International Trade Centre

TRADE IMPACT FOR GOOD

2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report

Midterm Evaluation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025

ITC Independent Evaluation Unit

2024 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 published by the ITC Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU). The 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR) comprises two main parts: the Midterm Evaluation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025 and a compilation of evaluation-related synthesis and learning products.

The Midterm Evaluation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025 has been conducted by an independent external Senior Evaluator (Mr. Mathew Varghese) and an Evaluator (Ms. Sharon Low). The evaluation process was managed by Mr. Miguel Jiménez Pont (Head of the IEU).

www.intracen.org/evaluation

Visual Summary – Evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025

High level findings and conclusions

ITC's Strategic Plan leverages MSME trade for inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies, aligning with SDGs.

Developed through an inclusive process involving technical staff, management, and external stakeholders, guided by SMC, fostering a multidimensional perspective.

Despite the inclusive formulation, divergences in understanding the plan across divisions highlight the need for better internal coherence and teamwork.

The Strategic Plan has shown limited adaptation to changing country, regional, and global contexts, affecting a coherent manner for ITC to adapt to changing context.

The current monitoring system is overly focused on compliance, with too many strategic milestones, limiting its effectiveness for strategic decision-making.

The Strategic Plan significantly influences operational planning, monitoring, evaluation, and project design, bridging high-level objectives with annual plans.

ITC has gained a significant role in global trade discussions, promoting an economically beneficial, socially responsible, gender-responsive, and environmentally conscious trade environment.

Future strategic plans should prioritize defining core offerings and ambitions clearly, utilizing external perceptions of ITC's work for better alignment.

Implementing a country engagement strategy is timely, with a successful example like The Gambia, emphasizing the importance of country offices for enhancing ITC's profile and accessing decentralized donor funding.

The "Moving Forward Action Plan" demonstrated ITC's ability to manage multiple priorities effectively and enact meaningful organizational change, despite systemic and structural constraints.

Recommendations

Change the planning process of the next strategic plan and ensure it has clearer articulation of core offering, ambition, and success criteria.

Define success criteria for the ITC's core offerings and streamline the number of indicators to those essential for measuring organisational success as per the established criteria.

Improve organizational cohesiveness and teamwork across ITC through focused teamwork training for all SMC members.

Implement a phased and strategic expansion of ITC's country-level engagement, carefully considering associated risks and constraints such as lack of additional core funding.

Contents

Acronyms

AESR	Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AI	Artificial Intelligence
CCITF	Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
DCP	Division of Country Programmes
DECI	Division of Enterprise Competitiveness and Institutions
DMD	Division of Market Development
DPS	Division of Programme Support
DSIT	Division of Sustainable and Inclusive Trade
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
ED	Executive Director
GDI	Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion
GPGs	Global Public Goods
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
ITC	International Trade Centre
IT	Information Technology
JAG	Joint Advisory Group
LDC	Lease Developed Country
MARKUP	Market Access Upgrade Programme
MPTF	Multi-Partner Trust Funds
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NTF	Netherlands Trust Fund
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OED	Office of the Executive Director
RC	Resident Coordinator
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMC	Senior Management Committee
SPPG	Strategic Planning, Performance, and Governance
TOR	Terms of Reference
TPO	Trade Promotion Organizations
UNCDF	United Nations Capital Development Fund
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
WTO	World Trade Organization
WYVC	Women, Youth and Vulnerable Communities

Foreword

i.   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.

ii.   This is the twelfth 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.

iii. Usually, the AESR provides a synthesis of findings from evaluations of ITC's projects, programmes, and policies conducted during the previous year. This year, however, the AESR concentrates on the assessment of the current ITC Strategic Plan, echoing the 2021 AESR, which provided a review of the previous Strategic Plan 2018-2021.

iv.   As a result, the report provides the midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2012-2025, which has been conducted by two independent external evaluators. It is accompanied by Annex 1: an audit trail that reflects how the evaluators have addressed in the final report the issues and comments raised by stakeholders in relation to the draft version of the AESR; Annex 2: the evaluation terms of reference; Annex 3: the documents reviewed by the evaluation; and Annex 4: the list of interviewees.

v.   At the same time, and as in previous AESR versions, the reader will find information and an update on evaluation-related products and activities carried out in 2023. Annex A: an analysis of the operational approaches and recommendations suggested by ITC project teams through Project Completion Reports; Annex B: a synthesis of the key messages provided by Results-Oriented Monitoring Reviews; Annex C: a description of internal and external evaluation reports and reviews conducted in 2023; Annex D: an analysis of the implementation status of recommendations of previous AESR; and, Annex E: the implementation status of recommendations of previous evaluations conducted by the IEU.

Midterm Evaluation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025

Executive Summary

vi. The ITC initiated the midterm evaluation of its Strategic Plan 2022-2025 to enhance accountability and foster organizational learning at the request of the Senior Management Committee (SMC). The evaluation aimed to assess the utility of the Strategic Plan in guiding ITC's activities and to offer recommendations for future strategic planning cycles. Key methodologies included document reviews, interviews with ITC headquarters and country-level stakeholders, and a detailed case study in The Gambia to comprehensively understand the implementation of the Strategic Plan from a country perspective.

Evaluation findings

vii. **The ITC Strategic Plan is an ambitious and broad framework that aims to leverage the trade of MSMEs to build inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies.** The Strategic Plan clearly states that its objective is to contribute to the pursuit of achieving of the SDGs. The primary goal of the Moonshots, introduced and implemented during the operationalization of the Strategic Plan, was to strategically position and focus efforts in four key areas to achieve a tangible and visible impact. Additionally, the aim was to enhance the provision of technical support to MSMEs in these areas through a targeted approach.

viii. **The formulation of the Strategic Plan, led by the Strategic Planning, Performance, and Governance (SPPG) section, was participatory and inclusive, involving technical staff, management, and external stakeholders. Guided by SMC, this approach fostered a multidimensional perspective crucial for a robust strategic framework.** However, despite its inclusivity, during the implementation of the Strategic Plan, notable divergences still prevail in understanding the plan across divisions, highlighting the need for improved internal coherence and better teamwork towards a shared goal.

ix. **The Strategic Plan has significantly influenced operational planning, monitoring, evaluation, reporting mechanisms, and project design to different degrees.** The Strategic Planning function has successfully developed an implementation framework that bridges the Strategic Plan's medium- to long-term high-level objectives and their operationalization in annual operational plans. However, the monitoring system has too many strategic milestones, does not have the utility for strategic decision-making, and continues to be more of a compliance exercise.

x. **Despite the intensity and depth of the changing context at country, regional and global levels, it has only led to limited adaptation of the Strategic Plan to external changes.** By implication, the monitoring and reporting system of the Strategic Plan has continued as per the Strategic Plan without any adaptation to changing context.

xi. **ITC's success on the ground and strategic engagement have given it a rightful place and influence in global conversations.** Overall, ITC has made considerable strides in championing

an economically beneficial, socially responsible, gender-responsive, and environmentally conscious trade environment.

xii. **The Strategic Plan needs to be clear in its core offering and ambition.** However, it is too late to make changes to them during this current Strategic Plan period (2022 to 2025). Therefore, prioritization and defining the core offering and its ambition should be included as an important part of the formulation of the next strategic plan. The external perception of ITC work is good guidance for crafting the core offering and ambition.

xiii. **The evaluation confirms that now is the opportune moment to seize the chance for strategic reorientation regarding country and regional engagement.** There are compelling reasons to progress with the country engagement strategy:

- The Gambia's example illustrates that a country office can be successfully managed, and in doing so, significantly elevates ITC's profile at the country level.

- The ITC country office will be able to leverage and enrich the UN RC system, enhancing mutually shared benefits.

- With its technical expertise and knowledge, ITC is well-equipped to contribute significantly to the UNSDCF and national policies on MSME trade.

- As donor funding has increasingly decentralized, the presence of a country office becomes essential to access funds for projects effectively.

- ITC has a proven track record of consistently delivering results from its projects, establishing it as a partner of choice for MPTF and Joint Projects.

xiv. **These factors collectively underscore the timely and strategic imperative** to advance ITC's country engagement, promising and impactful ITC.

xv. **The evaluation finds that ITC's management of internal reforms, as outlined in the "Moving Forward Action Plan," is notably ambitious, achieving substantial progress in a brief period.** The approach to developing and managing this agenda has been participatory, effectively allowing staff to contribute to making ITC a better-managed organization. Both staff and stakeholders recognize SMC's strong commitment and active engagement in pushing these reforms forward. The general sentiment is that this reform process has been a tremendous success. However, despite the success certain aspects of the reform have been slow due to systemic and structural issues, as the degree of implementation will depend on the limitations set within the UN Secretariat rules and procedures which are outside the authority of ITC management.

xvi. **Additionally, it is noteworthy that this progress has occurred alongside significant advancements in other areas of management efficiency.** Despite the potential challenges associated with such extensive internal reforms, they have not hindered ITC from making real progress and achieving remarkable impacts in delivering on the objectives of the Strategic Plan. This demonstrates ITC's leadership's ability to manage multiple priorities effectively, underlining the strength of its leadership and the resilience of the staff.

Conclusions

xvii. The conclusion that can be drawn from the evaluation findings above is that **overall, the guidance provided by the Strategic Plan has enabled the ITC to successfully establish itself as a credible player in global trade discussions.** This is demonstrated by ITC's on-the-ground success and strategic engagements, which reflect a commitment to creating a trade environment that is economically robust as well as socially and environmentally attentive. This approach aligns closely with the SDGs, indicating the ITC's forward-looking momentum during the Decade of Action. ITC is a growing organization that has consistently delivered. Concerning a sense of purpose and focus, staff are proud of the many achievements of ITC and the Deputy Secretary General of the UN called ITC a "jewel in the crown" of the UN Development System in recognition of its impactful presence.

xviii. **ITC's Strategic Plan guided the organization's commitment to enhancing the role of MSMEs in global trade, which is crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth in line with the SDGs.** However, there is a noted need for more cohesive understanding and collaboration within the organization's divisions to fully harness the plan's potential. Additionally, while the plan has significantly influenced ITC's operations, improvements are necessary in its monitoring systems and the follow-up on evaluation recommendations to enhance strategic decision-making.

xix. **The evaluation findings helped to affirm the relevance of the ITC's Strategic Plan focus on MSMEs for fostering employment and equity, particularly in least developed countries (LDCs). This strategic emphasis is recognized for its clear and substantial contribution to advancing the SDGs.** However, the Strategic Plan's monitoring system appears overly rigid, with too many indicators that may not effectively support strategic decision-making in a rapidly changing global context that is required in a moving context. The organization's reliance on project funding requires accountability at the project level rather than general indicators that cover all projects for compliance purposes.

xx. **The changing context and findings from the evaluation require adapting the Strategic Plan. However, the timeline is too short to make the changes. Therefore, the focus should be on the next strategic plan in developing a plan that clarifies the articulation between core offerings and ambition.** Utilising external perceptions of the ITC's work can provide valuable insights for shaping the next strategic plan, ensuring it is more focused on the core offering and aligned with the organization's mission and the expectations of its stakeholders.

xxi. **The evaluation concludes that it is an ideal time for the ITC to implement its draft country engagement strategy, and it is important to get it right.** This strategic shift is supported by several factors: the success of country offices like in The Gambia, the potential for synergies with the UN RC system, ITC's ability to support the UNSDCF and national policies, the need to adapt to the decentralization of donor funding, and ITC's established track record of delivering impactful projects. These elements together make a compelling case for ITC to deepen its country-level presence to increase its effectiveness and influence.

xxii.   The conclusion that can be drawn from this evaluation is that the **ITC's "Moving Forward Action Plan" for internal reforms has been both ambitious and successful, with significant progress noted in a short timeframe.** The participatory nature of the reform process has been effective, with staff feeling actively involved and SMC being recognized for their strong commitment to the reforms. **However, some aspects of the reforms have not been completed or are still in progress due to systemic and structural issues.** This process coincided with improvements in other management areas, indicating the ITC's capacity to handle multiple priorities and enact meaningful organizational change.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Change the planning process for the next strategic plan and ensure that it has a clearer articulation of the core offering, ambition, and success criteria.

xxiii.   **Regarding the core offering and ambition of the organization**, the evaluation finds that clarity is needed, and the current Strategic Plan is written as a broad framework. There are clear indications available from the perception of the few external stakeholders, who highly praised for three areas of ITC's work: (a) support to LDCs on WTO accession, the implementation of their commitments under the agreement and the management of trade negotiations; (b) visibility of moonshots; and (c) market intelligence, standards and quality control, and technical support to MSMEs. These areas of praise can provide good guidance for ITC's core offering.

xxiv.   **In terms of the planning process,** it may be good to be guided by the fact that the ambition and performance management of the organization is a prerogative that must be decided by the Executive Director along with the SMC and cannot be a bottom-up planning process. Once the core offering and ambition are decided, each division plans how it contributes to the ambitions through its respective areas of divisional responsibility and performance.

xxv.   The planning should also note that the core budget is limited, and most funding relies on extrabudgetary resources. Therefore, the strategic plan should be a roadmap to guide strategic decision-making, aligning core organizational offerings with its overarching mission. In doing so, the next strategic plan will help ensure that all parts of the organization work cohesively towards a common core offering.

xxvi.   **As for content**, the next strategic plan should contain the following elements:
- clarity in core offering;
- ambition and performance standards;
- well-defined principles;
- articulation of the implementation strategies which separate the core offering from how it is implemented;
- alignment of capacity and resources to match objectives, focus and implementation strategies; and,

- explicit identification of results and success criteria for measuring progress.

xxvii. Importantly, it is recommended that the next strategic plan be developed more explicitly to account for the need for greater flexibility and adaptation given the rapidly changing global context and excessive reliance on donor financing.

Recommendation 2: Define success criteria for the ITC's core offerings and streamline the number of indicators to those essential for measuring success as per the established criteria.

xxviii. **Concerning measuring the performance of its core offering and the fulfilment of its ambition,** ITC should clearly articulate what 'success' looks like for its core offering. It is important to distinguish between core offerings and services. For example, the core offering can support countries in implementing WTO agreements, and service can include technical support, policy support, etc. Once success is defined, the organization should identify and use only those key performance indicators (four or five as per the core offering) that directly relate to these success criteria.

xxix. **In terms of enhancing the utility of the indicators**, this approach aims to focus efforts, reduce complexity, and ensure that all measures are directly linked to the ITC's core offering and desired outcomes. It is a call to shift from quantity to quality in performance monitoring, ensuring that indicators are collected for reporting purposes and actively used to guide decision-making and demonstrate impact to external stakeholders. This is related to the evaluation finding that too many indicators are currently being monitored without much value for strategic decision-making. Limiting the number of indicators and being clear on success helps the organization profile its success and improves the cohesiveness of the organization.

xxx. **Strategy planning and monitoring improvements also call for evaluation improvements to ensure robust results management.** In the next revision of the evaluation policy, it is important to make the evaluation office structurally independent by reporting to the Office of the Executive Director (OED). Independence of the evaluation unit helps in the credibility of the evaluations and, importantly, addresses issues that the OED is strategically concerned with increasing the utility of the evolutions.

Recommendation 3: Improve organizational cohesiveness and teamwork across ITC by providing focused teamwork training for all SMC members through the UN Staff College or a similar institution.

xxxi. The divisional meetings and interviews with staff consistently revealed tension between the Divisions and a need to find ways to build a cohesive organization to maximise the impact of ITC's work. Many Divisions do not fully agree with the importance of the work of other Divisions and how it fits into the overall mission of ITC.

xxxii. Strengthening the unity and collaboration within the organization is crucial for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of ITC's management and operations. When teams work cohesively, it enhances communication, streamlines workflows, and fosters a more inclusive work environment where diverse ideas and perspectives can contribute to innovative

solutions. This, in turn, is likely to improve project outcomes and help ITC more effectively fulfil its mandate and strategic objectives. The training is also to help managers understand and appreciate the work of other divisions and find ways to work for a shared purpose.

Recommendation 4: Implement a phased and strategic expansion of ITC's country-level engagement, carefully considering associated risks and constraints such as lack of additional core funding.

xxxiii. While the need for and benefits of progressing on country engagement are fully understood, a phased approach is required to allow for adaptability and careful allocation of resources, closely aligning with each country's specific needs and the dynamic global funding landscape. Acknowledging risks, such as the adequate training of human resources in managing a country office and insufficient core funding, is crucial. This will enable ITC to plan strategically and seek diverse funding sources to sustain its activities. It will also ensure that the organization is not overextended at the Geneva level, as it manages expansion and maintains quality and effectiveness in its programmes. By managing opportunities, risks, and constraints proactively, the ITC can secure its role as a key contributor to trade development and economic growth within the countries it serves.

Final thought

The International Trade Centre (ITC), with its crucial role in supporting MSMEs—the economic pillars for broad-based growth and employment in developing countries—shines as a jewel in the crown of the UN Development System. Its efforts are pivotal in creating inclusive growth and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work carried out during the strategic plan period has been meaningful and impactful. By refining its strategic approach and enhancing its internal unity of purpose, the ITC can amplify its full potential and bring equitable prosperity to the corners of the world that need its support most.

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1. Introduction

1. **Rationale**. In response to the 2021 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR), ITC SMC endorsed an independent midterm evaluation of the [Strategic Plan 2022-2025](). The findings and recommendations of this evaluation will be presented to the Joint Advisory Group (JAG). The evaluation was conducted in two phases: the scoping phase and the data collection and reporting phase.

2. **Objectives**. The Terms of Reference (TOR) - Annex 1 - of the evaluation provides the direction and objectives. The TOR says the following in this regard: The evaluation is conducted under the overarching framework of the ITC Evaluation Policy to (a) enhance corporate accountability to ITC stakeholders and development partners, (b) contribute to organizational learning, and (c) extend strategic partnership in achieving ITC's development objectives.

3. **Scope**. In terms of its scope, the objectives of the midterm evaluation have been so focused on the Strategic Plan as follows:

    i. Assessing the Strategic Plan's utility as a tool for guiding the organization and its activities.

    ii. Learning from ITC's experience in operationalizing the Strategic Plan will be facilitated to improve its use and introduce possible adaptations for the remainder of 2022-2025.

    iii. Providing recommendations concerning the organization's overall strategy and strategic planning process for the upcoming strategic planning cycle 2026-2029.

4. The report does not assess the ITC's performance for 2022–2023, nor does it attempt to connect the Strategic Plan with specific ITC results. Conducting such a results-based corporate evaluation of the ITC would surpass the modest resources available for this exercise and exceed the given mandate. Instead, this report adheres to the objectives specified in the Terms of Reference and detailed in the scoping report as a midterm strategic evaluation.

2. Methodology

5. **Evaluation questions.** The scoping report outlined five key questions for the evaluation:

    - Key question 1: What can the ITC learn from its successes and challenges/constraints to better achieve its mission?

    - Key question 2: What strategic priorities and core offerings should the ITC focus on to clarify and enhance the ambition of its mission?

    - Key question 3: How can the ITC's Strategic Plan be further adapted to effectively address the evolving global dynamics and challenges impacting MSME trade?

    - Key question 4: How can the ITC determine its country's engagement in supporting self-determination in developing countries, working with decentralized donor funding, and using the RC System?

- Key question 5: How can the ITC shape its management system to ensure it is comprehensive and adequate for the organization to work effectively as one?

6. **Data collection.** As per the scoping report, the evaluation employed the following data collection methods:

   - Review and synthesize key HQ and country case study documents. The list of the 51 documents reviewed is in Annex 2.

   - Key informant interviews at HQ and country level (56) were done through a visit to ITC HQ, and interviews were held with various stakeholders across levels. The list of the interviewees is provided in Annex 3. Complementary workshops (5) with each ITC Division discussed how the Division perceived and implemented the Strategic Plan.

   - A country case study in one selected country, The Gambia. Secondary data and information were validated and supplemented with a country case study in The Gambia to illustrate the findings meaningfully from a country perspective

7. **Limitations**:

   - The evaluation focused on strategic high-level lines of inquiry as outlined in the five questions. It did not assess the performance of individual projects but aimed to understand how the organization functioned as per the focus areas of the Strategic Plan.

   - The evaluation does not assess ITC performance overall but specifically targets the Strategic Plan and its direction.

   - The evaluation was conducted with limited time and resources, so the focus of inquiry remained strategic and conceptual.

   - A limited sample of one case study country presents a risk that findings based on a single case may not be representative but merely illustrative.

   - These limitations are real, yet they do not compromise the validity and strategic utility of the evaluation's findings. Nonetheless, a more extensive and deeper evaluation could yield additional insights into the accountability, progress, and performance of the ITC, which is beyond the scope of this strategic evaluation.

3. The Strategic Plan 2022-2025

8. The ITC's Strategic Plan for 2022–2025, developed during the COVID-19 crisis, is a framework addressing major global issues and focus. It focuses on empowering MSMEs in international trade, aligning with the SDGs. The plan articulates ITC's vision and mission, emphasizes donor engagement, and outlines management and operational strategies.

9. The plan states, "Established in 1964, the **International Trade Centre** is the joint agency of the WTO and the UN. ITC is the only international development agency fully dedicated to supporting micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to enable them to benefit

from trade. Working with partners to strengthen MSME competitiveness, we help build entrepreneurial and employment opportunities, particularly for women, youth, and people in vulnerable situations. Our main clients are MSMEs, business support organizations (BSOs), governments in developing countries, and economies in transition.

10. Key aspects of the Plan Include.

- **Vision, Mission, and Principles:** The plan articulates ITC's vision, mission, and principles, emphasizing their alignment with current global trade dynamics and the specific needs of MSMEs.

    a. **Vision:** A world where trade builds inclusive, sustainable and prosperous economies

    b. **Mission:** ITC supports sustainable and inclusive livelihoods by boosting the competitiveness of MSMEs, placing trade-led growth at the centre of public policy and building supportive business ecosystems in developing countries.

    c. **Guiding Principles:** ITC's work is driven by three goals: inclusion, sustainability and prosperity. Decision-making processes are guided by the values of collaboration and coordination and the core values of the UN: inclusion, integrity, humility and humanity.

- **Focus on MSMEs:** Acknowledging its unique position as a joint agency of the WTO and UN, the plan prioritizes empowering MSMEs to benefit from international trade, recognizing their vital role in job creation, especially in developing countries.

- **Donor Engagement and Budget Considerations:** The plan strategically aligns with donor priorities, reflecting ITC's reliance on project-based funding. This alignment ensures broad stakeholder engagement and support.

- **SDGs Alignment:** ITC's strategic plan underscores its commitment to the SDGs, acknowledging the critical role of MSMEs in driving employment in developing economies.

- **Core Services and Global Leadership:** The plan outlines ITC's four core services, providing a clear action framework. It also sets an ambitious goal for ITC to lead global discussions on MSME competitiveness, trade, and development. The four core services are:

    a. Improved MSME firm-level capacities to trade

    b. A more supportive business ecosystem for MSMEs

    c. A more conducive policy and regulatory environment for MSMEs

    d. Improved business, trade, and market intelligence (public goods)

- **Management and Operational Strategy:** Detailed management strategies are laid out to ensure operational efficiency and effectiveness, indicating a well-thought-out approach to achieving the set objectives.

- **Learning from Evaluation and Funding Strategy:** The plan demonstrates a commitment to learning from past evaluations and maintaining moderate growth in funding levels, ensuring financial sustainability.

- **Impact and Results Indicators:** It concludes with a comprehensive set of impact and results indicators, adding measurable and accountable dimensions to the strategy. The inclusive process of the plan's preparation enhances its credibility.

11. **The Strategic Plan covers a broad range of areas** - see figure 1. Strategic Plan 2022–2025 at a glance. **It was reconfirmed during the interview with SPPG and validated through the document review that the Strategic Plan was prepared as a broad framework.** The main reason for having a broad framework was to ensure donors' and programme countries' priorities were included in the Strategic Plan. The assumption is that if the Strategic Plan did not include the key donor priorities, its resource mobilization utility would be limited. The other stated reason was to ensure that there was engagement of the donors to the Strategic Plan.

Figure 1. ITC's Strategic Plan at a glance
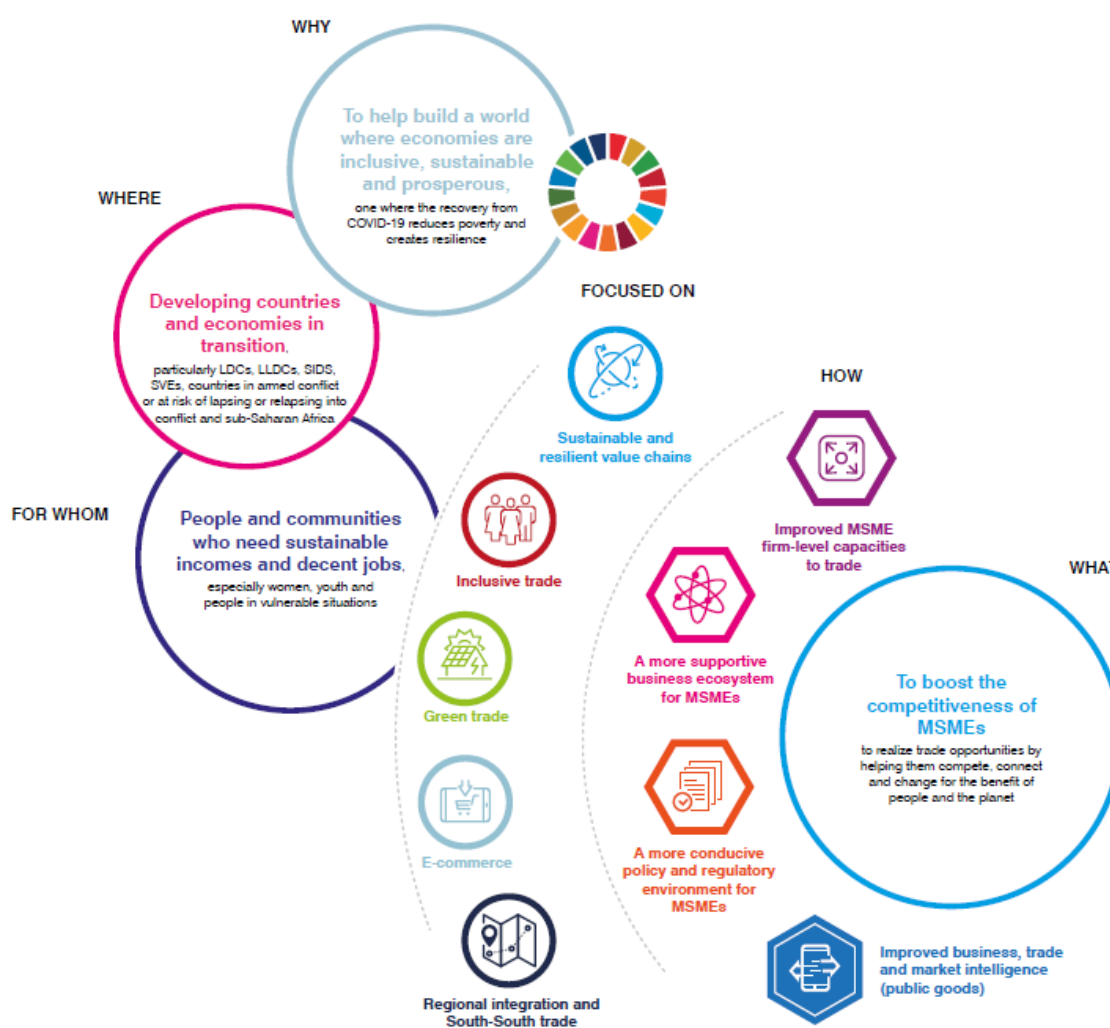
12. **Moonshots**. The impact areas of the Strategic Plan were further articulated with a special initiative called "Moonshots" during the implementation phase of the Strategic Plan. These sub-strategies[1] It is part of ITC's ambitious initiative to support the Strategic Plan objectives by tackling complex challenges small businesses face in developing nations, particularly in the global trade sector. Moonshots delineates four groundbreaking initiatives, each targeting a distinct area and aligning with ITC's broader priorities, encompassing climate change, gender equality, youth empowerment, and digital connectivity. These pivotal undertakings are emblematic of ITCs ambitious goals and represent a commitment to instigating significant change.

13. **Digital Moonshot - "Switch ON" Initiative:** This initiative uniquely addresses specific challenges small enterprises in developing countries face in global trade, such as limited access to financing, inadequate infrastructure, and regulatory barriers. It aims to bridge the digital divide, focusing on gender, youth, digital connectivity, and eco-friendly trade practices. The goal is to integrate 20,000 small businesses from 17 countries into the digital economy by 2025, strengthen 4,000 digital entrepreneurs, and establish a network of 30 BSOs. It involves investments in connectivity infrastructure, skills training, policy reforms, and partnerships.

14. **Green Moonshot:** Responding to climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, this initiative seeks to ignite 100,000 climate actions among small businesses by 2025. It focuses on empowering small businesses with knowledge and tools for environmentally conscious practices, access to green finance, and participation in the green transition. The Green Moonshot is critical to the transition to an inclusive, low-carbon economy.

15. **Gender Moonshot:** This initiative aims to close the global gender gap, particularly impacting women, including young women in developing countries. It targets the root causes of trade inequalities and promotes gender-transformative interventions. By 2025, ITC plans to enhance its services and tools through the SheTrades Initiative, focusing on innovative services for women entrepreneurs or women-led businesses, leveraging decentralized platforms, policy advocacy, and gender mainstreaming.

16. **Youth Moonshot:** Focused on empowering young individuals, this initiative aims to foster economic independence and contribute to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It involves collaborations with small-scale business producers and policymakers, aiming to improve the competitive standing of the youth in business. The goal is to enable 200,000 young entrepreneurs and producers to access trade and finance opportunities and connect 1,500 young entrepreneurs with financial institutions by 2025.

17. The interviews with staff and stakeholders mentioned that the Moonshots initiative reflects ITC's commitment and ambition toward innovative and holistic strategies in tackling global trade challenges. The Moonshots programme specifically aims to achieve tangible impacts by providing technical support to MSMEs in these four targeted areas. **Stakeholders mentioned**

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[1] Sub-strategies in this context, can be understood as 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

that successfully implementing such innovative strategies could significantly boost ITC's reputation as an effective organization. This effectiveness, demonstrated through targeted efforts, could justify continued support from stakeholders and potentially attract further investments.

The ITC Strategic Plan is an ambitious and broad framework that aims to leverage the trade of MSMEs to build inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. The Strategic Plan clearly states its objective is to contribute to the pursuit of the achievement of the SDGs. The primary goal of the Moonshots, introduced and implemented during the operationalization of the Strategic Plan, was to strategically position and focus efforts in four key areas to achieve a tangible and visible impact. The aim was to enhance the provision of technical support to MSMEs in these areas through a targeted approach.

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18. **SPPG led the preparation of the Strategic Plan with guidance and oversight from the SMC.** The formulation process was inclusive and comprehensive, with guidance/oversight of the SMC. Central to this process was integrating insights from eight distinct working groups, each contributing to a facet of the strategic vision. This work was also completed through a stakeholder survey and consultations with Member States. This structure ensured a breadth of participation and fostered a multidimensional perspective from across the organization, which is essential for a robust strategic framework.

19. **The ED's Foreword articulated the tone for the strategic intent, effectively addressing critical contemporary issues such as resilience in the face of global challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic, climate change responsiveness, and the imperative of upholding human and economic rights.** This approach underscores a commitment to a principled and people-centred strategy, resonating with the need for equitable and sustainable development.

20. **The involvement of multiple working groups facilitated a diverse aggregation of expertise and viewpoints, enriching the strategic discussion.** The subsequent review and synthesis of these recommendations by the SMC were pivotal in ensuring that the strategic direction aligned with the organization's mission and values and the dynamic global trade environment. This participatory approach in the strategic planning process reflects a deliberate approach, which is crucial for a strategy that can navigate the complexities of contemporary global trade dynamics. However, despite the inclusive and participatory process, the divergence in understanding of the Strategic Plan by various divisions of ITC was evident. One of the main issues of difference that emerged during division meetings was what aspect of the strategic plan was more important to ITC's mission. **Many of the Divisions felt that their work was more important than the others, and the SMC was not giving proportionate attention and importance to their work. The contradiction of divergence and convergence goes further; all Divisions claim that their Divisional plans and reports are aligned with the Strategic Plan.**

The formulation of the Strategic Plan, led by SPPG, was participatory and inclusive, involving technical staff and management. Guided by SMC, this approach fostered a multidimensional perspective crucial for a robust strategic framework. However, despite its inclusivity, while implementing the Strategic Plan, notable divergences still prevail in understanding its operationalisation across divisions, highlighting the need for improved internal coherence and better teamwork towards a shared goal.

21. **The ITC operationalizes its Strategic Plan through annual Operational Plans, which translate long-term goals into actionable, yearly plans for the organization.** Each Operational Plan provides a comprehensive overview, including budget allocations across different operational areas, regions, and countries. It outlines ITC's contributions to the 2030 Agenda's 5Ps (people, prosperity, planet, partnership, and peace) using tier 1 scorecards and assesses development outcomes and outputs with tier 2 scorecards. These plans also monitor major technical assistance milestones in core services and key impact areas, alongside ITC's adherence to results management dimensions such as responsiveness to country needs, engagement with WTO and UN, partnerships, leadership in global discussions, and commitments to gender diversity, environmental sustainability, and operational efficiency.

22. The 2022 Operational Plan is credited with implementing ambitious moonshot initiatives targeting the green economy, gender equality, digital connectivity, and youth engagement. These initiatives represent ITC's forward-thinking approach to global trade challenges.

23. **Preparation of these Operational Plans is led by SPPG, which coordinates consultations across various divisions and sections to ensure alignment with the Strategic Plan.** Performance monitoring at ITC involves a three-tier scorecard system which tracks contributions to the SDGs (Tier 1); measures ITC's corporate development outcomes and outputs using quantitative indicators (Tier 2); and focuses on tracking key performance indicators that gauge corporate efficiency and effectiveness (Tier 3).

24. Additionally, **ITC employs a large number of qualitative proxy indicators to monitor key programmatic and operational initiatives as specified in the Strategic Plan. When translated into milestones within the annual Operational Plans, these indicators play a role in ensuring effective delivery and alignment with strategic objectives.** Their role is not just significant, but pivotal, as they provide a nuanced understanding of our initiatives and contribute significantly to their successful implementation.

25. **ITC Projects are designed with a focus on its alignment with the strategic plan.** This effort happens at Division and country levels, and technical support is provided by the planning and monitoring staff in SPPG. Box 1 shows how projects are identified, planned, and monitored for their alignment to the Strategic Plan in The Gambia.

26. **ITC Projects are monitored in a very structured and determined way as per the Strategic Plan.** The strategic milestones for 2024 include 45 technical assistance milestones with an additional 30 points for efficiency-effectiveness milestones per year. While these indicators might serve accountability purposes, the utility of making strategic decisions is negligible simply due to the sheer number of indicators that do not allow for strategic focus.

27. **The evaluations and the AESR are aligned with the Strategic Plan as they guarantee that projects/programmes are assessed against the objective of the Strategic Plan.** Managed by the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU), the process offers a comprehensive analysis of the evaluations (internal and external) of ITC activities. The AESRs particularly assess the findings from evaluation reports against the main objectives and focus of the Strategic Plan

> **Box 1**
>
> In The Gambia, the ITC aligns its project identification and development process with the overarching goals of its Strategic Plan. This alignment begins with identification, focusing on addressing gaps in current initiatives or responding to needs highlighted by donor agencies, government and partners, ensuring that all projects contribute to the Strategic Plan's targets. SPPG plays an integral role in this process, particularly in aligning project-specific indicators with those of the Strategic Plan. This well-structured process of iteration between the staff formulating the project and SPPG ensures that the projects formulation is closely aligned with the Strategic Plan.

2022-25, ensuring that the stakeholders understand how the organisation work aligns with the Strategic Plan objectives but also effectively contributes to the overarching mission of the ITC. This approach of aligning evaluations to the strategic plan is crucial in maintaining the relevance, efficiency, and impact of the ITC's global initiatives. The AESRs provide recommendations to ITC management on this basis, which are addressed through a management response. The AESRs and the management responses have been presented and discussed with Member States at the JAG. The IEU ensures the follow-up of these recommendations and that progress on their implementation is provided annually. The analysis of the AESRs shows that they provide strategic recommendations focused on the Strategic Plan. For example, the AESR 2023 found that ITC projects are generally highly relevant, focusing on the systems underlying MSME competitiveness.

28. **On examination, the ITC Annual Report 2023 shows that it is aligned with the organization's Strategic Plan for 2022–2025.** SPPG coordinates the drafting of the annual report in collaboration with various divisions and sections; the report tracks and analyzes corporate indicators related to implementing the Strategic Plan. The annual report provides a detailed review of the ITC's activities over the year, focusing on the outcomes and effectiveness of these efforts in relation to the strategic objectives laid out in the plan. It highlights achievements and identifies challenges, in line with the Strategic Plan objectives.

29. **The ED's reports to JAG and member states follow the Strategic Plan.** Similarly, reports to the Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund (CCITF) emphasize results and KPIs related to the implementation of operational plans, including performance evaluations, budget details, and technical assistance milestones, all organized by country/region and Strategic

Plan impact areas. **These reports from the ED ensure stakeholders are well-informed of the organization's progress as framed by the Strategic Plan**.

Strategic Plan is central to the organization, significantly influencing project design, operational planning, monitoring and evaluation, and reporting mechanisms. The Strategic Planning function has successfully developed an implementation framework that bridges medium- to long-term high-level objectives in the Strategic Plan and their operationalization in annual operational plans. However, the monitoring system of 45 technical assistance milestones with an additional 30 points for efficiency-effectiveness milestones per year does not have the utility for strategic decision-making. It continues to be more of a compliance exercise.

4. The changing context during Strategic Plan implementation

30. **The drafting of the Strategic Plan, formulated during the COVID-19 pandemic, occurred at a time fraught with uncertainty and rapid change.** The intensity of the developments impacting MSME trade has outpaced initial expectations, suggesting a need for adapting strategies to the evolving external context. Several key global dynamics identified are notably influencing MSMEs:

31. **Increased Influence of the Global South**: There's a growing trend where countries from the Global South are asserting more significant roles and control over projects within their regions, which may impact the way MSMEs engage in international trade.

32. **Decentralization of Official Development Assistance (ODA)**: A shift in the management and distribution of development aid could have implications for international trade, potentially affecting how MSMEs operate and access opportunities.

33. **Regionalization of Trade**: Trade patterns are increasingly becoming regionalized. This shift could indicate a move towards more localized trading blocs and supply chains, affecting global trade dynamics and possibly offering new opportunities for MSMEs that can navigate these regional networks.

34. **Political Divides and Conflicts**: Geopolitical divides and conflicts bear direct consequences on trade, presenting challenges and opportunities for MSMEs, depending on their positioning and agility in adapting to these changes.

35. **Climate Change and COP 28 Decisions**: Decisions made at international climate conferences, like COP 28, play a substantial role in shaping global trade policies, which could significantly influence MSME operations, particularly those in sectors sensitive to environmental regulations.

36. **Economic Factors**: Inflation and economic shifts challenge the global trade environment, potentially impacting MSMEs in various ways, from cost structures to consumer demand.

37. **Rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI**): The surge in AI technologies is transformative for trade, offering MSMEs tools for innovation and efficiency but posing challenges in adaptation and skills development.

38. **Increasing Inequality.** The COVID-19 pandemic wiped out years of progress in reducing poverty and has led to a spike in economic inequality.

39. **The ITC recognizes that while some of these changes were identified during the strategy's formulation, their intensity and depth have far exceeded expectations**.

40. **Changing context suggests a growing political, social, and economic divide that may require agility and quick adaptations of the Strategic Plan.** For example, one adaptation that could be used for advocacy with donors is the need for MSME support in an environment of increased inequality. The main reason for advocating for the benefit of MSMEs for equity is because MSMEs generate around 60 to 70% of employment in developing countries. By greater advocacy at the global level on the need for targeting MSMEs, the ITC could have directly influenced impacts on SDGs—promoting decent work and economic growth (SDG 8), fostering innovation, and building resilient infrastructure (SDG 9), and working towards reduced inequalities (SDG 10). Adaptability would show ITC's potential to drive substantial progress in achieving the SDGs, positioning MSMEs as catalysts for inclusive and sustainable development. It should be noted that although there were some adaptations due to changing contexts, these changes were not systematic, as there was no corresponding adjustment in the Strategic Plan.

The intensity and depth of the changing context at the country, regional, and global levels have not led to the Strategic Plan's adaptation to external changes. By implication, the Strategic Plan's monitoring and reporting system has continued as per the Plan without any adaptation to the changing context.

5. Many achievements and successes during Strategic Plan implementation

41. **During individual and divisional meetings, the evaluation team was informed of the considerable progress and numerous successes that ITC has achieved since adopting the Strategic Plan.** Staff members at all levels take great pride in the numerous accomplishments made in the past two years. While there is an acknowledgement that efforts must continue to realize the full impact delineated in the Strategic Plan**, there is also a sentiment that the results and achievements to date need to be celebrated**.

Box 2

Interviews with staff and stakeholders have shed light on the breadth of the ITC's accomplishments and its unique value in the MSME trade and development sphere. A few selected statements below show the pride staff and stakeholders take in ITC:

"The ITC has carved out a unique position as the voice of the private sector within the UN. We are particularly known for its distinct ability to engage with developing nations on MSME trade matters. Our tools for market analysis serve as a global public good and are extensively utilized by trade promotion experts worldwide. ITC's technical assistance has bolstered the negotiating strength of LDCs at the WTO, underlining the effectiveness of our support."

"Innovation is at the forefront of our operations, with initiatives like Moonshots that clearly elevate ITC's profile and articulate its value proposition. The GreenToCompete programme, for instance, has provided compelling evidence of how small businesses can successfully transition to green operations. This thematic leadership is part of the directional focus ITC adopts to stay at the leading edge of trade development."

"Our commitment to the UN's Development Reform system is evident in our signatures on more than 40 UNSDCFs, ensuring the integration of MSME trade into the UN's Cooperation Frameworks. ITC's conscious efforts to align with and contribute to the SDGs have positioned us as a transformative force in trade-related sustainable development."

"ITC's dynamic growth as a project-driven organization is a product of our technical competence and agility, enabling us to respond to changing contexts effectively. We leverage our hands-on experience with small business realities and the global trading environment to empower local capabilities for global conversation."

"We've been influential in shifting the narrative around trade and gender, presenting an offer that is now more transformational than ever. Our organization designs approximately 100 new projects annually, maintaining our visibility and impact free from political and geopolitical dynamics."

The Permanent Representative of The Gambia to the UN Office in Geneva said that ITC is a pivotal force in transforming The Gambia's trade landscape. It drives innovation and fosters creativity among youth and women, thereby strengthening the foundations of the business ecosystem and enhancing the country's productive capacity.

Staff and stakeholders broadly agree on ITC's success and value, but they also feel that ITC does not celebrate its success.

42. **The recognition from the highest levels of the UN underscores the vital role of ITC in the global development framework. In a message to the ITC staff, the ED conveyed the Deputy Secretary-General's remarks: "*Barely five minutes into my meeting this morning with UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed, this is what she said: she considered ITC as a "jewel in the crown" of the UN Development System. She thanked ITC for doing what we do, for being a living example of Leaving No One Behind, for helping demystify the role of trade in development, and for bringing stories of the UN's work and impact to the world*".**

43. **The staff and management highlighted that the ITC has continually adapted and evolved to meet the challenges of the global trade environment.** ITC's strategic interventions have reverberated through the economies of numerous countries, from enhancing the quality of trade infrastructure to pioneering inclusive trade practices. Below are a few examples to capture the essence and impact of ITC's work in line with the objectives of the Strategic Plan. Examples:

    - **Climate Advocacy at UN Conferences:** ITC has been instrumental in amplifying the role of MSME trade at UN Climate Conferences. By introducing platforms like the Trade House Pavilion at COP28, ITC has enabled MSME to engage directly with policymakers, fostering dialogues around trade policies in climate action.

    - **Quality Infrastructure in Burundi:** Through the EU-funded Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP) project, ITC has significantly strengthened Burundi's national quality infrastructure. This has empowered the nation to meet international quality standards, aiding local businesses in becoming globally competitive.

    - **The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) Trade Promotion Organisations (TPO) Network Collaboration:** ITC's partnership with the ECOWAS Commission to form the ECOWAS TPO Network has bolstered trade competitiveness in West Africa. The network has promoted regional integration and readiness for initiatives like the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) by facilitating information exchange and joint trade actions.

    - **Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) V in the Tech Sector:** The NTF V initiative has shown remarkable success in the tech sector, with notable increases in MSME sales and export opportunities. It has also highlighted gender inclusivity and provided digital access to underserved communities.

    - **Operational Streamlining and Automation:** ITC has made significant strides in automating and streamlining administrative processes, enhancing organizational efficiency. Despite these improvements, the auditor report points to areas needing further development, like a comprehensive workforce plan.

    - **Inclusive Trade Initiatives:** The expansion of the inclusiveness agenda within ITC's strategic plan has been significant, with efforts to integrate women, youth, and other vulnerable groups into the trade ecosystem. The formation of the Women, Youth and Vulnerable Communities (WYVC) section is a testament to ITC's commitment to its 'Trade Impact for Good' mandate.

    - **"Made by Africa" initiative:** ITC influences trade and investment decisions at the continental level in Africa and has shaped the priority value chains that the African Union (as well as the EU) are focusing on in their efforts to support and foster regional integration under the Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).

- **Resource Mobilization and Fundraising Growth**: ITC has seen a substantial increase in fundraising, indicating a shift in donor preferences towards supporting national and regional projects. This has been vital in supporting ITC's strategic objectives and expanding its impact.

- **Global Public Goods (GPGs):** ITC's GPGs like Trade Map, Market Access Map and Export Potential Map, reach millions of users annually, showcasing ITC's fundamental role in levelling the playing field by supporting evidence-based decision-making across all countries. Standards Map and Sustainability Map complement the suite of tools that ITC provides as GPGs and demonstrate ITC's contributions to sustainable development and responsible trade practices globally. The above examples demonstrate how the ITC's strategic initiatives have translated into real-world impacts, furthering the cause of sustainable and inclusive trade across various countries and regions.

Box 3

ITC's Moonshot initiatives, with their strategic and targeted programmes, have heralded a transformative era for inclusive and sustainable trade. They address the core pillars of digital connectivity, gender empowerment, youth engagement, and green business practices.

The Digital Connectivity and Trade (Switch ON) initiative has proven instrumental in bridging the digital divide for MSMEs, enhancing their market access and investment potential, particularly in Zambia, Tanzania, and Rwanda.

Concurrently, the Gender Moonshot initiative, buoyed by the SheTrades platform, has fortified the role of women in trade, equipping over 5,800 female entrepreneurs across 28 countries with vital skills for international commerce. While these programmes have celebrated success, they also reveal the critical challenges of scaling such impacts, requiring sustained digital literacy and gender-focused economic development efforts.

Complementing these strides, the Youth Moonshot initiative has cultivated a broad base of trade-savvy young entrepreneurs, connecting over 42,000 individuals to the vast potential of global markets through the innovative use of social media and digital forums.

The Green Moonshot's has seen encouraging steps towards embedding sustainability in the DNA of small businesses. These initiatives are underpinned by ITC's commitment to a supportive business ecosystem for MSMEs, as demonstrated by the launch of advanced benchmarking platforms, the expansion of the SheTrades initiative to create hubs in new regions and the development of GreenToCompete Hubs. The foresight in 2023 to scale the Green Moonshot initiative's best practices, alongside growing the Gender Moonshot through new SheTrades Hubs, exemplifies ITC's unwavering pursuit of nurturing global networks that not only boost trade competencies but also anchor the pillars of environmental stewardship and gender parity in the very fabric of trade.

44. **The Strategic Plan called for ITC to lead the global conversation on MSME competitiveness, trade, and development.** The focus identified in the Strategic Plan also included the following issues — women's economic empowerment, youth, migration, the environment, and digital connectivity.

45. **The evaluation finds through the distillation of documents and various interviews that ITC has played a crucial role in shaping international trade practices to be more inclusive, sustainable, and responsive to global challenges.** The evaluation finds that the engagements were strategic, and ITC has successfully brought to the forefront the critical interconnections between trade, climate change, and gender equality. The following are key messages that evaluation distilled about what the ED of ITC has championed in various forums during the last three years.

    • In 2022, The focus was on foundational trade inclusion issues, emphasizing the importance of integrating small businesses into global trade frameworks, the role of digitalization, and the necessity of multilateral cooperation to address global challenges. The advocacy was geared towards creating a fair and equitable trading environment that recognizes all stakeholders' unique challenges and contributions.

    • In 2023, the advocacy expanded to include marginalized populations such as refugees and the African diaspora, spotlighting trade's potential to economically empower these groups. Continued emphasis was placed on small businesses, advocating for sustainable trade practices that align with environmental conservation efforts.

    • In 2024: A significant shift towards gender equality and environmental sustainability marked the advocacy efforts, focusing on supporting women entrepreneurs in the digital economy, promoting gender-responsive public procurement, and integrating deforestation concerns into global value chains. ITC has also begun developing an Indigenous Peoples and Trade programme document in an area where ITC has also intentionally focused on inclusivity.

46. **Each year's shift demonstrates a strategic deepening of engagement and changes in the external context with complex trade issues, reflecting ITC's commitment to evolving and adapting its advocacy to meet global needs**.

47. **The Core Messages from the ED's Speeches aligned with the Strategic Plan.** Below are a few statements from the Speeches to give a sample of the issues the ED raised in various forums.

    • **Supporting Marginalized Groups**:

        "Digital trade and e-commerce enable micro-firms to trade internationally and particularly contribute to the economic empowerment of women and youth." - Remarks at G20 Trade, Investment, and Industry Ministerial Meeting, Bali, September 23, 2022

        "By supporting refugees as they grow their businesses and engage in trade, these programmes are yielding not just economic benefits, but also helping fill crucial gaps

in public goods and services." - Opening Remarks of Global Refugee Forum-linked event, Geneva, December 12, 2023

- **Gender Equality and Empowerment**:

"This SheTrades Summit is both a celebration and a call to action: a chance to see where we've been and propel this initiative into an exciting new phase." - Opening of WTO-ITC High-Level Event on Women and Trade and SheTrades Summit in Abu Dhabi, February 24, 2024

"But I don't want us to wait 131 years for global gender parity to become a reality. That's why we need many more pledges and more statements of support to help make this parity possible, perhaps even within our generation."- Launch of the Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement during the 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68) in New York, March 11, 2024

- **Environmental Sustainability**:

"But these same commodities provide crucial livelihoods for people around the world, across all regions. They are essential for ensuring global food security." - Opening at joint ITC-WRI event on deforestation, Abu Dhabi, February 27, 2024

"Without the active involvement of small businesses, especially in developing countries, we will fail at achieving the SDGs, and we will be unable to avert catastrophic global warming. This failure will affect us all." -Opening Remarks of Good Trade Summit, New York, September 20, 2023

- **Inclusive Policy Making and Multilateral Cooperation**:

"I believe that inclusivity is the trade moonshot of our time. My parents' generation created the basic structures of trade. Me and my peers fleshed out those ideas into the multilateral system we use today. The challenge of the next generation of trade professionals is to spread the benefits as widely and evenly as possibly" -Remarks at the launch of Georgetown University's Center on Inclusive Trade and Development in Washington, D.C., April 5, 2022
"We must take this momentum and use it to craft a new approach to trade and trade policy—one that is informed by equity and justice." -Welcome Remarks at 2023 Intra-African Trade Fair's Diaspora Day, Cairo, November 14, 2023

- **Partnerships and Collaboration**:

"For large companies, institutions, and other organizations working across global supply chains to commit to abiding by five core principles, which together can move us closer to achieving the SDGs." - Opening Remarks of Good Trade Summit, New York, September 20, 2023

"Let me close by calling on governments and private sector to work with small businesses, especially those in least developed countries, land-locked countries,

countries in conflict / post-conflict and small island developing states. Let's make this low-carbon transition a just and transformational one." - Remarks at COP27 high-level roundtable on just transition, Sharm El-Sheikh, November 7, 2022.

ITC's success on the ground and strategic engagement have given it a rightful place and influence in global conversations. Overall, the ITC has made considerable strides in championing an economically beneficial, socially responsible, gender-responsive, and environmentally conscious trade environment.

6. Core offering and clear results agenda

48. **The ITC has shown commendable initiative in enhancing its strategic operations, emphasizing the value of accurate and comprehensive monitoring and reporting as evident in the strategic plan for 2022-2025.** Introducing customized surveys and developing standardized reporting templates have improved inclusivity and specificity in data collection, ensuring that reports account for key mainstreaming dimensions such as youth, gender, and environmental impact. These improvements have enabled data-driven decisions and increased accountability throughout the organization. [p. 76, Annual Report 2022].

49. **Despite these advancements, donor feedback on the Draft Operation Plan 2024 suggests that the ITC could benefit from defining its strategic objectives and expressing its mission with more pronounced ambition.** Donors have acknowledged ITC's solid performance and have lauded initiatives such as SheTrades and the focus on environmental sustainability. Nevertheless, they seek a deeper involvement in the ITC's strategic journey, reflected in their request for more frequent updates and a desire for a more precise delineation of ITC's future direction. [Donors' Statement, 25 March 2024].

50. **Donors have shown particular interest in ITC's adaptation to digitalization and the integration of AI within its frameworks.** This interest points towards an expectation for ITC to be a leader in adopting cutting-edge technologies to remain at the forefront of trade and development practices. The continuation and expansion of programmes promoting gender equality, diversity, and inclusion, like the Mentoring Programme, have been particularly emphasized, signifying the donors' commitment to these areas. [CCITF Meeting Minutes 2022].

51. **As ITC moves forward, the donors' feedback implies a need to reinforce the organization's strategic priorities.** This includes a steadfast focus on supporting MSMEs while ensuring that programmes are coherent and interlinked. The appreciation for budget transparency is coupled with a call for strengthened core services, especially those linked to the promotion of digital trade. There is also an expressed eagerness to introduce more comprehensive impact indicators that span green trade and digital commerce. [Donors' Statement, 25 March 2024].

52. **Meetings at individual and division levels showed that staff believed in the organization's mission and how their division contributed to its mission.** However, they were unsure if the other division's work was as relevant as theirs. The meetings with the division showed that different divisions had diverging ideas of what priorities and success mean for ITC. There was also no convergence of ideas on what the core offering of ITC should be. It was mentioned in many of the division meetings and individual meetings with directors that ITC needed a sharpened core offering and a more defined results agenda. There was also a call for a more apparent ambition that underscores the ITC's mission. The divisional meetings also revealed tension between the divisions and a need to find ways to build a cohesive organisation to maximise the impact of ITC work.

53. **The external interviews with donors and stakeholders showed they were clear about what ITC does and the value add of ITC.** The donors and stakeholders were of high praise for three areas of ITC work: (a) support to developing countries with both WTO accession and the implementation of their commitments under the agreement, (b) success of Moonshots and (c) market intelligence, standards and quality control, and technical support to MSME's. The external donors and stakeholders were also of the opinion that there is clarity in the work of ITC and that ITC is consistently achieving results and punching above its weight.

The Strategic Plan needs to be clear in its core offering and ambition. However, It is too late during this current Strategic Plan period (2022 to 2025) to make changes on the core offering and ambition. Therefore, prioritization and defining the core offering and its ambition should be part of the ITC plan when formulation of the next strategic plan. The external perception of ITC work is good guidance for crafting the core offering and ambition.

7. Better engagement of ITC at the country level

54. **ITC is actively refining its approach to deepen engagement with individual countries, acknowledging each member state's unique requirements and capabilities.** As part of its draft country engagement strategy, ITC is focused on ensuring that its activities are strategically aligned and operationally impactful, thereby mitigating risks such as reputational harm and inefficiency due to poor coordination. ITC is committed to working closely with Resident Coordinator (RC) systems and other UN agencies, recognizing the importance of coordinated support that respects each country's self-determination.

55. **Central to this strategy are the Country Managers, who currently face the challenge of being overburdened.** They juggle project management duties with critical intelligence and strategic focus needs. In response, ITC is looking to standardize these roles and reallocate resources to enhance country coordination effectively. This adjustment aligns with ongoing UN reforms and aims to increase participation in UN Sustainable Development Corporation Frameworks, thereby improving contributions to SDGs and optimizing ITC's role as a Non-Resident Agency.

56. **To foster stronger partnerships and collaborations with UN agencies and other stakeholders, ITC acknowledges the necessity for a more unified approach to staff allocation and personnel management.** This strategic shift is essential to address current deficiencies and enhance the overall impact of ITC's global efforts.

57. The approach articulated in ITC's Draft Country Engagement Strategy 2024 includes:

    - **Light Engagement**: This term applies to countries with potential for growth, where engagement efforts are primed for expansion through global and regional programs and low-cost resources (p. 10).

    - **Medium Engagement**: For countries with current ITC projects and staff, prioritizing information exchange and maintaining a strategic post-project presence for sustained impact (p. 11).

    - **Strong Engagement:** Aimed at countries of long-term strategic interest, this level commits to establishing a country office with a comprehensive suite of representation functions, fostering significant and lasting ITC engagement (p. 12)

58. Addressing the Geneva-centric model, the **ITC ED's email from 25 May 2023 acknowledges the need to adapt to country-specific requirements. This is followed by a Service Level Agreement with UNDP to facilitate international staff reassignments and ensure comprehensive UN coverage.** This initiative paves the way for rapid deployment and seamless operations (ED, 25 May 2023; 16 August 2023).

Box 4

Case Study: ITC's Strategic Engagement and Impact in The Gambia

The ITC has established a significant presence in The Gambia, exemplifying the successful implementation of its Strategic Plan 2022-2025 through a dedicated country office. This office has adeptly navigated the complexities of country-specific challenges, harmonizing global strategic objectives with local developmental needs. This case study demonstrates how establishing a country office has catalyzed ITC's engagements and facilitated a tangible impact on the ground.

Contextual Background: Despite economic slowdowns and high inflation, The Gambia continues to show growth potential, focusing on human capital, economic diversification, and infrastructure development—areas that align with ITC's strategic objectives. Yet, challenges like youth unemployment, irregular migration, and unmet aid commitments present a complex developmental landscape, highlighting the necessity of ITC's interventions.

ITC's Strategic Approach in The Gambia: In response to The Gambia's socioeconomic dynamics, ITC has employed a multifaceted strategy. Initiatives like the Youth Employment Project (YEP) have garnered widespread recognition, embedding ITC as a cornerstone in the country's development narrative. The country office serves as a fulcrum, allowing ITC to focus on critical areas such as skill development, trade capacity building, and SME support—directly addressing drivers of vulnerability and poverty.

Utility and Advantages of the Country Office: The presence of a country office in The Gambia has provided ITC with a platform to:

1. Secure a respected position within the UNCT and the RC system. The country office contributes to and benefits from the RC system. It is seen as a partner of choice by other UN agencies.

2. Actively formulate the UNSDCF and the National Development Plan (NDP), influencing ITC's trade and MSME expertise.

3. Effectively raise in-country resources, demonstrating the advantage of proximity in resource mobilization and project management.

4. Create and sustain strategic partnerships with UN agencies, donors, and local partners, enhancing ITC's operational efficiency and impact.

Strategic and Operational Insights: The operational successes underscore the importance of country engagement in alignment with ITC's broader strategic plans. Challenges such as the need for regular funding and the project-driven nature of engagement and emphasize the need for long-term sustainability.

Lessons from The Gambia for Country Engagement Strategy: As ITC continues to refine its country engagement strategy, the learnings from The Gambia Country Office have shown that there are many benefits from having a country office.

1. Make a significant difference in the achievement of SDGs through its projects.

2. Raise funds in-country for MSME trade projects in line with the Strategic Plan.

3. Influence UNSDCF and National Development Plan on MSME and Trade.

4. Leverage technical expertise from Geneva to support trade and MSME in the country.

5. Managing and sustaining a country office with project funds is possible.

6. Learn from successful projects in other countries to bring ideas to Gambia on trade and MSME's.

The Gambia case illustrates the profound efficacy of a strategically placed ITC country office in navigating the intersection of global strategic imperatives with localized developmental exigencies. The office has elevated ITC's profile and reinforced its operational mandate, substantiating the Strategic Plan's objectives and bolstering country-specific developmental trajectories. As ITC continues to refine its country engagement strategy, the learnings from The Gambia offer invaluable insights for replication across other member states, promising a cohesive and impact-driven future.

59. **ITC's tiered engagement approach, coupled with strategic adjustments in coordination, is designed to elevate the organization's presence and efficacy across diverse country contexts.** This model aims to provide a nuanced and responsive strategy to meet countries' unique challenges and opportunities, ensuring ITC's work is aligned with and actively contributes to the SGDs within each country it operates in.

60. **The evaluation finds that after examining the Geneva and Gambia case study interviews, the draft country engagement strategy, emerging from extensive deliberation by staff and SMC, has been meticulously crafted.** It thoroughly examines multiple facets of engagement and articulates a clear, strategic path forward, reflecting a well-rounded and decisive action plan.

The evaluation confirms that now is the opportune moment to seize the chance for a strategic reorientation regarding country and regional engagement. There are compelling reasons to progress with the country engagement strategy:

The Gambia example illustrates that a country office can be successfully managed, and doing so significantly elevates ITC's profile at the country level.

The ITC country office will be able to leverage and enrich the UN RC system, enhancing mutually shared benefits.

With its technical expertise and knowledge, ITC is well-equipped to contribute significantly to the UNSDCF and national policies on MSME trade.

As donor funding has increasingly decentralized, the presence of a country office becomes essential to access funds for projects effectively.

ITC has a proven track record of consistently delivering results from its projects, establishing it as a partner of choice for MPTF and Joint Projects.

These factors collectively underscore the timely and strategic imperative to advance ITC's country engagement, promising and impactful ITC.

8.   Management system and moving forward

61. In December 2022, the results of a survey on prohibited conduct in the ITC that the UNOG Staff Union published raised troubling allegations in several areas. Consequently, the ED immediately decided to hold a full, formal, and thorough investigation into the most urgent issues raised by the survey. Concerning the more systemic and structural issues, she launched a participatory process to ensure a healthier, more supportive, and happier workplace.

62. As a result, **over the last ten months, the ITC has focused on improving its work environment, leading to the "Moving Forward Action Plan."** This plan aims to strengthen the ITC and create a better workplace by tackling issues like prohibited conduct and improving staff engagement and processes. Key aspects of the Moving Forward initiative include:

    - **Addressing Prohibited Conduct:** A six-point action plan is in place to handle prohibited conduct, including a full review of policies and establishing an Ombudsperson and an in-house investigations function for fair resolution of staff issues. The JAG will receive regular reports on these matters.

- **Improving the Workplace:** A comprehensive twenty-point plan is focused on enhancing various operational and personnel aspects, such as communication, career development, and consultant management. The plan also includes financial support for interns to promote a diverse and dynamic workforce. It also addresses issues related to skills, project management capabilities and performance management practices, as well as the need to tackle process bottlenecks that complicate or delay project delivery.

- **Regular Updates and Improvements:** The ITC is committed to continuous improvement, and various groups review and present recommendations to improve the organization.

63. **The ITC Employee Engagement Survey Results 2023 indicate that the SMC effectively addresses key organizational challenges.** The consensus indicated that the ITC is on the right track with the Moving Forward agenda. However, to further strengthen this momentum, the following suggestions were given:

- Prioritize actions that enhance corporate coherence, which includes improving financial management practices to ensure optimal resource allocation, refining contractual modalities, especially concerning consultants, and improving project design and mobility for maximum efficiency and impact.

- Improve recruitment processes that ensure the recruitment of qualified and motivated individuals for the organization's success.

- Address underperformance within the workforce and proactive measures to identify and support struggling employees.

- Better workload distribution to prevent burnout and optimize productivity across ITC.

64. **Interviews with staff and external stakeholders showed that the ED and SMC made a conscious and deliberate effort to make ITC a better organization.** The process was participatory, transparent, and well-managed. Staff feel that there was a lot of cooperation and working together in setting up the Moving Forward agenda, which brought staff from various Divisions together, a lesson in teamwork for the organization.

65. **There is a feeling among staff and stakeholders that the ED and SMC are committed to internal reform; they communicate regularly in a transparent way, and importantly, they have invested time and effort to make the reform real.** Staff and external stakeholders feel that ITC has progressed significantly regarding internal reform issues. Red lines have been drawn on prohibited conduct. **While progress is real, there is also frustration with the Moving Forward agenda. The real reason for the frustration is that the recommendations built through a participative process are seen as good. Still, some are not moving forward as per the expectations that have been generated. The agenda was ambitious, and some of the reforms required changes in UN Secretariat rules and procedures, which are outside the authority of ITC management. These systemic and structural impediments have slowed the progress.**

66. **The participatory nature of formulating and managing the moving forward agenda gave staff a voice and encouraged teamwork across divisions.** The staff feel that the management is talking to them more, and there is a real interest in the SMC engaging with staff to find solutions.

67. **While the ITC management was progressing on internal reforms regarding prohibited conduct and advancing their ambitious moving forward agenda, significant strides were also being made in other crucial areas of organizational management**.

68. **Gender Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (GDI):** The ITC has actively pursued a shared framework under its Strategic Plan to promote GDI within the organization. In 2022, the introduction of ITC's Mentoring Programme involved 134 participants, enhancing professional development and support. Despite the postponement of mandatory Performance Management goals on gender and diversity to 2023, progress was made towards an updated Gender Parity Action Plan and a new GDI Strategy to ensure parity and inclusivity at all levels.

69. **Organizational Strengths and Operational Efficiency:** ITC continued to improve its management systems to effectively align with its strategic goals. This included upgrading its Enterprise Risk Management Policy and Framework and enhancing proprietary results-based management tools to bolster operational effectiveness.

70. These comprehensive efforts across various sectors from gender, payments, procurement, human resources to evaluation within ITC demonstrate the organization's dedication to improving both its internal operations and its external impact, creating a robust and effective environment for achieving its mission in trade and development.

The evaluation finds that the ITC's management of internal reforms, as outlined in the "Moving Forward Action Plan," is notably ambitious, achieving substantial progress in a brief period. The approach to developing and managing this agenda has been participatory, effectively allowing staff to contribute to making the ITC a better-managed organization. Both staff and stakeholders recognize SMC's strong commitment and active engagement in pushing these reforms forward. The general sentiment is that this reform process has been a tremendous success. However, despite the success certain aspects of the reform has been slow due to systemic and structural issues as some changes require changes in UN Secretariat rules and procedures which is outside the authority of ITC management.

Additionally, it is noteworthy that this progress has occurred alongside significant advancements in other areas of management efficiency. Despite the potential challenges associated with such extensive internal reforms, they have not hindered the ITC from making real progress and achieving remarkable impacts from delivering on the objectives of the Strategic Plan. This demonstrates the ITC's leadership's ability to manage multiple priorities effectively, underlining the strength of its leadership and resilience of the staff.

9.   Conclusions

71. The conclusion that can be drawn from the evaluation findings above is that **overall, the guidance provided by the Strategic Plan has enabled the ITC to successfully establish itself as a credible player in global trade discussions.** This is demonstrated by ITC's on-the-ground success and strategic engagements, which reflect a commitment to creating a trade environment that is economically robust as well as socially and environmentally attentive. This approach aligns closely with the SDGs, indicating the ITC's forward-looking momentum during the Decade of Action. ITC is a growing organization that has consistently delivered. Concerning a sense of purpose and focus, staff are proud of the many achievements of ITC and the Deputy Secretary General of the UN called ITC a "jewel in the crown" of the UN Development System in recognition of its impactful presence.

72. **ITC's Strategic Plan has been guiding the organization's commitment to enhancing the role of MSMEs in global trade, which is crucial for achieving sustainable and inclusive economic growth in line with the SDGs.** However, there's a noted need for more cohesive understanding and collaboration within the organization's divisions to fully harness the plan's potential. Additionally, while the plan has significantly influenced ITC's operations, improvements are necessary in its monitoring systems and the follow-up on evaluation recommendations to enhance strategic decision-making.

73. The evaluation findings helped to affirm the **relevance of the ITC's Strategic Plan focus on MSMEs for fostering employment and equity, particularly in LDCs. This strategic emphasis is recognized for its clear and substantial contribution to advancing the SDGs.** However, the Strategic Plan's monitoring system appears overly rigid, with too many indicators that may not effectively support strategic decision-making in a rapidly changing global context that is required in a changing context. The organization's reliance on project funding requires accountability at the project level rather than general indicators that cover all projects for compliance purposes.

74. **The changing context and findings from this evaluation require adapting the Strategic Plan. However, the timeline is too short to make the changes. Therefore, the focus should be on the next strategic plan in developing a plan that clarifies the articulation between core offerings and ambition.** Utilising external perceptions of the ITC's work can provide valuable insights for shaping the next strategic plan, ensuring it is more focused and aligned with the organization's mission and the expectations of its stakeholders.

75. **The evaluation concludes that it is an ideal time for the ITC to implement its draft country engagement strategy, and it is important to get it right.** This strategic shift is supported by several factors: the success of country offices like in The Gambia, the potential for synergies with the UN RC system, ITC's ability to support the UNSDCF and national policies, the need to adapt to the decentralization of donor funding, and ITC's established track record of delivering impactful projects. These elements together make a compelling case for ITC to deepen its country-level presence to increase its effectiveness and influence.

76. The conclusion that can be drawn from this evaluation is that the **ITC's "Moving Forward Action Plan" for internal reforms has been both ambitious and successful, with significant progress noted in a short timeframe.** The participatory nature of the reform process has been effective, with staff feeling actively involved and SMC being recognized for their strong commitment to the reforms. **However, some aspects of the reforms have not been completed or are still in progress due to systemic and structural issues.** This process has coincided with improvements in other areas of management, indicating the ITC's capacity to handle multiple priorities and enact meaningful organizational change.

10. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Change the planning process for the next strategic plan and ensure that it has a clearer articulation of the core offering, ambition, and success criteria.

77. **Regarding the core offering and ambition of the organization**, the evaluation finds that clarity is needed, and the current Strategic Plan is written as a broad framework. There are clear indications available from the perception of the few external stakeholders, who highly praised for three areas of ITC's work: (a) support to LDCs on WTO accession, the implementation of their commitments under the agreement and the management of trade negotiations; (b) visibility of moonshots; and (c) market intelligence, standards and quality control, and technical support to MSMEs. These areas of praise can provide good guidance for ITC's core offering.

78. **In terms of the planning process,** it may be good to be guided by the fact that the ambition and performance management of the organization is a prerogative that must be decided by the Executive Director along with the SMC and cannot be a bottom-up planning process. Once the core offering and ambition are decided, each division plans how it contributes to the ambitions through its respective areas of divisional responsibility and performance.

79. The planning should also note that the core budget is limited, and most funding relies on extrabudgetary resources. Therefore, the strategic plan should be a roadmap to guide strategic decision-making, aligning core organizational offerings with its overarching mission. In doing so, the next strategic plan will help ensure that all parts of the organization work cohesively towards a common core offering.

80. **As for content**, the next strategic plan should contain the following elements:
    - clarity in core offering;
    - ambition and performance standards;
    - well-defined principles;
    - articulation of the implementation strategies which separate the core offering from how it is implemented;
    - alignment of capacity and resources to match objectives, focus and implementation strategies; and,
    - explicit identification of results and success criteria for measuring progress.

81. Importantly, it is recommended that the next strategic plan be developed more explicitly to account for the need for greater flexibility and adaptation given the rapidly changing global context and excessive reliance on donor financing.

Recommendation 2: Define success criteria for the ITC's core offerings and streamline the number of indicators to those essential for measuring success as per the established criteria.

82. **Concerning measuring the performance of its core offering and the fulfilment of its ambition,** ITC should clearly articulate what 'success' looks like for its core offering. It is important to distinguish between core offerings and services. For example, the core offering can support countries in implementing WTO agreements, and service can include technical support, policy support, etc. Once success is defined, the organization should identify and use only those key performance indicators (four or five as per the core offering) that directly relate to these success criteria.

83. **In terms of enhancing the utility of the indicators**, this approach aims to focus efforts, reduce complexity, and ensure that all measures are directly linked to the ITC's core offering and desired outcomes. It is a call to shift from quantity to quality in performance monitoring, ensuring that indicators are collected for reporting purposes and actively used to guide decision-making and demonstrate impact to external stakeholders. This is related to the evaluation finding that too many indicators are currently being monitored without much value for strategic decision-making. Limiting the number of indicators and being clear on success helps the organization profile its success and improves the cohesiveness of the organization.

84. **Strategy planning and monitoring improvements also call for evaluation improvements to ensure robust results management.** In the next revision of the evaluation policy, it is important to make the evaluation office structurally independent by reporting to the Office of the Executive Director (OED). Independence of the evaluation unit helps in the credibility of the evaluations and, importantly, addresses issues that the OED is strategically concerned with increasing the utility of the evolutions.

Recommendation 3: Improve organizational cohesiveness and teamwork across ITC by providing focused teamwork training for all SMC members through the UN Staff College or a similar institution.

85. The divisional meetings and interviews with staff consistently revealed tension between the Divisions and a need to find ways to build a cohesive organization to maximise the impact of ITC's work. Many Divisions do not fully agree with the importance of the work of other Divisions and how it fits into the overall mission of ITC.

86. Strengthening the unity and collaboration within the organization is crucial for maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of ITC's management and operations. When teams work cohesively, it enhances communication, streamlines workflows, and fosters a more inclusive work environment where diverse ideas and perspectives can contribute to innovative solutions. This, in turn, is likely to improve project outcomes and help ITC more effectively

fulfil its mandate and strategic objectives. The training is also to help managers understand and appreciate the work of other divisions and find ways to work for a shared purpose.

Recommendation 4: Implement a phased and strategic expansion of ITC's country-level engagement, carefully considering associated risks and constraints such as lack of additional core funding.

87. While the need for and benefits of progressing on country engagement are fully understood, a phased approach is required to allow for adaptability and careful allocation of resources, closely aligning with each country's specific needs and the dynamic global funding landscape. Acknowledging risks, such as the adequate training of human resources in managing a country office and insufficient core funding, is crucial. This will enable ITC to plan strategically and seek diverse funding sources to sustain its activities. It will also ensure that the organization is not overextended at the Geneva level, as it manages expansion and maintains quality and effectiveness in its programmes. By managing opportunities, risks, and constraints proactively, the ITC can secure its role as a key contributor to trade development and economic growth within the countries it serves.

Final thought

The International Trade Centre (ITC), with its crucial role in supporting MSMEs—the economic pillars for broad-based growth and employment in developing countries—shines as a jewel in the crown of the UN Development System. Its efforts are pivotal in creating inclusive growth and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The work carried out during the strategic plan period has been meaningful and impactful. By refining its strategic approach and enhancing its internal unity of purpose, the ITC can amplify its full potential and bring equitable prosperity to the corners of the world that need its support most.

Annex 1: Audit Trail: stakeholders' comments and evaluators' responses

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Para viii	**The formulation of the Strategic Plan, led by the Office of SPPG, was participatory and inclusive, involving technical staff and management** Also external stakeholders - funders, BSOs, partners, programme countries. It is described correctly in para 13 on page 6 (page 15) below.	Thank you. Included external stakeholders.
Para viii	The formulation of Strategic Plan was a consultative process including the inputs collected from member states/funders, beneficiaries and partners in an iterative process. (This is confirmed in paragraph 11 on pg.4 and paragraph 18 on pg. 6)	Thank you.
Para ix	**the monitoring system of more than 200 strategic milestones does not have the utility for strategic decision making and continues being more of a compliance exercise.** How are these counted? The milestones are expressed per year.	We did count 200 strategic milestones. *Edited to - However, the monitoring system has **too many** strategic milestones does not have the utility for strategic decision making and continues being more of a compliance exercise.*
Para x	**the monitoring and reporting system of the Strategic Plan has continued as per the Strategic Plan without any adaptation to changing context.** What exactly is proposed here? Can you give an example of a major change and how this should have been addressed by an adaptation of the monitoring and reporting system?	The changes in the external context are elaborated in the report.
Para xii	**prioritization and defining the core offering and its ambition should be included as important part of the formulation of the next strategic plan.** I don't agree that ITC's core offering is not described. For me, the core services and impact areas are very clear. Can you give an example of what you mean by 'core offering'?	The need for prioritizing and defining the core offering has come from majority of the ITC staff interviews.
Para xii	As mentioned at SMC this gives the impression that we have not updated/modified our SP but this was never our intention. Secondly, perception of ITC's work in my view cannot be a good guidance for adapting our offering (especially when I see later in the document the three areas of work mentioned). Our offering needs to be adapted in line with what our beneficiaries need and are asking for rather than what we do well.	Sure – it is the leadership and management that decide on the core offering. What is provided is only to provoke further thought.
Para xv and xvi	The paragraphs could be more specific so that a reader, based on the reading of the executive summary alone, can understand what is said and what has been done.	That is the intention and we think we achieved that.
Para xv	Re: On the "Moving Forward" in general in various other paragraphs.One may wish to draw the distinction between staff reps and staff more widely. Because fact is that those (many) colleagues who were not directly involved in any of the working groups will have seen little impact of the Moving Forward action plan just as yet given that many changes are longer-term ambitions that only slowly start materializing and becoming apparent now. The finding of the evaluation seems heavily influenced by the interviews that have been made – these are of course the more informed individuals.So while I personally fully agree with the assessment that ED and SMC are committed and that the Moving Forward initiative is a success, I would just like to flag that this is not necessarily what the average colleague would say (yet) as they can't see all the things that happen behind the scenes, even if shared in regular updates. It's just not sufficiently tangible yet at a broader level.	This report does not go into such details given its strategic nature.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Para xv, and page 22 Callout	Re: *"certain aspects of the reform has been slow due to systemic and structural issues"* → This formulation gives the impression that it would have been feasible to implement reforms faster, but this is not the case. Also the formulation suggests that we can change UN Secretariat rules, which we cannot. <u>Suggestion to reformulate to:</u> "However, certain aspects of the reform require further time for their effects to become tangible as they touch upon various policies and procedures that may require amendment, and/or need some financial investment."	We think this is correct to say systemic and structural issues.
Para xvi, and page 22 Callout	Re: *"demonstrates the ITC's leadership's ability to manage multiple priorities effectively, underlining the strength of its leadership and resilience of the staff."* It also demonstrates the ability of ITC staff to manage multiple priorities: dozens of ITC staff have participated in the process on top of their massive workloads – this should be acknowledged, too. Implementation success and high delivery is due to the high commitment and dedication at "lower levels".	Thank you. This is correct and resilience of staff means commitment and dedication of the staff in the face of adversity.
Para xix	**the Strategic Plan's monitoring system appears overly rigid** Monitoring system is also mentioned above. Is this a separate point?	Not a separate point but the context is different.
Para xix	**The organization's reliance on project funding requires accountability at the project level rather than general indicators that cover all projects.** I think all of our funders would disagree. They want corporate indicators.ITC's work is based on a project portfolio - you are suggesting that we do not need corporate indicators that summarize the results achieved across the project portfolio. If I understand this correctly, it contradicts any normal approaches to RBM where indicators are standardized and geared towards corporate goals. See e.g. the recent IFC reform of their indicators.	The report makes a case for a limited number of corporate indicators. The point is that the corporate indicators cannot capture accountability at project level. Corporate indicators measure progress at corporate level.
Para xx	**The changing context and findings from this evaluation requires that the Strategic Plan be adapted, however, the timeline is too short to make the changes. Therefore, the focus should be on the next strategic plan in developing a plan that articulates core offering and ambition.** What exactly does this mean? If I understood your analysis correctly, you are arguing for a more explicit prioritization of goals. Here you say that we should articulate our core offfering. I believe that in the current strategic plan the 'core offering' is articulated - one can argue whether it is to broad for an organization the size of ITC and your view of the need for reducing the scope /prioritizing the 'core offering' is a valid perspective, but should be articulated better.	Majority of the staff interviewed have expressed that the Strategic Plan is a broad framework and that ITC needs to be clear on its core offering and ambition. However, it is understood that there many ways to draft a strategic plan and one cannot argue one way of doing a strategic plan is better than another. The key question is what type of strategic plan best suits ITC going forward.
Para xx	Re: "... ensuring it is more focused and aligned with the organization's mission and the expectations of its stakeholders" -So from the preceding points above, I would interpret that the Strategic Plan has been very well focused and aligned with the organization's mission. -perhaps re-phrasing it as "ensuring it remains focused"? or indicate more clearly already that the Plan lacks this focus	The Strategic Plan is a broad framework. However, it has been clarified that the Strategic Plan should be more focused on the core offering.
Para xxi and 76	The conclusion should probably be that ITC should finalize its draft country engagement strategy with a view to implementing it rather than implement its draft strategy.	The strategy is still a draft at the time of writing this report. We as evaluators cannot assume that the final strategy will be same as the draft in spirit.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Para xxii	"*However, some aspects of the reforms have not been completed or still in progress due to systemic and structural issues.*" Suggestion to reformulate to: "Some aspects of the reform have not been completed or are still in progress as they complex issues that require at times substantive amendments to practices, policies, procedures and/or financial investments, which need to be carefully designed and sequenced."	This has been responded to above.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1	The three areas of praise are very different in terms of depth, range and size of our offering. As mentioned at SMC, our work on WTO is a subset of a subset of one of our four core areas of work (namely the policy area)	Sure. The three areas of praise are what we heard but they do not fully represent all areas of ITC work.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxiii	Re: "There are clear indications available from the perception of external stakeholders who were of high praise for three areas of ITC work"Did the team speak to enough stakeholders from a variety of projects? Because naturally stakeholders will praise those areas that have benefited them directly.Maybe more cautious wording or indicating this is based on feedback from xx number of interviewees to give these particular mentions some credibility.	Thank you – change made to indicate that it was a few external stakeholders.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxiii	**(a) support to least developed countries on WTO accession, the implementation of their commitments under the agreement and the management of the trade negotiations, (b) visibility of moonshots and (c) market intelligence, standards and quality control, and technical support to MSME's. These areas of praise can be a good guidance to the core offering of ITC.** No BSOs - contrary to research on the relevance of business ecosystems. What is 'visibility of moonshots' as a 'core offering'?	These are areas given as guidance and not a decision on what the next Strategic Plan should be.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxiii	*Quality control* **is** by definition a process by which a business ensures that product quality is maintained or improved therefore I wonder if such type of assistance shouldn't rather fall under a broader category which is technical support to SMES.	Thank you.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxiv	**...SMC and cannot be a bottom-up planning process** You correctly noted that the development of the previous Strategic Plan was overseen and guided by Senior Management. Here you imply that it was purely a 'bottom-up planning process' without ED decisions.	The paragraph is clear. "**In terms of the planning process,** it may be good to be guided by the fact that the ambition and performance management of the organization is a prerogative that must be decided by the Executive Director along with the SMC and cannot be a bottom-up planning process." It is however the prerogative of the leadership how they would like to manage their strategic planning process.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxv	**aligning core organizational offering with its overarching mission** Our W1 funding allocation is based on the Strategic Plan, including the funding for the 'moonshots'. As you wrote above, for all W2 projects, we ensure that they are aligned with the Strategic Plan.	Thank you.
Ex. Sum. rec. 1 and para xxvi, list of bullet pts	**performance standards** What does this mean?**well-defined principles and standards** What does this mean? **articulation of the implementation strategies** They are articulated. What additional information is required? What is the role of the Operational Plan? **alignment of capacity and resources to match with objectives, focus and implementation strategies;**Isn't this a point about implementation, rather than a point in the strategic plan? **explicit identification of results and success criteria for measuring progress** Risky in view of	These are generic elements as guidance. The management must take the decision what guidance it will consider. An evaluation report can only point in the direction but cannot go into more details.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
	XB and portfolio uncertainty. **the next strategic plan development should more explicitly account for the need for greater flexibility and adaptation given the rapidly changing global context and excessive reliance on donor financing** I don't understand. Above, you are saying the SP should be more specific. Here, that it should be more flexible. I don't understand what this means?See my comments above. I think it would be helpful if this was articulated as more specific advice, rather than as generic elements of a strategic plan without identifying what is currently in place. To a reader it suggests that the current Strategic Plan is fulfilling none of these criteria. On which basis was this judgement made?	
Ex. Sum. rec. 2	As mentioned at SMC, whereas I understand the differentiation being made between core offering and service, we need to be careful not to confuse the reader because in the current SP we talk about four "core service areas" and five "impact areas".	The recommendation is a judgment of the evaluator. Core offering, core services and impact areas are all concepts that need to be defined as part of the next strategic plan. This depends on what type of strategic plan ITC leadership and management decides is best for ITC.
Ex. Sum. rec. 2, para xxviii and xxix	**should identify and use only those key performance indicators (four or five as per the core offering) that directly relate to these success criteria**A data-driven organization works with more KPIs and at different levels. **a call to shift from quantity to quality in performance monitoring, ensuring that indicators are not just collected for reporting purposes but are actively used to guide decision-making and demonstrate impact to external stakeholders.** On which basis are the current indicators rated as useless? I find this sentence insulting. **there are too many indicators that are currently being monitored without much value for strategic decision making. Limiting the number of indicators and being clear on success helps the organisation profile its success and improves cohesiveness of the organisation.** Could we have some examples? On which basis do you make this assessment of 'too many indicators' - by counting that we have over 200? (unclear counting) . Even if we had, what would be a 'good' number? Which best practice in comparable organizations should we be guided by?	These are recommendations given by the best judgment of the evaluator. There are many lenses by which performance indicators can be approached and we cannot argue which lens is better. As mentioned before the management must decide what is best for ITC. The evaluators have recommended a limited number of indicators in the best judgment of the evaluator.
Ex. Sum. rec. 2 and para xxix	Re: "this approach aims to focus efforts, reduce complexity, and ensure that all measures are directly linked to the ITC's core offering and desired outcomes." I do not disagree with this but wonder to what degree this may not conflict with the aim mentioned earlier for "the need for greater flexibility and adaptation given the rapidly changing context and excessive reliance on donor funding" (pg.8).	Thank you – it must be adapted to context and balanced between flexibility and focused.
Ex. Sum. rec. 2 and para xxx	As mentioned at SMC I do not see the link between making the evaluation office structurally independent and the mid-term review of the SP. Whereas I do not have a problem with the recommendation being made, I do not see its link to the SP.	This is for management to decide. We can only suggest best practice in the UN Secretariat and UN agencies.
Ex. Sum. rec. 3, and Rec 3	The conclusion is that SMC members should be trained through UNSC, however, the justification is that the training would help managers understand and appreciate the work of other divisions and find ways to work for a shared purpose. It is not clear if we are talking about SMC or MAG.	The guidance is for SMC.
Ex. Sum. rec. 3	*Improve organizational cohesiveness and teamwork across ITC through focused teamwork training for all SMC members through UN Staff College or similar institution.* Wouldn't an organizational (re)alignment be a	This is a management decision.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
	prerequisite to reduce unnecessary frictions and avoid unhealthy competition within ITC (while trainings might be a nice to have option for newcomers)?	
Ex. Sum. rec. 4, and Rec. 4	Re: Core funding and throughout the document. What is the definition of core funding?	Earmarked funding.
Ex. Sum. Final Thought	Is this the quote from the Deputy Sec. General? Maybe indicate this (even without name but just to make it clear that it is a quote). Maybe it is not a quote? But the word "though" opens up a question: "thought of whom"?	This is a final thought from the evaluator that is partly inspired from the quote of the Deputy Secretary General.
Para 7, 3rd bullet pt.	The **Strategic Plan** was conducted with limited time and resources, so the focus of inquiry remained at a strategic and conceptual level. Should this read 'the evaluation'? a more extensive and deeper evaluation could yield additional insights into the accountability, progress, and performance of the ITC, which is beyond the scope of this strategic evaluation. Since I don't think there are plans to have a more extensive deeper evaluation, why would we want to say this here?	Thank you. It has been edited. To evaluate more or not is a decision that that is left to the management.
Para 7, 4th bullet	*One case study country* is for sure a severe limitation not mentioning the fact that The Gambia in itself is a specific case (geographically wise, etc). Beneficiary countries are diverse (classified according to different categories such as SIDS, LLDS, low, lower-middle, upper-middle, and high income countries) with needs and local conditions that can vary significantly.	Thank you. We have mentioned it as a limitation in the report.
Para 10, 5th bullet pt.	**Core Services and Global Leadership** I think that the impact areas should also be mentioned as a separate point, after this section. **The main reason for having a broad framework was to ensure donors and programme countries priorities were included in the Strategic Plan. The assumption being that if the Strategic Plan did not include the key donor priorities, then its utility for resource mobilisation would be limited. The other stated reason was to ensure that there was engagement of the donors to the Strategic Plan.** Yes and No. The existing text on page 6 below (before paragraph 13, on document page 15) describes this much better. A broad framework is important because SDGs are interconnectedMSME development contributes to all SDGs Funders focus on development impact - but to achieve impact, ITC differentiates itself from other organizations on the basis of its core expertise. We need to explain how our technical TRTA approach connects to the SDGs, and in particular the 5 impact areas we described. The business environment keeps changing, but the bigger picture and focus is ITC's contribution to the SDGs. The text reads as if we list impact areas because they are donor priorities. This gives the wrong impression. We did not only engage donors but all ITC member states and TPOs in the development of the Strategic Plan.	Yes the report describes better than the summary. However, a summary is a summary and cannot start repeating the report or the benefit of a summary is lost.
Para 13	"Digital Moonshot - "Switch ON" Initiative:" => "Digital Moonshot – (initially communicated as "Switch ON" Initiative):"	Thanks for the clarification.
Para 13	"*This initiative addresses the challenges small enterprises in developing countries face in global trade.*" This sounds a bit weird – all ITC initiatives address challenges small enterprises in developing countries face in global trade… Maybe something's missing in this sentence?	*Paraphrased - This initiative uniquely addresses specific challenges small enterprises in developing countries face in global trade, such as limited access to financing, inadequate infrastructure, and regulatory barriers.*

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Para 15	Re: "...impacting women, and girls in developing countries." Girls are not target group (children) of ITC. THere is no resolution supporting ITC's engagement with children as beneficiaries. Please change to ... women, including young women...	*Changed as suggested - This initiative aims to close the global gender gap, particularly impacting women, including young women in developing countries*
Para 15	Re: "...focusing on innovative services for diverse groups" Focusing on services for women entrepreneurs, or women-led businesses, not for diverse groups	*Changed as suggested - By 2025, ITC plans to enhance its services and tools through the SheTrades Initiative, focusing on innovative services for women entrepreneurs, or women-led businesses, leveraging decentralized platforms, policy advocacy, and gender mainstreaming.*
Page 6, Callout	Re: "The ITC Strategic Plan is an ambitzious and broad framework..." These insertions are summaries / conclusions from the sections, rather than quotes correct?	Yes, that is the correct.
Page 6, Callout	**Additionally, the aim was to enhance the provision of technical support to MSMEs in these areas through a targeted approach** This is part of the strategic focus, not an addition.	Thanks. Changed so there is no ambiguity in meaning.
Page 6, Callout	*notable divergences still prevail in understanding the operationalisation of the Strategic Plan across divisions highlight the need for improved internal coherence and better teamwork towards a shared goal.* There is some grammatical problem with the sentence. Maybe this is why it is difficult to understand. Could this sentence be clarified?	It has to be read in the context of the paragraph.
Para 21	**The contradiction of divergence and convergence goes further, and all divisions do claim that their division plans and reports are aligned to the Strategic Plan** I don't understand this sentence. Does it mean that the division plans are assessed as not being aligned to the Strategic Plan? Why? And why is there a contradiction? I can believe that my work is the most important, and still be aligned with the Strategic Plan. Some people believe that policy work is more important to reduce poverty, others that working directly with poor people is more important as results are faster and more tangible - this is a common discussion across all people dealing with development, not only a discussion in ITC. And there is no proof for either approach to be the only 'right' one. ITC has accepted this and is working with a number of approaches. Senior Management is conscious of it and fine with it.	The sentence should be read in the context. "**Many of the divisions felt that their division's work was more important than the other divisions work, and the SMC was not giving proportionate attention and importance to their work. The contradiction of divergence and convergence goes further, and all divisions do claim that their division plans and reports are aligned to the Strategic Plan."**
Para 24	**ITC employs a large number of qualitative proxy indicators to monitor key programmatic and operational initiatives as specified in the Strategic Plan, translating these into milestones within the annual Operational Plans to ensure effective delivery and alignment with strategic objectives** I think the following is a better description: ITC specifies how key deliverables planned for the year (milestones) are linked to the objectives and commitments made in the Strategic Plan.	Thank you that is one way to look at it.
Para 26	**The strategic milestones for 2024 includes technical assistance milestones and managing for results milestones has more than 200 indicators** This is a wrong description and I don't know how the 200 indicators were counted. We don't have 200 indicators - the milestones describe ITC's planned work in different programmatic and operational areas, specifying what we want to achieve during the year in view of commitments made in the Strategic Plan. They serve to have internal teams communicate their planned key deliverables to colleagues as	We counted 200 milestones. *Paraphrased - The strategic milestones for 2024 includes **45 technical assistance milestones with additional 30 points for efficiency-effectiveness milestones per year.***

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
	well as external stakeholders. The process facilitates an SMC review of what are more or less important deliverables, in the development of the Operational Plan and give external stakeholders an overview of ITC's workplan. **the sheer number of indicators that does not allow for strategic focus** What do you call 'strategic focus'? Could you give an example of a document - e.g. from UNICEF - that clarifies what you mean by strategic focus and strategic indicators? Some years ago we reviewed the RBM systems of a number of organizations including development banks, and are confident that what we do is at par. But maybe there are new approaches which are far better - we'd love to learn from that.	
Para 27	Re: "For example, the AESR 2023 finds that there is generally high relevance of ITC projects, focusing on the systems underlying MSME competitiveness." Consider re-phrasing. I don't fully understand what is meant here.	This is taken from the AESR that is already published.
Box 1	**This alignment begins with identification, focusing on addressing gaps in current initiatives or responding to needs highlighted by donor agencies** Only donor agencies or also the government and local partner institutions?	Thank you. Changed.
Para 28	**The ITC Annual Report 2023 on examination** What does mean on examination? **coordinated by the Office of SPPG** SPPG produces the annual (and mid-year) CCITF reports, and contributes substantively to the Annual Report. However, the Annual report is led by the 'Communications and Events' section, with inputs from across ITC. **the report tracks and analyzes corporate indicators related to the implementation of the Strategic Plan. The annual report provides a detailed review of the ITC's activities over the year, focusing on the outcomes and effectiveness of these efforts in relation to the strategic objectives laid out in the plan. It highlights achievements, identifies challenges, in line with the Strategic Plan objectives**I'm not sure whether you refer to the CCITF report or the ITC Annual Report?	When examined by the evaluators is what means. Coordinated seems right in this context where other offices also provides inputs and leads in some aspects.
Para 28	The Strategic Plan is for 2022-2025. ITC Annual Report 2023 was reviewed. What about ITC Annual Report 2022?	For the purpose of the report 2023 was sufficient.
Page 9, Callout	*However, the monitoring system of more than 200 strategic milestones does not have the utility for strategic decision making and continues being more of a compliance exercise* This is factually incorrect. Our monitoring system is not about a high quantity of milestones as explained above, and the origin of the figure of 'over 200' is not clear to me. Monitoring takes place across a number of areas - from financials, to risks, to the project portfolio and individual projects. However, the results framework with quantitative indicators, presented in the Annex of the Strategic Plan, is the core of the corporate 'programmatic' monitoring system.	The fact that there are too many indicators has been clarified before.
Para 30	**suggesting a need for adapting strategies to the evolving external context.** There is a difference between a need for adapting strategies (e.g. on best approaches to support MSMEs in digital trade) and a need for adapting the Strategic plan. Here, it somehow reads as if it was needed to adapt the Strategic Plan. If this was not meant, it would be good to clarify this.	It means what it says.
Page 10, Callout	*the monitoring system of more than 200 strategic milestones* We have indicated before, there are no 200 milestones. Annually there are up to five by core service/impact	*Changed to - However, the monitoring system of 45 technical assistance milestones with an additional 30 points*

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
	area. So 9 areas times 5=45 technical assistance milestones; with some additional 30 points for efficiency-effectiveness milestones per year. The analyst must have summarized all the reporting years to date.	*for efficiency-effectiveness milestones per year does not have the utility for strategic decision making and continues being more of a compliance exercise.*
Para 40	**Changing context suggest a growing political, social, and economic divide that may require agility and quick adaptations of the Strategic Plan** What do you mean by 'quick adaptations of the Strategic Plan'? Are you suggesting that a Strategic Plan should be quickly and frequently adapted?**one adaptation could be used for advocacy with donors is on the need for MSME support in an environment of increased inequality**Sentence is grammatically unclear. The Strategic Plan does articulate ITC's role in advocacy - in the chapter 'leading the global conversation'. While it does not specify 'advocacy with donors on the need for MSME support', this is happening and in line with the strategic plan. Why would we want to turn the Strategic Plan - through 'quick adaptations' into an operational workplan, describing concrete activity level adaptations to a change in environment? **The main reason for advocating for the benefit from MSMEs for equity is because MSMEs generate around 60 to 70 percent of the employment in developing countries. By greater advocacy at the global level on the need for targeting MSMEs, the ITC could have directly influenced impacts on SDGs—** All this is described in the ED's Foreword and in the chapter 'why MSMEs' - you took the text on the relevance of MSME employment directly from page 10. The whole Strategic Plan argues the point why MSME development is important for achieving the SDGs. **It should be noted that although there were some adaptations due to changing contexts, these changes were not systematic, as there was no corresponding adjustment in the Strategic Plan** Could you give an example of what you would propose should have been adjusted? We did not change our high-level strategic goals. We do of course adapt to changing contexts, in how we pursue these goals at the operational level.	The evaluators are clear that changing context requires adaptation of the Strategic Plan.
Para 40	I think to a certain degree, ITC has always argued this point well about focusing on MSMEs to achieve growth, create jobs etc. what needs to be emphasized, and what perhaps this example in par. 40 is already indicating (but could be made more strongly overall), is that ITC needs to advocate and to show that working on MSMEs is not working on "micro" issues – but by strengthening MSMEs, ITC is working on "macro", "structural" problems like inequality, fragility and climate change.	Thank you – that might be correct. However, we cannot cover new aspects in this report as we will have to evidence it and at this stage of the report we cannot collect fresh evidence.
Para 40	"*For example, one adaptation could be used for advocacy with donors is on the need for MSME support in an environment of increased inequality.*" I was a bit surprised to read this, because this is what we do on a daily basis … It's part of ITC's standard narrative. So I am not sure what is meant by adapting the Strategic Plan further to allow for such narrative/ emphasis.	Adaptation of the Strategic Plan would be supporting the reinforcement of what you do on a daily basis.
Para 41	"*The evaluation team were informed during individual and divisional meetings of the considerable progress and numerous successes that ITC has achieved since the adoption of the Strategic Plan.*" Not sure where the DMD voices went. The list of interviewees doesn't show many DMD interlocutors (in contrast to DSIT) and the divisional meeting focused to a large extent on feedback of the evaluation team about their visit to the Gambia. During the remaining time, DMD colleagues raised numerous concerns in relation to the articulation and visibility of ITC's work at the policy level (and the transparency-related work), the impact of which is harder to measure in general and particularly within the lifetime of projects.	That is true we heard this from DMD. Articulation and visibility come up in various parts of the report.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Box 2, and in general	Please use -- ... Permanent Representative of **The** Gambia instead of "the" – apply everywhere where you have *the Gambia*.	Thank you change made.
Para 43	**Below are a few examples to capture the essence and impact of ITC's work in line with the objectives of Strategic Plan. Examples:** Aren't these examples precisely contradicting the message that seems to be given above - that ITC has not adapted to a changing environment because it has not re-written/updated its Strategic Plan 2022-26?	ITC operation plans have adapted but not the Strategic Plan – so two are different.
Para 43, 5th bullet pt.	Re: Operational Streamlining and Automation. Reference is made to "auditor reports", however, Annex II only refers to one audit report: United Nations financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 and report of the Board of Auditors: Volume III - International Trade Centre. General Assembly Official Records, Seventy-eighth Session, Supplement No. 5.	*Changed to single auditor report*
Para 43, 7th bullet pt.	I am missing a reference to ITC's "Made by Africa" initiative, which is influencing trade and investment decisions at the continental level in Africa and has shaped the priority value chains that the African Union (as well as the EU) are focusing on in their efforts to support and foster regional integration under the Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).	*Inserted - **"Made by Africa" initiative:** ITC influences trade and investment decisions at the continental level in Africa and has shaped the priority value chains that the African Union (as well as the EU) are focusing on in their efforts to support and foster regional integration under the Continental Free Trade Agreement (AfCFTA).*
Para 43, 8th bullet pt.	**indicating a shift in donor preferences towards supporting national and regional projects** I don't think this connection between the two parts of the sentence is valid. Some donors focus on national/regional projects, usually for geopolitical reasons. Others focus on thematic areas. I think the sentence would be better phrased as 'ITC has seen a substantial increase in earmarked funding, especially for country and regional projects. This increase in funding	We have been informed that this shift is happening.
Para 43, 9th bullet pt	To rephrase the sentence related to **GPGs**, as the current description is missing the most important ones (important in terms of "age", number of users, covered topics). Suggestion: Global Public Goods (GPGs): ITC's GPGs like Trade Map, Market Access Map and Export Potential Map reach millions of users every year, showcasing ITC's fundamental role in levelling the playing field by supporting evidence-based decision-making across all countries. the Standards Map and Sustainability Map complement the suite of tools that ITC provides as GPGs and demonstrate have reached hundreds of thousands of users, showcasing ITC's contributions to sustainable development and responsible trade practices globally. Each of the above examples demonstrates how the ITC's strategic initiatives have translated into real-world impacts, furthering the cause of sustainable and inclusive trade across various countries and regions.	*Amended as suggested*
Box 3	Re: moonshots **- equipping over 5,800 female entrepreneurs across 28 countries with vital skills for international commerce** Where does the number come from? And what time-frame/project(?) does it relate to? We have far higher numbers reported at corporate level, not only in terms of increased skills, but also in terms of changes to businesses and international transactions of women-led MSMEs.	This number was provided to us. We can only use secondary information as this evaluation is strategic in nature we do not collect and verify numbers.

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Box 3, 2nd para	Current paragraph: The Digital Connectivity and Trade (Switch ON) initiative has proven instrumental in bridging the digital divide for MSMEs, enhancing their market access and investment potential, particularly in Zambia, Tanzania, and Rwanda. Proposed update: Our vision for the Digital Moonshot is to increase the scale and reach of our digital initiatives on e-commerce and tech entrepreneurship to reach 20,000 small businesses by 2025. This means prioritizing investments in connectivity and a conducive business environment – through hands-on skills training and information sharing, policy reform and key partnerships – so small businesses in developing and least developed countries can profit from digital trade. The Digital Moonshot initiative targets broader elements of trade facilitation and institutional support in addition to the more targeted training related to digital entrepreneurship and e-commerce, resulting in coordinated action across the policy, institutional and enterprise levels. Access to digital connectivity and related services plays an important role in increasing the competitiveness of small businesses in international markets, in particular those run by women, youth and people living in remote, rural or vulnerable communities.	Thank you and there is no contradiction with what is proposed. However, the proposed update is better suited for progress report or annual report.
Para 45	and ITC has successfully brought to the forefront the critical interconnections between trade, climate change, and gender equality. Doesn't this contradict the earlier message that ITC is not engaging in advocacy?	Context is different.
Para 45	In 2024, ITC has also begun developing an Indigenous Peoples and Trade programme document which is in the process of being completed. While this might not have come up in interviews, it can be flagged that this is also an area where ITC has also intentionally focused on inclusivity.	*Added - Additionally, ITC has also begun developing an Indigenous Peoples and Trade programme document which is in an area where ITC has also intentionally focused on inclusivity.*
Para 52	In terms of belief in the organisation / overall engagement, it may be worth referring to the Employee Engagement Survey (EES) results here, which clearly document this (currently the para only refers to "*meetings at the individual and divisional level*"). I also feel that the assessment that there is tension between divisions is not correct. What is true, and this is very clear also from the EES, is that colleagues across the house wish to see more guidance on the precise mandates (and limits thereof) of individual units, be it sections or divisions. I.e. should DCP implement technical projects even without technical sections or not? Does GIVC takes care of policy issues or is that TFPB? And if there is overlap, how to define the collaboration? It's a "perceived lack of leadership and guidance / perceived lack of clarity in roles and mandates" question, not one of tensions between sections or divisions. I feel the current formulation is very misleading.	This evaluation cannot go into all the problems of ITC.
Para 52 and 53	There is discrepancy in that staff and external stakeholders differ in their agreement that ITC's core work needed to be clarified. The recommendation states that prioritization and defining the core offering and its ambition should be part of the ITC plan in the formulation of the next strategic plan. Should this be clarified? Will it therefore be an internal process as the external perception seemed fine? Yet under recommendation 1 it says on page 24 „In terms of the planning process, it may be good to be guided by the fact that the ambition and performance management of the organization is a prerogative that must be decided by the Executive Director along with the SMC and cannot be a bottom-up planning process. Once the core offering and ambition is decided then each division plans how the division contributes to the ambitions through their respective areas of divisional	This is for the management to decide we have given some guidance but cannot be prescriptive.

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	responsibility and performance." How should ITC therefore clarify its core offering in the next strategic plan?	
Para 53	**The external interviews with donors and stakeholders showed** Would be good to quantify both categories, how many	It will not be good for reading ease and will not change the findings or conclusion.
Para 53	"*punching above its weight*" If I am not mistaken this expression refers to sth rather negative: that one takes on challenges that one is not made for and one is set to fail… In the context of the paragraph, I doubt this is what was meant. Consider revising to: "exceeding expectations" or sth around "delivering more (results / impact) than one would expect given the size of the organisation" or sth like that.	This is a positive comment.
Page 17, Callout	*Strategic Plan needs to be clear* Should it be 'the next SP should be clearer in its core priorities and ambition ….?	The statement is clear in the context.
Para 55	"*Central to this strategy are the Country Managers, who currently face the challenge of being overburdened.*" Country managers are not the only ones who feel overburdened. Every ITC colleague who is not a country manager will find this reference odd. Suggestion to reformulate to: Central to this strategy are country managers. However, currently there are only very few that can focus their attention on the critical needs for intelligence and strategic focus as many are also entrusted with project management responsibilities, leading to conflict of interest and a shift of priorities. FYI, since a long time the recommendation has been made to separate country management from project management because both are not combinable. Would be good if the Strategic Plan evaluation would support this call.	Might be true. But this is written within a context of country strategy.
Para 55	Use the term United Nations Sustainable Development Corporation (UNSDCF) instead of UNDAF.	Thank you change made.
Para 56	One could make reference here to the dedicated Moving Forward Action item that aims at exactly that (more unified approach to personnel management)	We have mentioned moving forward action plan in other contexts.
Box 4	**This case study demonstrates how the establishment of a country office has catalyzed ITC's engagements and facilitated a tangible impact on the ground.** please be careful as we never had stated to have a country office, only project/programme offices. The first country office will be open in a pilot country according to the ITC Country strategy.	The draft country engagement strategy make the shift to country office.
Box 4	**Utility and Advantages of the Country Office:** Please use alternative, such as Field-level office or something similar. This establishment did not have a country-office status.	Country office is what the country engagement strategy talks about.
Box 4	**The Gambia offer invaluable insights for replication across other nations,** please replace nations by member states	*Changed as suggested - As ITC continues to refine its country engagement strategy, the learnings from The Gambia offer invaluable insights for replication across other member states, promising a cohesive and impact-driven future.*

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
Para 65	**The agenda was ambitious and some of the reforms required changes in UN Secretariat rules and procedures which are outside the authority of ITC management. These systemic and structural impediments have slowed the progress** We should be able to substantiate this with examples.	The statement is clear in the context and no examples are needed.
Para 65	"*These systemic and structural impediments have slowed the progress.*" No, progress has been steady. It's just massively complex issues. So while it is true that the tangibles may not meet expectations, I would not say that structural impediments have *slowed* the progress. It is not in any way realistic to expect faster progress against complex items such as consultants' contracts and payments – in fact, it would be a sign of "carelessness" and window-dressing if ITC had been done with all items by now. I would hence recommend reformulating.	There is no contradiction with what is proposed.
Para 65	Re: "There is a feeling among staff and stakeholders" Would be useful to qualify the sources in these instances, say, is it based on the staff survey, question xyz (I know that this data was available at the time)	It is based on interviews with the staff and stakeholders.
Para 69	Re: Enterprise Risk Management Framework Please modify to: ... Policy and Framework (instead of only Framework)	*Changed as suggested*
Para 72	Re: "...improvements are necessary in its monitoring systems..." We have ongoing efforts on these, also in our operational plans, under RBM chapter.	
Para 75	Re:"...the success of country offices like in The Gambia..." Field offices, or project field offices	It is a country office in The Gambia.
Rec. 1	Re: Core offering. This recommendation to further clarify the core offering of ITC seems insufficiently substantiated. Supporting least developed countries on WTO accession is too narrow an area of work to be elevated to a "core" ITC offering. In fact, ITC does this work within one section working on Trade Policy which sits within ITC's "more conducive policy and regulatory environment for MSMEs" core offering. The other two examples provided are equally narrow or insufficiently described to be categorized as core offerings. The graph on page 4 taken from the strategic plan (page 7) does include a graphical description of ITC's core offering (the how), which are: 1. Improved MSME capacities to trade, 2. A more supportive ecosystem, 3. A more conducive regulatory and policy environment, 4. Improved trade and market intelligence. I do not think the core offering needs to change; we just need to ensure the services within match the core offering.	Thank you. We are offering some guidance but it is for the management to decide.
Para 78	Re: "The planning should also note that the core budget is limited..." I think we may need to articulate clearly what is intended to be achieved with the core budget, and what with voluntary contributions.	The sentence makes sense in the context with which it is made.
Para 78	Re: "ambition..." Just a clarification: shall we interpret this as a demand that the Strategic plan articulates in more detail the corporate targets for 4-year period?	Recommendation is a judgment of the evaluator and it is the management to decide.
Rec. 2	Re: On success criteria on there being too many indicators.In fact, **there are too few indicators**, and this is what constrains project design and reporting from projects into the corporate framework. The types of	The report guides that there be limited core indicators at corporate level to measure corporate level performance

Ref. AESR	Comment/Question/Feedback as Provided by Stakeholders	Evaluation Team Response/Action as Provided by the Evaluation Team
	projects we have today tackle many more issues that are not captured in the corporate indicators because, in my cases, there is no correspondence. The recommendation here is to ensure there are sufficient indicators to measure success of the strategic plan. However, many donor-funded ITC projects fall outside the strategic plan and core offerings.	and have project indicators for measuring project level performance and accountability.
Para 84	Re: Paragraph on IEU reporting to the ED. I disagree. We want to keep the evaluation unit independent.	Thank you. The evaluation office is not functionally independent as per the UNEG norms and standards. Naming an evaluation office independent does not make it independent.
Rec. 3	The problem is not one of missing training for managers. It's one of incentives, fundraising / security of funds playing a big part in these and the fact that in most cases, people (including section chiefs and division directors) are evaluated based on the money they bring in, not the money they enable ITC at large to have (whether or not landing in their own units). And the fact that managers (including chiefs and directors) are pretty much "on their own" if they struggle. I.e. the corporate, strategic view on our offering, related funding and staffing, is what is needed – and less of the current "*chacun-pour-soi*" approach. This starts emerging (also thanks to the Moving Forward plan) but there is still much to do there. Btw, linked to this, maybe a call (destined at donors) would be merited: more Window I, i.e. more "corporate funding" will greatly help reducing the silo approach as SMC would have a greater margin for manoeuvre than currently to foster collaboration and teamwork.	This is for the management to decide.
Rec. 3	Re: On SMC teamwork and training. The origin of the conflicts is power and access to financial resources. Training is a good idea but not sufficient. The incentives must change. IN addition, selection processes of SMC members must also improve and should give priority to people who understand ITC.	Thank you.
Rec. 3	Re: "...for all SMC members..." I believe you might want to refer to all senior managers (P5 level and above, and not only to SMC)? So, SMC and MAG? If you indicate that staff/teams need to work cohesively, maybe there's a need for all-staff training, too?	Here it is a guidance and for the leadership to decide.
Annex 4	The list of ITC Gambia personnel interviewed, where does it sit in the document?Programme Coordinator; SheTrades Regional Coordinator and Project Development Consultant; Technical Advisor and JSF Coordinator; Technical Advisor; Communications and Knowledge Management Consultant; Project Officer; Operations and Admin Assistant; Driver; Driver; and Driver	*Inserted pp. x Annex 3*
Annex 4	Re: List item 34. The correct title would be Chair of the *ITC Staff Council*	Thank you changed.

Annex 2: Terms of reference of the midterm evaluation

Evaluation context

In its management response to the 2021 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR), ITC Senior Management agreed to the recommendation of implementing an independent mid-term evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. It was envisaged the mid-term evaluation to review the ITC Strategic Plan priorities and implementation with a panel of experts. ITC Senior Management also committed to implementing possible adjustments suggest by the mid-term evaluation.[2] The midterm evaluation will be presented at the 2024 Joint Advisory Board meeting in July, which gathers ITC Member States.

Consequently, the ITC Independent Evaluation Unit is looking for hiring an evaluation team to conduct this evaluation. Due to budgetary cycle constraints, it is envisaged to fund the evaluation through two consecutive contracts. One focusing on deliverables of the inception phase, the second on those deliverables provided during the data collection and analysis phase.

Introduction to the ITC Strategic Plan

The International Trade Centre (ITC) prepared its Strategic Plan 2022–2025 against the backdrop of a rapidly changing global landscape. This plan outlines ITC's vision for fostering inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. ITC's strategic plan serves as a guiding document that outlines the organization's strategic objectives during that period. It is designed to steer the organization's efforts towards fostering global economic development and sustainable development through the promotion of Micro-, Small-, and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs) competitiveness and international trade.

The plan outlined the global landscape and challenges.
- **COVID-19 Impact:** The pandemic had led to increased poverty, unemployment, and inequalities. Supply chain disruptions and macroeconomic risks, including inflation and debt concerns, posed challenges to global recovery.
- **Geopolitical Dynamics:** Changing power dynamics, economic nationalism, and value chain politicization influenced global production and investment. Conflicts, humanitarian crises, and forced displacements further complicated the geopolitical landscape.
- **Environmental Concerns:** The world faced a triple planetary crisis: climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. The transition to a sustainable economy was imperative.

The plan linked the Strategy to ITC's Vision and Mission.
- **Vision:** ITC envisions a world where trade promoted inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. The recovery from the pandemic should have led to resilience and a green transition.
- **Mission:** Established in 1964, ITC is the joint agency of the WTO and the UN, dedicated to supporting micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in trade. It aims to strengthen MSME competitiveness, fostering opportunities for women, youth, and vulnerable populations.

The plan laid out the strategic priorities of the organization going forward.
- **MSMEs as Key Players:** MSMEs, which account for 60–70% of employment in developing countries, are central to ITC's strategy. They play a crucial role in poverty reduction and sustainable development.
- **Inclusive Trade:** ITC emphasizes the importance of trade that benefited all, addressing vulnerabilities and promoting decent work, especially for women and youth.
- **Sustainable Trade:** The strategy underscores the shift to sustainable production, the development of a circular economy, and the creation of green value chains.
- **Digitalization:** Addressing digital connectivity gaps, providing necessary skills, and scaling up e-commerce capabilities are pivotal to ITC's approach.
- **Regional Integration:** The plan highlights the empowerment of regional economic blocs, especially in Africa, to transform trade patterns.

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[2] Subsequently, it was decided to launch the data collection stage of evaluation in 2024.

The plan laid out the operational strategies of the organization.

- **Customized Solutions:** ITC offers tailored solutions to address the unique needs of least developed countries, landlocked developing countries, small-island developing states, conflict-affected countries, and sub-Saharan Africa.
- **Partnerships:** Collaborations with Geneva partners like WTO and UNCTAD, the broader UN family, and the private sector are strengthened.
- **Internal Reforms:** ITC aims to be more agile and expert-driven, strengthening core business processes and emphasizing equality, diversity, and inclusion.

The Plan has been prepared as a comprehensive roadmap that intertwines trade with broader global goals. It recognizes the challenges posed by the current global context and outlines a path to address them, with MSMEs at the core of its strategy. The plan emphasizes the importance of collaboration, innovation, and adaptability in achieving its vision of inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. The plan considers the need to leverage the UN Development Reform to contribute to the achievement of SDG more effectively during the decade of action.

Intended users

- ITC Senior Management, as the evaluation will provide an information base for organizational decisions and management, in relation to ITC´s programmatic approach in general and issues related to the operationalization of the Strategic Plan;
- ITC staff, and ITC Sections and Divisions as they are responsible for Strategic Plan implementation, management and results monitoring;
- ITC Member States, including funders and recipients; and well as other ITC stakeholders and development partners; and
- The general public interested in learning more about ITC strategic planning and performance.

Objectives, Criteria and Scope

Objectives – This evaluation will be carried out within the overall provisions of the ITC Evaluation Policy to (a) enhance greater corporate accountability to ITC stakeholders and development partners and (b) contribute to organizational learning and, (c) extend strategic partnership in achieving ITC's development objectives.

It will neither evaluate ITC's performance during period 2022–2023, nor will it attempt to link the Strategic Plan to specific results of the ITC. Instead, the objectives of mid-term evaluation will be focusing at:

- Assessing the utility of the Strategic Plan as a tool in guiding the organization and for managing its activities.
- Facilitating learning from ITC experience in operationalizing the Strategic Plan, to improve its use and introduce possible adaptations for the remaining of the 2022-2025 period.
- Providing recommendations with respect to the organization's overall strategy and strategic planning process for the upcoming strategic planning cycle 2026-2029.

Criteria – The evaluation will be expected to answer a set of questions in order to meet its purpose and objectives. The evaluation questions will be directly linked to a number of fundamental evaluation criteria[3] which reflect the core principles for evaluating Strategic Plans in the field of development assistance and which have been adopted by most development agencies as standards of good practice in evaluation.

The scope of the mid-term evaluation will encompass all activities related to the design, implementation, management, and monitoring of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.

Tentative timeline and key deliverables

The evaluation is planned to be conducted in a timeframe of nine months, between September 2023 and end of May 2024. The evaluation consultant will work under the supervision of the Head of the IEU. The consultant will be responsible for the delivery of the outputs as set out below.

Initial Analysis – An initial analysis based on data collected and reviewed, including key issues to be assessed by the evaluation and likely data gaps. Conduct a desk review and gather additional exploratory data collection as

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[3] OECD (2019), Evaluation Criteria (revised set of definitions)

needed to prepare the evaluation. This will consist in an exhaustive mapping of existing information to establish a basis for its use in the mid-term evaluation ([Annual Operational Plan](), [CCITF Report](), [ITC Annual Report](), ITC reviews, studies, and [evaluations including AESRs]()[4]). It will also take in account relevant new initiatives and sub strategies launched by the ITC during the 2022-2024 period, in particular those related to the improvement of ITC operations and building of a better workplace (Moving Forward action plan) and the programmatic promotion of trade and sustainable development (moonshots on "[Green]()", " [Digital]()¨, "[Youth]()" and "[Gender]() " that were elaborated for the 2022-25 period). This mapping will lead to a document review and the preparation of an initial analysis of the strategic plan and resource documents as well as data gaps. (approx. 10 days)

Main deliverable: initial analysis (due by approx. 10 Oct.)

Draft Inception Report – Design the evaluation approach, data collection instruments, and prepare a draft inception report. This will be built on consultations with key ITC and external stakeholders to gather insights and feedback. This exercise will take in account the changes occurred since 2022, in terms of the UN Development reform and concerning the Aid for Trade context. The Draft Inception report will define the envisaged evaluation approach including a validation of the objectives of the evaluation, the related evaluation questions, data collection methods and foreseen indicators to measure performance and results, the evaluation matrix, and the suggested timeline for the evaluation. (approx. 15 days)

Main deliverable: draft inception report (due by approx. 31 Oct.)

Final Inception Report– Presentation of to internal and external stakeholders of the Initial Analysis and the Draft Inception Report. Collection of feedback and comments gathered through a workshop. Amendment and drafting of the Final Inception Report, accordingly. (approx. 10 days)

Main deliverables: workshop and final inception report (due by approx. by 10 Dec.).

Data collection and analysis – Conduct interviews with different stakeholders and use other data collection methods as defined in the inception report; prepare a synthesis paper summarizing findings from interviews, case study and/or survey results. Prepare and carry out a validation workshop with senior management to discuss main findings. (approx. 20 days)

Main deliverable: synthesis paper (deadline tbd)

Report drafting – Prepare an outline of the evaluation report, indicating the report structure and key inputs to be integrated; prepare a draft evaluation report based on the findings from data collection and analysis (and possibly the feedback from the validation workshop). (approx. 20 days)

Main deliverable: draft evaluation report (deadline tbd)

Finalization and dissemination – Revise the draft report based on comments received; document how comments have been addressed; prepare a draft communication product that highlights the most significant learning points generated by the evaluation, and a presentation to be delivered to key stakeholders (JAG members). (approx. 5 days) (deadline 31 May 2024)

Main deliverables: revised evaluation report; audit trail addressing comments; draft communication products.

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[4] The successive AESRs since 2021, have aimed at informing, learning, and ensuring accountability to ITC member States on the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, by assessing the findings from previous evaluation reports and related reviews against its main strategic dimensions. A methodological framework was developed for this purpose in the form of a series of research questions combining the respective Strategic Plan objectives with each of the evaluation criteria defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC).

Methodology

The evaluation process and methodological approach is expected to follow the principles set forth in the [ITC Evaluation Guidelines](). Furthermore, it shall be performed in line with the [Norms and Standards for Evaluation]() and respecting the [Ethical Guidelines for Evaluation]() published by the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG).

The methodology will be designed during the inception phase and entail the development of an **evaluation matrix** defining which data sources will be used to answer the evaluation questions while taking into account data availability as well as budget and time constraints.

The evaluation should be based on a rigorous and transparent methodology ensuring impartiality and lack of bias. To this end, a mixed method design is preferable, which allows triangulation of multiple data sources and stakeholder groups. The evaluation will mainly rely on the following data collection methods:

a) **Document review**, which will comprise mainly relevant documents related to the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 (e.g., strategic and operational planning documents, work plans and budgets, monitoring data and corporate publications). In addition, the document review shall include other relevant publications, such as evaluations or studies.

b) **Key informant interviews** will be semi-structured and conducted either face-to-face or by telephone/video conference. These interviews are mainly to be conducted with the following groups:
   - ITC staff working on strategic planning, performance and governance issues and staff members collaborating with the implementation of the objectives of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, in particular ITC staff in the field.
   - ITC senior management (SMC).
   - Member States representatives, including funders and beneficiaries.
   - ITC Parent institutions (WTO and UNCTAD) as well as other development partners such as UN agencies interested in trade and sustainable development issues.
   - Representatives of the main beneficiary groups of the ITC, in particular BSOs, MSMEs, workers, and marginalized community leaders.

c) An online survey may be also used to gather additional data. A survey may be implemented among other main client groups or adapted specifically to other individual audiences.

d) Missions in Geneva might be an opportunity to develop an in-depth understanding of the perspectives of various stakeholders around the evaluation questions and collect relevant data.

To ensure participation and ownership among key stakeholders, regular consultations will be conducted during the evaluation process. In concrete terms, this implies that key stakeholders (in particular the Member States representatives, Senior Management) will be consulted at the drafting stages of the (i) terms of reference, (ii) inception report and (iii) evaluation report and will have the opportunity to provide comments. Moreover, it is envisaged to have a meeting with evaluation stakeholders to present and discuss the findings before the conclusion of the final draft of the evaluation report.

Evaluation team and management

The IEU will establish an evaluation team comprising one external consultant, which will be managed by the IEU and under the overall guidance of the Head of the IEU.

The evaluation will be guided by a panel of experts with the purpose of providing independent and globally diverse oversight and perspectives to the evaluation.

Annex 3: Documents reviewed in the midterm evaluation.

1. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 24 March 2024

2. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 7 March 2024

3. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 25 March 2024

4. Hermelink, U. (2024). ITC employee engagement survey results of the EES of December 2023 [All-ITC presentation]

5. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 15 March 2024

6. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2020). Review of the coordination of ITC activities at country level. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

7. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2021). 2021 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report: Review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2018-2021. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

8. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2022). 2022 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report: Review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

9. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2022). Evaluation of the ITC SheTrades Initiative. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

10. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2022). Final evaluation of the Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) Phase IV-Export Sector Competitiveness Programme: Final Evaluation Report. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

11. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2022). Midterm evaluation of the ITC MENATEX Programme. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

12. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2023). 2023 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report: Review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025 Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

13. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2023). Colombia PURDE. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

14. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2023). Evaluation of the UKTP Programme. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

15. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2023). Inception Report: Midterm Evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 [Internal Document]. International Trade Centre.

16. Independent Evaluation Unit. (2023). Sustainability review of the ITC programme "Trade Development Strategies": Results and lessons learned after project completion. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/evaluation

17. International Trade Centre. (2021). Draft Strategic Plan 2022-25: Table of Contents and Recommendations of the 8 Working Groups. [Internal Document].

18. International Trade Centre. (2021). Management response and implementation follow-up to the 2021 annual evaluation synthesis report [Internal document].

19. International Trade Centre. (2022). Diversifying trade in times of crisis: Annual Report 2022. Retrieved from https://intracen.org › itc-annual-report

20. International Trade Centre. (2022). ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/about-us/governance/corporate-documents/itc-strategic-plan

21. International Trade Centre. (2022). Operational Plan 2022. Retrieved from https://intracen.org › file › operationalplan2022pdf

22. International Trade Centre. (2022). Remarks at the BMZ Economic Policy Forum. [Speech]. Berlin, Germany. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/itc-executive-director-remarks-at-the-bmz-economic-policy-forum-berlin

23. International Trade Centre. (2022). Remarks at COP27 high-level roundtable on just transition. [Speech]. Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/itc-executive-directors-remarks-on-just-transition-at-cop27

24. International Trade Centre. (2022). Remarks at G20 Trade, Investment, and Industry Ministerial Meeting. [Speech]. Bali, Indonesia. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/itc-executive-directors-remarks-at-the-g20

25. International Trade Centre. (2022). Remarks at the launch of Georgetown University's Center on Inclusive Trade and Development. [Speech]. Washington, D.C., USA. https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/launch-of-georgetown-university-center-on-inclusive-trade-and-development

26. International Trade Centre. (2023). Address to Tsinghua University students. [Speech]. Beijing, China. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/stronger-small-businesses-for-the-un-sdgs

27. International Trade Centre (2023). Minutes of the CCITF Meeting on 2nd June 2023. [Internal Document].

28. International Trade Centre (2023). Minutes of the CCITF Meeting on 17th October 2023. [Internal Document].

29. International Trade Centre. (2023). Opening Remarks of Global Refugee Forum-linked event. [Speech]. Geneva. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/supporting-refugees-through-trade

30. International Trade Centre. (2023). Opening Remarks of Good Trade Summit. [Speech]. New York, USA. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/itc-executive-director-opening-remarks-at-the-2023-good-trade-summit

31. International Trade Centre. (2023). Operational Plan 2023. Retrieved from https://intracen.org › file › operationalplan2023pdf

32. International Trade Centre. (2023). Report to the Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund (1 January – 31 December 2022). Retrieved from https://intracen.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CCITF%20Report%20Jan-Dec%202022_.pdf

33. International Trade Centre. (2023). Report to the Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund (1 January – 30 June 2023). Retrieved from https://intracen.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CCITF%20Report%20Jan-Jun%202023.pdf

34. International Trade Centre. (2023). Resource Mobilization Strategy (RMS) 2022-2025 Version 1.1 [Internal Document].

35. International Trade Centre. (2023). Welcome Remarks at 2023 Intra-African Trade Fair's Diaspora Day. [Speech]. Cairo, Egypt. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/building-an-economic-bridge-between-africa-and-its-diaspora

36. International Trade Centre. (2023). Working Group ITC Operational Efficiency, ITC moving Forward Action Plan.

37. International Trade Centre. (2024). ITC country engagement strategy 2024-2030: The future of impactful country engagement [Internal Document].

38. International Trade Centre. (2024). JAC Meeting Minutes [Internal Document].

39. International Trade Centre. (2024). Launch of the Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement. [Speech]. 68th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68), New York, USA. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/making-public-procurement-work-for-women-entrepreneurs

40. International Trade Centre. (2024). Launch of the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund. [Speech]. Abu Dhabi, UAE. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/wto-itc-launch-global-fund-for-women-exporters-in-the-digital-economy

41. International Trade Centre. (2024). Opening of WTO-ITC High-Level Event on Women and Trade and SheTrades Summit. [Speech]. Abu Dhabi, UAE. Retrieved from https://intracen.org/news-and-events/news/shetrades-summit-celebrates-women-in-international-trade

42. International Trade Centre. (2024). Opening remarks at joint ITC-WRI event on deforestation. [Remarks]. Abu Dhabi, UAE.

43. ITC Executive Director. (2024). Celebrating wins, preparing for the road ahead [Presentation to ALLITC]. Town Hall.

44. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 23 March 2024

45. ITC Staff, Personal communication, 23 September 2021

46. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 25 May 2023

47. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 16 August 2023

48. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 7 March 2024

49. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 8 March 2024

50. ITC Staff, Personal Communication, 26 March 2024

51. United Nations. (2023). United Nations financial report and audited financial statements for the year ended 31 December 2022 and report of the Board of Auditors: Volume III - International Trade Centre. General Assembly Official Records, Seventy-eighth Session, Supplement No. 5.

Annex 4: List of interviewees

List of interviewees during field visit to The Gambia

1. Board Chairman Center Manager, Bakoteh Production Hub, Medina
2. CEO, The Gambia Women Chamber of Commerce
3. BDS Officer, The Women Chamber of Commerce
4. President, Alpha Jallow- Ex. Member, Earth Builders' Association
5. CEO, The Gambia Investment and Export Promotion Agency
6. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration & Employment
7. Director of Employment, Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration & Employment
8. Principal Economist, Ministry of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration & Employment
9. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Tourism and Culture
10. Executive Director, National Youth Council
11. Deputy Executive Director, National Youth Council
12. CEO, The Gambia Chamber of Commerce and Industry
13. Country Representative, UN Residence Coordinator
14. Head of RCO, National Youth Council
15. Country Representative, United Nations Development Programme
16. European Union Delegation (Donor)
17. European Union Delegation (Donor)
18. Country Manager, United Nations Capital Development Fund (UNCDF)
19. CEO and Chairman, Mansakonko Area Council; Governor Lower River Region
20. CEO, Sterling Consortium
21. Administrative Officer, Sterling Consortium
22. Programme Coordinator
23. SheTrades Regional Coordinator and Project Development Consultant
24. Technical Advisor and JSF Coordinator
25. Technical Advisor
26. Communications and Knowledge Management Consultant
27. Project Officer
28. Operations and Admin Assistant

List of ITC staff interviewed

29. Executive Director (ED)
30. Deputy Executive Director (DED)

31. Director of Division of Country Programmes (DCP)

32. Director of Division of Market Development (DMD)

33. Director of Division of Enterprises Competitiveness and Institutions (DECI)

34. Director of Division of Sustainable and Inclusive Trade (DSIT)

35. Chief of Sector and Enterprise Competitiveness

36. Chief of Section of Women Youth and Vulnerable Communities (WYVC)

37. Chief of Sustainable and Inclusive Value Chains

38. Senior Donor Relations and Governance Officer

39. Senior SheTrades Programme Officer

40. Chief of Human Resources

41. Chair of ITC Staff Council.

42. Chief of Strategic Planning, Performance and Governance (SPPG)

43. Senior Planning and Performance Programme Officer

44. Senior Trade Promotion Officer, Steering Mechanism of the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

45. Senior Advisor, Steering Mechanism of the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

46. Chief Export Strategy, Steering Mechanism of the Implementation of the Strategic Plan

47. Head, Independent Evaluation Unit

48. Interim Director of the Division of Programme Support (DPS)

49. Chief of Staff, Office of Executive Director

50. Head, Project Design Task Force

List of the Evaluation Panel Experts interviewed

51. Ambassador, Permanent Mission of The Republic of The Gambia

52. First Secretary, German Permanent Mission.

53. Counselor, Organization of Eastern Caribbean States

54. Chair of the Steering Mechanism of the Strategic Plan, ITC.

55. Programme Officer in Nepal, ITC.

56. Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce, Trade, and Industry, Republic of Zambia


Workshops conducted

57. Division of Country Programmes (DCP)

58. Division of Market Development (DMD)

59. Division of Enterprise Competitiveness and Institutions (DECI)

60. Division of Sustainable and Inclusive Trade (DSIT)

61. Division of Programme Support (DPS)

Evaluation-related synthesis and learning products

A. Operational approaches and recommendations suggested by Project Completion Reports

A Project Completion Report (PCR) is a standardized report prepared by those responsible for the design and the delivery of the project to describe and self-reflect on the performance of an intervention. In 2023, IEU continued offering its support to project teams, through trainings, digital development, and management monitoring. Upon request and as part of its advisory services, the IEU assisted in PCR preparation for quality purposes, and to pave the way for a common understanding of project performance and improvements to be introduced in future interventions.

Number of PCRs completed by Division / Section, 2023
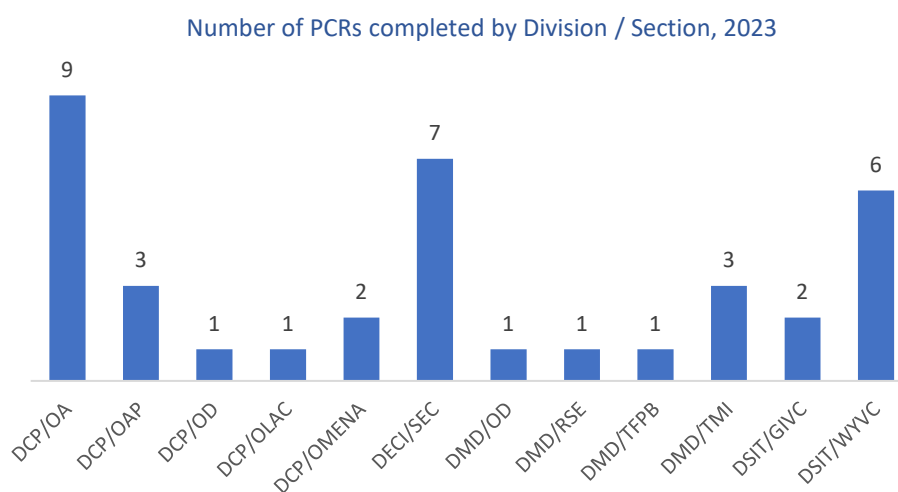
An analysis of Project Managers (PMs) self-reflections in the form of lessons learnt and recommendations was synthesized for all PCRs completed in 2023. Methodology on how the synthesis was conducted can be consulted below. Lessons learnt[5] and recommendations[6] were processed separately given their different nature to better inform managers in future decision making. The quality of the analysis' output is highly dependent on the quality of the data provided by PMs in the PCRs.

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[5] Generalisation or extrapolation of findings and translation of analysis into relevant knowledge that supports decision making, improves performance and promotes the achievement of better results in other settings. A lesson may be positive, neutral or negative. (OECD, 2023. Glossary of Key Terms in Evaluation and Results Based Management for Sustainable Development).

[6] Proposals aimed at enhancing the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact or sustainability of the intervention; at redesigning the objectives; or reallocating resources. Recommendations should be based on findings and conclusions. (Ibid).

Operational approaches suggested through the PCRs

Eight key crosscutting lessons are presented below.

Lessons learnt by theme

For each thematic lesson, a concrete example (a quote) was extracted from the reflection made by one Project Manager. In addition, recommended operational approaches were synthesized from the data provided in the PCRs. Those encapsulate common patterns on how to apply these lessons in future project implementation.

How lessons learnt are presented

- Key crosscutting lesson
    - Example (quote)
    - Operational approach on how to apply the lesson

1. **Adaptability to external factors**: 27 out of 31 projects (87%) emphasized the need for flexibility and adaptability in project implementation to respond effectively to external factors, such as the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, changes in governance, and economic uncertainties. Timely adjustment of implementation strategies was highlighted as crucial in navigating challenges posed by external events.

    Example: "*Covid-19: The pandemic is still affecting production and activity management in all project locations*." - C084.

    How to operationalize the lesson: Develop contingency plans and agile project management frameworks to quickly adjust strategies, timelines, and activities based on changing circumstances.

2. **Expertise and collaboration**: 24 out of 31 projects mentioned the need to ensure access to top-notch expertise and foster collaboration with various agencies and partners for successful project implementation. Projects emphasized the importance of having knowledgeable personnel to guide activities and develop partnerships to leverage synergies.

Example: *"The collaboration between ITC SheTrades and Trade Facilitation Programme for Bangladesh was extremely fruitful. Each team tapped into their respective expertise and networks in gender as well as technical issues.*" - C056.

How to operationalize the lesson: Establish strong partnerships with organizations possessing relevant expertise and networks, facilitating knowledge exchange and resource sharing.

3. **Capacity building and training actions**: In 22 out of 31 projects, capacity building programs, including training-of-trainers initiatives, were recognized as pivotal for maximizing benefits and commitment. Tailoring training programs to specific sectors, maturity levels of companies, and target markets emerged as crucial for relevance and effectiveness.

Example: "*The intensive capacity building programme for the certification of trainers was a successful approach and was replicated to other projects (namely TIFM II) to maximize the benefits and commitment of the future trainers.*" - B951.

How to operationalize the lesson: Design tailored capacity building initiatives aligned with participant needs, leveraging successful approaches, and replicating effective initiatives across projects.

4. **Beneficiary selection and engagement**: Lessons learned from 20 out of 31 projects underscored the importance of effective beneficiary selection procedures, ensuring that selected beneficiaries meet predetermined criteria and form cohesive groups. Engaging participants actively and aligning project activities with their needs and schedules were highlighted to enhance commitment and participation.

Example: "*Beneficiary selection procedures: Consider preliminary selection based on applications, with the final selection only occurring after site visits and diagnostics to ensure that the selected beneficiaries meet the predetermined criteria and form a cohesive group.*" - B937.

How to operationalize the lesson: Use comprehensive criteria for beneficiary selection, including site visits and diagnostics, and employ participatory methods to engage beneficiaries throughout the project lifecycle.

5. **Networking and information sharing**: Building large networks of partner agencies and facilitating information sharing among stakeholders were identified as strategies to foster collaboration, exchange knowledge, and evaluate progress in 18 out of 31 projects. Annual meetings and workshops were recommended to promote dialogue, evaluate outcomes, and make necessary adaptations.

Example: "*Building large networks of partner agencies to build synergies and co-deliver activities.*" - B929.

How to operationalize the lesson: Facilitate regular communication and collaboration among project stakeholders through workshops, meetings, and online platforms, encouraging the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.

6. **Monitoring, evaluation, and continuous improvement**: 15 out of 31 projects underscored the importance of establishing robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability. Lessons highlighted the importance of continuous learning and adaptation to enhance project effectiveness and impact.

Example: "*Regular monitoring of the implementation of due diligence practices and the impact achieved is necessary to assess progress, identify areas for improvement, and ensure accountability.*" - C103.

How to operationalize the lesson: **Develop clear monitoring and evaluation frameworks with defined indicators and milestones, regularly assess project performance, and incorporate feedback mechanisms to facilitate continuous learning and improvement.**

7. <u>Resource allocation and budgeting</u>: Ensuring sufficient budget allocation for project activities, including government contributions where applicable, was highlighted as vital for realizing planned objectives in 14 out of 31 projects. Those emphasized the need for adequate resources to support diverse activities and mitigate logistical challenges.

Example: "*Ensure sufficient budget allocation for the project, considering the possibility of government contributions to realize the planned activities and achieve the project's objectives*." - B937.

How to operationalize the lesson: **Conduct thorough budget planning, considering potential government contributions and allocating resources based on project needs and priorities, with a focus on maximizing efficiency and impact.**

8. <u>Technology and digital skills</u>: 13 out of 31 projects emphasized the importance of technology and digital skills development to empower beneficiaries and enhance their competitiveness. Integrating skills development training with the provision of sustainable technology or digital tools was recognized as pivotal in empowering beneficiaries economically. Enhancing digital literacy and providing practical guidance on e-commerce were also highlighted as crucial for fostering inclusive economic growth.

Example: "*Integrating skills development training with the provision of sustainable equipment has proven to be a pivotal factor in empowering beneficiaries economically*." - C035.

How to operationalize the lesson: **Integrate technology training and digital skills development into project activities, providing hands-on experience and support to enable participants to leverage digital tools and platforms effectively.**

Recommendations suggested through the PCRs

Project Managers self-reflected and reported on **103 recommendations** in the 38 PCRs submitted. 15 PCRs suggested more than 4 recommendations; 15 PCRs indicated between 2 and 4 recommendations; 5 PCRs highlighted one recommendation; and 3 PCRs didn't reported recommendations.

The recommendations can be grouped into **8 main categories** based on the emerging themes related to project coordination and governance; capacity building and collaboration; market access and investment; flexibility and adaptation; stakeholders' engagement and partnerships; training and capacity building; prioritize documentation and evaluation; and optimize logistics and resource allocation. Details on action points and examples are provided below.

1. <u>Project coordination and governance:</u>
   - Establish project coordination mechanisms at senior levels for implementation buy-in.
   - Allocate resources for project communication and coordination efforts.
   - Develop the capacities of national staff for project replication.

Example: "*Create coordination and governance mechanism at the level of senior officials paired with technical working groups or core team to facilitate implementation and buy at all levels*." - B179

2. <u>**Capacity building and collaboration:**</u>

  ▪ Address institutional capacity gaps and foster collaboration among stakeholders.

  ▪ Support public sector institutions in adopting empowerment models.

  ▪ Conduct extensive fieldwork for partner identification and partnership establishment.

  ▪ Enhance dialogue with relevant departments for effective project management.

Example: "*The project should find ways to ensure that regional organisations like the EABC and EAC play a more active role in the implementation of technical activities under the project*." - B383

3. <u>**Issues related to market access and investment:**</u>

  ▪ Connect investment promotion activities to increase visibility and attract investors.

  ▪ Promote investment as a driver for value addition and processing.

  ▪ Sensitize stakeholders on trade facilitation tools and materials.

Example: "*Thoroughly evaluate the company to ensure that it is ready to expand internationally by reviewing the following elements: - expansion capacity, leadership and available team*." - B803

4. <u>**Flexibility and adaptation:**</u>

  ▪ Incorporate flexibility into project implementation to adapt to external constraints.

  ▪ Develop strategies for sustainability and generational replacement due to high participation of aging smallholders.

  ▪ Enhance administrative agility for efficient project performance.

Example: "*Incorporate flexibility into project implementation, by adapting project activities and their delivery modes to partners and beneficiaries' needs and external constraints*." - B599

5. <u>**Stakeholder engagement and partnerships:**</u>

  ▪ Carefully select and nurture relationships with national coordinators and strategic partners.

  ▪ Strengthen partnerships with other UN agencies for resource efficiency and visibility.

  ▪ Strengthen the lead farmer approach and partnerships for market linkages.

Example: "*Through the actions of National Coordinators and Country Managers, ITC must strengthen its relationships with strategic partners, both public and private, that are active and present in the implementation context. In the partnership with other UN agencies lies significant potential for ITC in terms of resource efficiency, implementation quality, and visibility.*" – B727

6. <u>**Training and capacity building:**</u>

  ▪ Increase coaching activities and direct linking of beneficiaries with markets.

  ▪ Establish mentorship and coaching activities for sustained business growth.

  ▪ Extend the duration of training and coaching phases for better outcomes.

Example: "*To increase the coaching activities compared to training activities, considering the differences between the SMEs from both of maturity and sub-product perspectives*." – B821

7. <u>**Prioritize documentation and evaluation:**</u>

- Establish robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms for accountability.

- Conducting comprehensive assessment, tracer studies, and impact analysis helps document project results and utilize data for informed decision-making. This ensures accountability, transparency, and continuous improvement in project management practices.

Example: "*Conduct a comprehensive tracer study or project impact assessment will provide valuable insights for refining and enhancing the project's effectiveness.*" - B179).

8. **Optimize Logistics and Resource Allocation:**

- Streamlining logistical arrangements, improving resource allocation practices, and enhancing administrative efficiency are crucial for smooth project delivery.

- Proactive measures such as develop user-friendly tools for effective due diligence processes, efficient visa procedures, effective budget management, and timely supplier payments can contribute to project success.

Example: "*Thoroughly evaluate the company to ensure that it is ready to expand internationally by reviewing the expansion capacity, leadership and available team.*" - B803.

Methodology

The methodology for this analysis followed a content analysis inductive approach. It started with a data base of pieces of information from the PCRs as an input (step 1), which content was read and cleaned (step 2). This allowed the identification, qualitative grouping and labelling of thematic pieces of data, both manually [*method 1*] and assisted by Artificial Intelligence (AI) [*method 2*]. This step 3 was piloted with 5 PCRs.

Comparison of the outputs produced by both methods (step 4) helped refining the AI-assisted method, as well as rewording the requests to be done to the AI software in producing the final synthesis for all the PCRs (step 5). Added to each thematic grouped PCR recommendations, one example was extracted for illustration purposes (step 6).
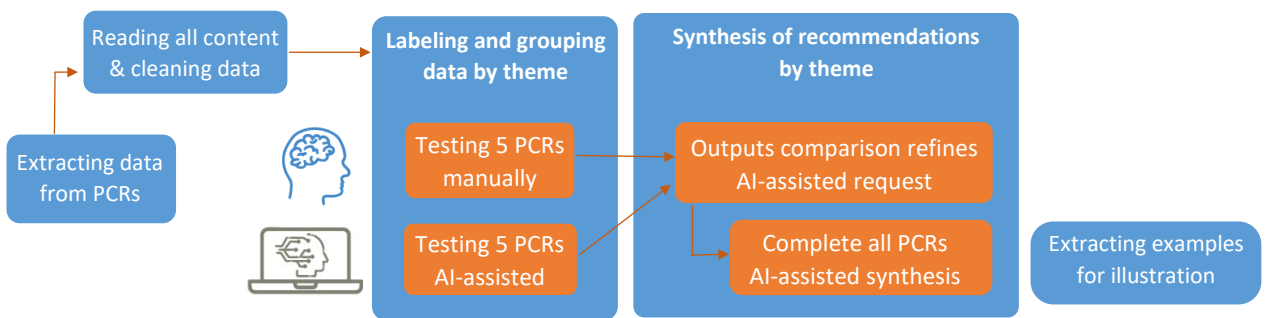
B. Synthesis of Results-Oriented Monitoring Reviews completed in 2023

This analysis synthesizes the Results-Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Reviews of the five ITC projects listed below conducted by the European Union (EU) in 2023. It should be noted that the reviews took place during project or programme implementation at midterm. The assessments have been synthesised and are presented according to the criteria used in the ROMs: 'relevance'; 'coordination, complementarity and EU added value'; 'intervention logic, monitoring, and learning'; 'efficiency'; 'effectiveness'; 'sustainability'; 'cross-cutting dimensions'; and 'communication and visibility'.

ROM Reviews include:

- African, Caribbean, and Pacific - Business-friendly: Supporting value chains through inclusive policies, investment promotion and alliances (ACP-BF) (B807)

- Myanmar: Trade-Related Technical Assistance (ARISE+ Myanmar) (B567)

- Culture project: Identity Building and Sharing Business Initiative (B542)

- Euromed: Providing trade and market intelligence for better informed decisions (TIFM II) (A340)

- Guinée: Programme d'appui à l'integration socio-economique des jeunes (INTEGRA) (B463)

Relevance

The projects, including the ACP-BF programme, ARISE+ Myanmar, Culture Project, TIFM II, and INTEGRA, have all been successful in meeting the needs of their target groups. They have focused on strengthening the private sector, improving regulatory systems, and promoting sustainable practices. These projects have demonstrated adaptability, stakeholder engagement, and alignment with national strategies, showcasing the importance of tailored approaches, stakeholder engagement, and national strategies in driving successful development outcomes. They have also emphasized the importance of fair supply chains and local ownership, a testament to their success.

The reviews have provided valuable insights for improvement, highlighting the need for enhanced coordination, capacity building, and inclusive design processes to optimize impact. While challenges such as overestimating capacities among Investment Promotion Institutions (IPIs), insufficient coordination among implementing agencies, uncertainties regarding government positions, and limitations in beneficiaries' capacity to absorb program benefits have been identified, they also present opportunities for growth and improvement. The Culture Project, TIFM II, and INTEGRA, in particular, have areas where they can enhance their effectiveness and reach.

Coordination, Complementarity and EU Added Value

The EU's involvement in various projects, such as the ACP-BF Programme, ARISE+ Myanmar Project, and Culture Project, is recognized for contributing to global development, capacity-building, and raising awareness about sustainable fashion practices. The projects also ensured effective coordination mechanisms, avoiding duplication of efforts and aligning with other interventions at regional and national levels. The INTEGRA Programme emphasized the EU's role in promoting information exchange and communication among participating agencies.

The ACP-BF Programme acknowledged the importance of collaboration among implementing agencies (IAs) but lacked systematic coordination mechanisms. The ARISE+ Myanmar Project faced challenges in achieving synergies due to limited national mechanisms and a difficult political context. The Culture Project suffered from inadequate complementarities with other EU-funded projects or international donors. TIFM II had effective internal coordination but needed improvement in external collaboration. INTEGRA lacked formalized coordination during implementation, highlighting the need for more structured collaboration efforts.

Intervention Logic, Monitoring, and Learning

The ACP-BF programme adapted to changing circumstances by incorporating lessons learned from past projects like ARISE+ Myanmar and TIFM Phase II. The monitoring system provided sufficient information for tracking activities and outputs. Projects like the Culture Project demonstrated adaptability, making significant adjustments during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. These positive findings highlighted the importance of learning from past experiences, adapting to changing circumstances, and effectively monitoring and reporting progress.

The ACP-BF programme and ARISE+ Myanmar project faced challenges in planning and coordination, with issues such as deficient intervention logics, lack of harmonization between interventions, missing coordination indicators, and limited scope of logframes. Monitoring and evaluation practices were also lacking, with issues like inadequate quality and scope of indicators, insufficient monitoring of outcomes, questionable report validation, and limited monitoring systems. Reporting challenges were also widespread, with issues like excessive reporting, lack of a global view in progress reports, and weaknesses in logframes and reporting templates. The Culture Project also faced problems with reporting templates and logframes not meeting EU standards. Resource and personnel constraints further hindered project effectiveness, with the ACP-BF programme's limited monitoring system resources, insufficient clarity on procedures, tools, and templates, and the absence of a dedicated MEAL professional exacerbating monitoring and evaluation shortcomings.

Efficiency

The reviews found adequate and timely resource availability for the ACP-BF programme and the ARISE+ Myanmar intervention. They also noted the clear implementation mechanisms and sufficient resources for the TIFM Phase II project. Despite challenges, the teams of implementing agencies within the INTEGRA programme were competent in their respective areas, and the suitable internal mechanisms within each implementing partner were conducive to delivering planned outputs. Despite various obstacles, these aspects highlighted an organizational commitment to resource management and operational efficiency within the programs.

The reviews identified systemic issues that hindered project and programme efficiency. The ACP-BF programme faced strategic alignment and limited coordination issues, leading to significant delays in implementation and insufficient financial resource utilization. The ARISE+ Myanmar intervention faced delays due to external factors like COVID-19 and a military coup, resulting in underspending and potentially incomplete activities. Governance issues also affected the Culture Project, with the Steering Committee (SC) failing to provide an effective platform for stakeholders to discuss the crucial problems; disagreements between ITC and implementing partners complicated matters, potentially jeopardizing contracts and business operations. INTEGRA suffered from a lack of structured intervention mechanisms, leading to autonomous interventions instead of coordinated efforts as initially envisioned.

Effectiveness

Despite challenges in reporting against the logframe and achieving outputs within the expected timeframe, several positive findings emerged. The ACP-BF programme showed adequate output delivery and institutional changes influencing partner governments' strategies. The ARISE+ Myanmar project also made significant progress in achieving indicators with good-quality deliverables, benefiting both men and women. The Culture Project had high-quality intervention expertise and outputs, with outcomes likely to be achieved. The INTEGRA programme generally met the expected results, indicating successful employability training initiatives.

The reviews found challenges in meeting output and outcome targets within timeframes, a lack of systematic inclusion of marginalized groups, and issues with regional cooperation. The ACP-BF programme, ARISE+ Myanmar project, and TIFM Phase II project faced challenges. The INTEGRA programme also lacked attention to post-training integration, business development, and financial inclusion. These findings suggested areas for improvement in project planning, implementation, and inclusivity to enhance effectiveness and ensure holistic benefits for all stakeholders involved.

Sustainability

The ACP-BF programme, ARISE+ Myanmar, and TIFM Phase II projects demonstrated promising sustainability prospects. The ACP-BF programme invested in policymaking, legislation drafting, and capacity building, leading to better economic growth and increased resilience. Private sector involvement also enhanced sustainability. ARISE+ Myanmar's stakeholders acquired the necessary capacities for a service flow. Despite challenges like access to finance and political tensions, efforts are being made to address fragility. The INTEGRA training courses positively influenced national employment, education, and vocational training strategies. These findings highlighted ongoing efforts to promote sustainability and positive impacts across various interventions and target countries.

The ACP-BF programme faced challenges in implementing changes, particularly in follow-up and monitoring, which may affect target groups' continued use of outputs. The ARISE+ Myanmar project also faced difficulties in long-term sustainability due to access to finance and technology transfer, political tensions, and lack of comprehensive planning. The Culture Project faced challenges in beneficiaries' ability to use intervention benefits effectively, and the TIFM Phase II project faced uncertainties regarding the sustained provision of updated data and training sessions. The INTEGRA programme may face obstacles in achieving inclusive results, potentially undermining its impact on employment and vocational training strategies. These negative findings highlight the complexities and obstacles in ensuring the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of development interventions.

Cross-cutting

The interventions outlined showed mixed adherence to gender equality and human rights principles, with positive findings in ARISE+ Myanmar and the Culture Project. ARISE+ Myanmar focused on gender equality but overlooked persons with disabilities. The Culture Project integrated gender concerns with human rights, leading to inclusive outcomes. INTEGRA aligned with national action plans and EU gender policies, promoting gender equality through innovative measures like mobile crèches and partnerships with women empowerment programs.

Some of the reviews found significant shortcomings in addressing gender equality, human rights, and environmental concerns. They often lacked explicit targeting and focused on the specific needs of persons with disabilities. The TIFM Phase II intervention overlooked women's representation and

environmental sustainability, while the ACP-BF Action Document highlighted these aspects but failed to integrate them effectively. The findings suggested a need for more comprehensive approaches to address gender disparities, promote human rights, and mitigate environmental impacts.

Communication and Visibility

The reviews highlighted positive communication efforts in various projects, including the ACP-BF joint action plan, ARISE+ Myanmar intervention, Culture Project, and TIFM Phase II project. The ACP-BF joint action plan showed commitment to coordinating communication, while the ARISE+ Myanmar intervention had a well-designed plan and adequate knowledge among beneficiaries. The Culture Project had a positive image and visibility aligned with EU guidelines. The TIFM Phase II project met EU standards but needed improvement in website and social media updates and audience inclusivity.

The ACP-BF joint action plan faced challenges such as inadequate coordination, limited stakeholder knowledge, political risks, and shortcomings in visibility and inclusivity. The ARISE+ Myanmar intervention had a well-designed Communication and Visibility plan, but its implementation was limited due to political risks. The Culture Project generally reflected a positive image of the EU in targeted countries, but there's room for improvement in incorporating the EU logo into relevant events.

C. Brief descriptions of evaluations and reviews completed in 2023

I. Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Midterm Reviews

Culture Project: Identity Building and Sharing Business Initiative

The overall objective of the project was to increase the stock of investment in human and social capital in the creative economies and marginalized segments of the societies of the countries concerned (Côte d'Ivoire, Eritrea, Kenya, Mali, Tajikistan, Uganda, and Uzbekistan), thus ensuring sustainable socio-economic development based on Cultural and Creative Industries (CCIs) and related sectors. The project's two outcomes were that marginalized segments of the concerned societies have access to jobs linked to CCIs and that cultural industries have acquired a greater role in contributing to prosperity, social cohesion and peacebuilding.

The review found the project very relevant for harnessing the power of cultural identity for development, poverty alleviation, and identity building. It addressed issues related to the intersection between the fashion industry and development, focusing on women's rights, disadvantaged communities, youth, the environment, and income generation. The project created a value chain that included women in marginalized communities, local designers, production hubs, and Social Enterprises (SE) using recycled materials and natural dyes. It also created sales and marketing channels and opportunities in up-scale markets for artisans in the USA and Europe. The logframe had shortcomings in formulating results statements and indicators, preventing effective monitoring and accurate assessment of achievements. The monitoring system was not entirely in place, and human resources were not deployed in the target countries. The intervention has employed international and local short-term consultants, but the implementation mechanism is compromised by the diverse and complex geographical reach and limited government partnerships in countries. The quality of outputs and outcomes was good, with new and innovative activities added during implementation. The project adjusted to online tools during the pandemic, enabling outreach to a large audience. The review reported that the expected outcomes are likely to be achieved, and good prospects for sustainability exist. However, challenges remain in the affordability of designers, attending costly fashion events in Europe, and producers investing in machinery to meet environmental requirements. Cross-cutting issues are sufficiently considered, with an adequate focus on gender equality, the environment, and climate change aspects. Recommendations focused on strengthening the logframe, considering better strategic utilization of Steering Committee meetings, resolving delays linked to Lai Momo/Hands of Fashion and the completion of the business-to-consumer sales channel, encouraging the creation of an Alumni for ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) beneficiaries, and proposing effective exit strategies.

ROM Review date: April 2023

Start and end date of the programme: December 2018 – July 2023

Total budget: USD 11,245,717 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Programme d'appui à l'intégration socio-économique des jeunes (INTEGRA) en Guinée

The INTEGRA project is implemented by ITC, GIZ, and ENABEL. The overall objective of the INTEGRA project is to help prevent and limit irregular migration, reintegration of returning migrants and the sustainable socio-professional integration of young Guineans to promote the inclusive economic development of Guinea. The programme's five specific objectives are: jobs are created through labour-intensive work contributing to the implementation of local economic development plans; young people have access to vocational training and preparation for working life, improving their employability; sustainable employment opportunities are created through the development of entrepreneurship and the strengthening of certain promising value chains; a range of financial services tailored to the needs of beneficiaries is disseminated and disseminated and strengthened in the intervention regions; and the target populations in the regions of departure/intervention are informed of the opportunities presented by the action and made aware of the risks of irregular migration.

The evaluation found that the project was very ambitious but adapted to the needs of the final beneficiaries and target groups. There is a quality dialogue with Guinean partners (at the national, regional and local levels) and involvement at all levels by the three agencies. The project considered complementarity at the outset of the projects financed by the EU and other TFPs. However, coordination was not formalized during implementation. The added value of the EU to this project is that it aims to promote the exchange of information, communication/visibility, leadership and credibility between different agencies. The quality of the logical framework of the intervention is quite disparate, with indicators that are more quantitative than qualitative; certain target values are not provided for the GIZ logical framework, and the impact indicators are significantly raised, like insertion. The project has a monitoring system for the GIZ intervention but not for ITC, and ENABEL has removed the post from the organization chart. Implementing agency teams are competent in their areas of expertise; certain important positions were missing in the constitution of the teams, such as M&E for ITC and integration specialist for the three agencies, as well as for ITC and GIZ. The project carried several training courses leading to certification and introduced new approaches. Generally, the expected results are inclusive. The intervention positively influences national employment, education and vocational training strategies and policies. Recommendations include implementing a strategy to involve the private sector to a greater extent in the integration of young people, including migrants; formulating realistic and easily measurable logical frameworks for future projects and providing for the updating of risks in interim and final reports; support the agencies in the process of on the main achievements and approaches developed; putting in place an exit strategy, including capacity building, toolkits and methodologies to enable methodologies used to institutionalize the approaches; and formulating an extension plan as soon as possible for activities that cannot be completed within the allotted timeframe as quickly as possible.

ROM Review date: January 2023

Start and end date of the ITC project: August 2018 – February 2024

Total budget of ITC project: USD 17,000,000 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Myanmar: Trade-Related Technical Assistance (ARISE+ Myanmar)

With the overall objective of inclusive and sustainable trade growth in Myanmar, the ARISE Plus Myanmar project aims to enhance trade diversification and integration, particularly focusing on gender-inclusive market-led value chains. The project's expected outcome is to increase trade diversification and integration regionally and internationally, focusing on gender-inclusive market-led value chains. Following the military coup in February 2021, the intervention revised its scope, suspending work with the Government of Myanmar and narrowing its focus to the private sector.

Despite challenges, the intervention remains relevant and supportive of EU objectives, with appropriate implementation methods and capable partners. However, coordination with other initiatives is limited due to the absence of national mechanisms and few active donors. While the intervention has a robust monitoring and evaluation system, its logic framework needs improvement. Although resources are sufficient, delays may hinder the completion of activities by the end of the implementation period. Despite progress, full delivery of outputs and outcomes is unlikely. Sustainability prospects are promising, but access to finance and political tensions in Myanmar pose challenges. Gender equality is prioritized, but the needs of persons with disabilities are overlooked. While the intervention indirectly contributes to environmental and climate concerns, its communication and visibility efforts are limited due to political risks. Recommendations include revising resources, requesting an extension, incorporating access to finance and technology components, improving the logic framework, and updating the exit strategy.

ROM Review date: June 2023

Start and end date of the project: June 2019 – May 2024

Total budget: USD 8,841,680 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Euromed: Providing trade and market intelligence for better-informed decisions (TIFM 2)

The project, which expands on the Euromed Trade Helpdesk (ETH) phase I, aims to contribute to the overall objective of the 'Inclusive Economic Development and Job Creation in the Neighbourhood South" by providing SMEs improved access to information on market access, investment and export trade potential as well as enhancing their understanding of the regulatory and procedural obstacles to trade in goods and services. The specific objectives are to facilitate closer economic ties between the EU and South Mediterranean countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Tunisia, as well as in Libya and Turkey) and enhance regional economic integration between these countries; and improve trade and investment transparency by providing free access to information for economic operators and policymakers to a state-of-the-art online portal to facilitate trade in goods and services and investment. TIFM II better addresses the needs than TIFM I, which focuses on trade in goods, for which data collection is already performing well in some countries (e.g. Morocco). TIFM II added a component to data collection in trade-in services, for which all beneficiary countries face difficulties. Additionally, TIFM II's capacity-building component answers a need that was clearly expressed by the intervention's beneficiaries at the end of TIFM I.

The review found that the project's relevance seems proportional to the share of export-ready SMEs in the beneficiary countries: low in Palestine, medium in Jordan and Algeria and high in Morocco. In other words, vulnerable countries and target groups benefit less from the action. The project benefits from EU-added value and is well-coordinated with regional components. However,

collaboration with external stakeholders could be improved at regional and national levels. The project considers lessons learned from past actions, and the intervention logic is coherent overall. However, how outputs and activities were aggregated is confusing, and the indicators do not properly measure progress. The implementation mechanisms in place are clear, and the resources provided by the ITC and local stakeholders are adequate. Despite the delay in project implementation, physical and financial implementation rates keep pace, disbursement is timely, and spending is in line with the budget. Various factors hinder project effectiveness: there are no qualitative indicators to measure the quality of outputs, but the overall quality of outputs is good based on internationally acknowledged ITC standards; the uneven progress of the project implementation puts at risk the achievement of outcomes; the ETH is a relevant tool only if at least a majority of countries' data is uploaded on the platform. The intervention excludes an overwhelming majority of SMEs, which is a limited privileged target group. There is no specific measure to reach out to potentially marginalized or isolated beneficiaries. Women are well represented in the activities so far, notably under Output 3 in Algeria, Morocco, and Palestine. The sustainability plan foresees that the ITC is responsible for updating the ETH if the countries provide annual data. However, there is no strategy to sustain the certified training sessions after the project completion, which depends on the trainers' capacity and willingness to find funding. Overall, the communication actions implemented meet the standards required in the latest EU guidelines, but the visibility of the project and the ETH could be improved. DG NEAR is recommended to intervene at a high level to resolve the situation in Egypt, negotiate with Algeria and Israel, and guide synergies. The ITC should speed up private sector inclusion, update the logframe, share the monitoring tool with partners, establish a regional dimension with cross-country activities, strengthen the sustainability plan, and adopt a more inclusive approach towards marginalized groups.

ROM Review date: July 2023

Start and end date of the project: September 2020 – August 2024

Total budget: USD 2,900,000 funded by EU DG-NEAR

ACP Business-friendly: Supporting value chains through inclusive policies, investment promotion and alliances

The ACP (Africa, Caribbean, Pacific) Business-friendly (BF) programme is jointly implemented at three levels: macro for policy level (implemented by the WB), meso for investment promotion (implemented by UNIDO) and micro for agriculture value chains (implemented by ITC). The programme follows a three-tiered approach with macro (WB), meso (UNIDO) and micro-level (ITC) interventions implemented independently but in close collaboration. This approach sought to leverage value chains to improve the ability of firms in ACP countries to compete, grow and prosper in domestic, regional, and international markets, ultimately generating inclusive and sustainable jobs and economic growth. The micropillar level of the programme, implemented by ITC, focuses on VC governance and investment strengthened through inclusive productive and commercial alliances and increased competitiveness of small farmers and MSMEs value addition.

The evaluation provided a consolidated analysis of the programme's performance. The programme addresses key challenges for private sector development in ACP countries, such as the need for relevant policies, concretizing investment projects, developing Quality Infrastructure, and recognizing agricultural value chains. Although the Implementing Agencies (IAs) are adequate, there are instances of overlapping actions, as targeted institutions show interest but variable ownership

levels. The three Interventions have progressed, but coordination mechanisms are not systematically present. The coordination among IAs and development partners is insufficient at the country level, and synergies have not been fully explored. The EU's added value is important but not well consolidated. The political role of the EU with ACP governments has not been played in a joint advocacy manner, highlighting missed opportunities.

The action aims to improve the quality of interventions, but there is a misalignment between the intervention logic and the interventions. The action logframe is not used effectively as a monitoring tool, and indicators are insufficient for measuring the full achievement of the action. The monitoring system provides enough information to monitor activities and outputs, not outcomes and short-term effects. Unnecessary reporting negatively impacts field operations, and results-oriented reporting is limited. The action steering committee meetings do not focus enough on strategic lines, lessons learned, and capitalization. The country-level coordination is limited, and while sufficient resources have been foreseen and made available, significant delays may hinder the full implementation of the scope and the full utilization of financial resources by the end of the implementation period.

The delivery of Outputs is not fast enough to achieve outcomes on time despite their quality and accessibility to target groups. The action influences ACP partner governments' strategies but has not generated a cascading effect at regional and ACP group levels. Global exchanges between government bodies and organizations are not facilitated enough to maximize benefits. The sustainability prospects of interventions vary across countries and are influenced by country teams' follow-up. The IAs' methodology may be more suitable for receptive contexts. Positive prospects for action projects with larger programs and significant private sector involvement are seen. Further support may be needed, but no exit/sustainability strategy has been developed. The ACP-BF aims for gender equality, environmental aid, and climate change mitigation. Still, these objectives have not been fully achieved due to insufficient analysis, specific actions, and insufficient transparency and information access. The EU's requirements are generally met in terms of communications and visibility. Still, actions are insufficient to promote the action's work effectively, and while the objectives and work of the IAs are well-recognized, their knowledge of the EU role is limited.

The recommendations to the EU, OACPS, and IAs include drafting an exit strategy and funding the continuation of the action; steering the coordination and structuring of IAs' joint work; revising the logframes; reinforcing monitoring; focusing on achieving the Outcomes; speeding up activities; enhancing communications; ensuring the continuous relevance of the action; integrating the gender dimension; and emphasizing the environment and climate change.

ROM Ad hoc report date: December 2023

Start and end date of the project: June 2019 – December 2024

Total budget of ITC project: USD 17,232,867 funded by EU DG-INTPA

II.   Independent evaluation

Evaluation of the United Kingdom Trade Partnership (UKTP) Programme

The United Kingdom Trade Partnership (UKTP) Programme is an initiative funded by the United Kingdom's (UK) Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) designed to support African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in taking advantage of the duty-free quota-free access to the European Union (EU) and UK markets that they enjoy under the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). The programme was designed to support ACP countries (Cameroon, Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, Dominican Republic, Fiji, Ghana, Jamaica, Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, and Zimbabwe) to effectively implement and maximize the benefits of the EPAs, promoting trade under the existing EU EPAs and the subsequent EPAs with the UK. The programme's expected main outcome is to increase trade between ACP countries and the UK/EU. UKTP has five key outputs, namely: (i) increased awareness of EPA preferences and benefits; (ii) creating a more transparent business environment for exports; (iii) improving institutional/business services to support market access; (iv) increasing the capacity of firms to export to the UK/EU market; and (v) connecting firms to buyers in EU and UK markets.

The evaluation found the UKTP Programme to be highly relevant to the needs of ACP countries and its beneficiaries, the implementing partners, and the client. It demonstrated good external and internal coherence. The programme was effective in achieving its targets for the expected results. Despite M&E being deprioritized by FCDO due to budget cuts, the M&E system generally provided sufficient information to support adaptive management. The programme had a significant impact; it exceeded its objective by boosting exports to EU and UK markets, achieving USD 80 million worth of additional trade, compared to the objective of USD 20 million. It also facilitated USD 29.4 million worth of indirect trade, surpassing its objective of USD 25 million. While UKTP did not reach its goal of having 100 companies (with 35 women-owned) doing business with the UK/EU, it did facilitate sales to these markets for 50 companies, including 18 women-owned businesses. The Programme contributed to job creation, maintenance, and improvement with 14,128 jobs (9,176 benefiting women), exceeding the objective of creating 3,500 jobs. The evaluation suggests improvements in measuring job and trade impacts and data collection and methodology challenges. The programme's benefits are likely to be sustained but could have been enhanced with better exit strategies. The evaluation provided four recommendations for future UKTP programmes and one for improving collaboration and coherence with the UK Missions.

Evaluation date: December 2023

Start and end date of the programme: 2018 and 2024

Total budget: USD approximately USD 15,500,000 (£17 million) funded by FCDO

III.   Funder-led evaluation

Final Evaluation of EU-Bhutan local Governance and Trade programmes

The evaluation covered the two main interventions of the programme: Capacity Development for Local Government and Fiscal Decentralization (CDLG&FD) (EUR 23.3 M) and Technical Assistance for Renewable Natural Resources and Climate Change Response and Local Governments and Decentralization BHUTAN (EUR 900 K); and the EU-Bhutan Trade Support (EUR 4 M) (implemented by ITC). The CDLG&FD component had the specific objective of strengthening the capacity of Local Governments (LGs) to provide better services in an accountable and efficient manner. The action directly supported the Local Government Sustainable Development Programme (LGSDP) as an integral part of Bhutan's five-year plan. The ITC EU-Bhutan Trade Support project aimed to boost Bhutan's economic growth and poverty reduction by increasing exports and diversification. It focused on two value chains, horticulture and textile handicrafts, and addressed cross-cutting trade policy issues. The project aimed to enhance capacity in trade and investment policy formulation and implementation, improve the environment for exports of high-value horticulture products, including organic ones, and enhance the environment for exports of high-value handicraft textile products.

The evaluation found that the ITC Trade Support project was aligned with Bhutan's development priorities, government policies, and private-sector export diversification while ensuring demand-driven project design. It was successful, involving an excellent team, high-quality experts, smooth coordination, active participation, and a flexible approach. It strengthened capacities, contributed to export diversification, and built confidence for private sector businesses, especially MSMEs and women entrepreneurs. It implemented sustainable initiatives, such as the Bhutan Trade Information Portal and the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS) but required more technical and financial support for MSMEs and women entrepreneurs. Institutional capacities were strengthened and positively impacted gender equality and the environment. The project contributed to the EU's trade-related assistance in Bhutan, demonstrating the high-added value of EU initiatives. ITC implemented unique trade preferential schemes, such as Everything But Arms (EBA), which can be negotiated with the EU after LDC graduation. The ITC project prepared a detailed communication strategy and promotional activities to increase EU visibility and impact stories for Bhutanese stakeholders. The evaluation provided four recommendations related to the ITC project addressed to the Royal Government of Bhutan, the EU, ITC, and other international organizations to feed into the implementation of the next Budget Support Programmes, particularly in good governance (support to local governments) and trade-related assistance.

Evaluation date: November 2023

Start and end date of the ITC project component: May 2018 – September 2022

Total budget of ITC project: USD 5,014,700 (USD 4,959,200 - EU DG-INTPA and USD 55,500 - Ministry of Economic Affairs (MoEA) of Bhutan

IV. Sustainability review

Synthesis Note: Sustainability Reviews of ITC Projects (2021–2023)

This synthesis note covered lessons learned from five sustainability reviews from 2021 to 2023. To address the gap of sustainability assessments for project and programme results some years after the projects have ended, the IEU developed Sustainability Reviews to understand: What has been the sustainability of the project's results, i.e., outcomes and impact, and their contribution to organizational and systems capacity for trade? Key lessons and recommendations from these reviews are:

1. Understanding of Country-Specific Contextual Variables: Sustainability has often been viewed by donors as the expectation of post-project financing. This view is still prevalent among in-country stakeholders, who generally expect a second phase of the project based on external financing. Key contextual variables such as administrative culture and managerial capacity should be considered during the project design stage to sustain results.
   Recommendation: Improve understanding of country-specific variables beyond specific value chains through systematic involvement of intended beneficiaries, project implementers, and key stakeholders at the design stage, including project management and performance monitoring aspects.

2. Capacity Building vs. Developing Skills and Capabilities: Central to sustainability is the autonomy of key actors, meaning that capabilities, organizational capacity, and institutional enablers should be developed to navigate unanticipated changes without external support. Flexibility in project management should be reflected in the performance monitoring and reporting expectations of donors.
   Recommendation: Focus on capacity building beyond developing skills and capabilities by systematically considering a country's capacity in terms of performance of its public administration, public expenditure and financial accountability, political economy, vulnerability to climate change, human rights, women's rights, and fragility.

3. Sustainability from the Design Stage and Exit Strategies: Sustainability considerations should be an integral part of the project design. It is important to use a rigorous definitional and analytical lens for the integration of sustainability into the project.
   Recommendation: More effectively coordinate internal activities relative to trade development strategy to reinforce the value and sustainability of projects and programs over time, including systematic consideration of the effects of climate change and ecosystem breakdown. Project documents should include these considerations from the design and planning stages, including in exit strategies.

4. Monitor and Assess Sustainability Including Eco-Systemic Variables: Post-project monitoring was not systematically planned and carried out, missing opportunities to learn about sustainability issues and support post-project sustainability. The review highlights the urgent need to recognize and integrate the reality of climate change and ecosystem breakdown into strategic considerations.
   Recommendation: Monitor and assess sustainability, including attention to environmental and climate change issues, using a data-supported systems view as a critical frame of reference. Project monitoring should go beyond the measurement and reporting of intended results using predetermined indicators and targets to support adaptive management, management autonomy, value creation, and post-project sustainability.

Synthesis Note date: December 2023

D. Follow up on the implementation of previous AESR recommendations

(As of May 2024)

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan defined in the Management Response**	**2024 Reporting**
1. Bring green transition to the forefront When putting into practice the Strategic Plan 2022-25, pay particular attention to ensure that environmental mainstreaming is considered more consistently in each ITC project, and that environmental objectives are expressed explicitly in a larger number of projects.	**1.2.** A climate proofing methodology for large ITC projects is developed, piloted and supported by an online training course. A GIVC focal point will assist developers of large projects to apply the methodology in collaboration with the Project Design Taskforce.	**Status: Implemented** In 2023, ITC focused on enhancing environmental sustainability by defining climate action, developing measurement methodologies, and compiling results, reviewing the project portfolio to ensure accurate assignment of green development marker levels and providing recommendations, and engaging staff through the Green Working Group and bilateral consultations. These efforts ensured sustainability was integrated into major projects like the Sustainable Connectivity ASEAN. ITC implemented initiatives including staff engagement, capacity-building sessions, and the deployment of the Green Performance Toolkit with MSMEs. Key actions **for 2024** include updating the environmental mainstreaming guide, conducting additional capacity-building sessions, improving monitoring tools, and deepening mainstreaming efforts across all TRTA projects.
2. Make projects even more responsive to beneficiaries' needs through an enhanced in-house toolbox To increase the adaptability and operational simplicity of ITC needs assessment tools, and their use as project baselines, undertake a conscious and planned effort to further developing the in-house toolbox available. Also provide corporate guidance on how to conduct specific needs assessments for project design, and general needs assessments on trade and MSMEs.	**2.1** Develop a compendium of needs assessment tools, based on a joint template for the description of the tool and inputs from ITC's technical and country programme divisions.	**Status: Implemented** Throughout 2023, the project management guidelines were updated, and the new site was launched in Q1 2024. A beta-version of the products & services database, including needs assessment tools was launched, after integrating the data collection on products and services into the ITC Survey Tool, and following a first round of clean-up of entries. The database currently contains 174 entries from all ITC's divisions. The database will be developed further, based on internal user feedback.
	2.2 Determine gaps and inconsistencies, and solutions	**Status: Implemented** In ITC's Products and Services Database, there are currently 18 needs assessments tools/methodologies listed (e.g. strategy roadmap methodology, CUBED assessment methodology for business support organizations, BSO ecosystem mapping methodology, Gender mainstreaming methodology, ITC Benchmarking for Trade (for BSOs and MSMEs) among others. The development of conflict assessment guidelines and the REMI conflict-sensitive intervention framework closed a gap in this space.

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2024 Reporting**
4. Continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools Make the RBM tools of ITC projects more robust and consistent e.g., by offering more generic tools that can be adapted to the needs of a particular project. The overall aim should be to provide project managers with the means to select and apply an appropriate RBM approach, suited to the size, intervention area, and other characteristics of their particular project, while ensuring that projects follow a common set of client-focused and purpose-driven RBM principles. This should ensure that RBM is used as a management tool for steering, including continuous adjustment, of projects, and would be particularly important for complex projects.	**4.3** For large projects (>$1m) that are often more complex as they have various interlinked project components, introduce minimum requirements for the definition of project's theories of change, and related data collection, monitoring and results assessment plans and responsibilities that must be established during projects' inception phases.	**Status: Implemented** As part of the updated Project Management Guidelines, a list of best practices for the roll-out of inception phases for large projects (with a related checklist) and for project monitoring was developed. These include templates for projects, that are aligned with the DCED standards control points, closely mirroring the recommendations of the IEU reviews for monitoring system development (especially for large projects). Regarding tools for data collection, both for baselines and project monitoring, under the Data management Initiative, the ITC Survey tool was fine-tuned, complemented with ITC Outreach (a tool for communicating with stakeholders through newsletters); ITC Events (a tool to manage and monitor 'events' - including trainings and other capacity building measures) and most recently with the ITC Beneficiaries database.
	4.4 Provide guidance and templates for project monitoring and reporting in large projects (> $1m).	**Status: Implemented** See under 4.3 above

AESR 2021		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2024 Reporting**
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.	**3.1:** • Steering mechanism established, in form of a group at the mid-management level (MAG or selected Division representatives at Chief level). • Annual review of the implementation plan and implementation by the Steering group, with a documentation of the lessons learned that will be shared with Senior Management and included in the annual CCITF reports.	**Status: Ongoing** The Steering Mechanism is operational, and in 2023-4 its activities have mainly focused on contributing to the process of the Midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. The incorporation in the CCITF report, of collective feedback from across the organization through the steering mechanism will take place based on the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the final report of the Midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. (Q4 2024)
(b) Undertake an independent midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.	**3.2:** • Midterm review of the ITC Strategic Plan priorities and implementation as per Implementation Plan, by IEU with a panel of experts • Adjustments in the Implementation Plan, by SMC, if required.	**Status: Implemented** The Midterm review of the ITC Strategic Plan was finalized and shared through the 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report.

AESR 2020		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2024 Reporting**
2: Enhance the capacity to utilize theories of change: (a) Develop the ITC Results Framework into a more detailed Theory of Change for the next ITC Strategic Plan and, (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.	**2.2:** Enhance Project Managers' capacity to develop project-level theories of change and use them for monitoring and management.	**Status: Ongoing** Through ITC's project design taskforce, guidance on projects' logical framework, results chain and theory of change is provided for the distinct stages of the project development process. This complements support available in the updated Project Management Guidelines. In 2024 further trainings on ToC and related progress and results monitoring are planned.
4: Enhancing project results sustainability: (a) Identify in the project cycle, the potential for replication and scaling-up of the project, and (b) Ensure the development and regular updating of exit strategies during project cycle, and their implementation.	**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.	**Status: Implemented** An update of the risk register in the project portal was done in the new Project Management Guidelines, following the promulgation of ITC's updated ERM Policy and Framework (March 2024). Furthermore, a cross-sectional risk working group was established, who started reviewing project-level guidance and will advise on expansion and modification of risk guidance. The recently launched project management guidelines provide a checklist and best practices for project managers in relation to large projects' inception phases. The purpose of a large project inception phase is to validate and deepen the evidence-based foundation for the project, grow the counterparts' and beneficiaries' project ownership, and elaborate theory of change and the M&E plan in more detail. Ultimately, it is focused on ensuring the projects' success, including its results sustainability.
	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 learned.	**Status: Ongoing** IEU will present the AESR at the JAG meeting: It will also use a MAG meeting to present the observations IEU has made on PCRs and Sustainability Reviews to get feedback and discuss lessons learnt with the MAG members (foreseen in Q4 2024)

AESR 2020		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2024 Reporting**
6: Implement corporate strategy to engage in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks: (a) Finalize and adopt a corporate strategy to engage more systematically in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and (b) Enforce this strategy, including training requirements for ITC Country Officers about how and why to engage in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.	**6.2:** Roll-out of the ITC UNSDCF Engagement Strategy	**Status: Implemented** ITC's Country engagement strategy, including engagement with the UN Country teams and UNSCDF was finalized.

E. Follow up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations

Implementation Status of Past Recommendations as of 31 March 2024

Since 2013, the IEU has followed up on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations, in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards[7], and ITC Evaluation Guidelines[8]. 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 2024, the IEU followed up on 40 recommendations resulting from the following six independent evaluations conducted by the IEU:

- Evaluation of the ITC Participation and Performance in the UN Delivering as One (DaO) System (2019);
- Evaluation of the ITC's Performance in Trade and Market Information (TMI) (2021);
- Final Evaluation of the Netherlands Trust fund Phase IV – Export Sector Competitiveness Programme (NTF IV) (2022);
- Midterm Evaluation of the ITC MENATEX Programme (2022);
- Evaluation of the ITC SheTrades Initiative (2023); and
- Evaluation of the ITC United Kingdom Trade Partnership (UKTP) Programme (2023).

Overview of implementation status as of March 2024

Evaluations	Recommendations			Implementation Status			
	Total	Accepted	Partially Accepted	Not Started	Ongoing	Partially Implemented	Implemented
DaO 2019	6	5	1	1	--	--	5
TMI 2021	9	9	--	--	2	--	7
NTF IV 2022	8	8	--	--	2	1	5
MENATEX 2022	7	6	1	--	2	--	5
SheTrades 2023	5	5	--	--	3	--	2
UKTP 2023	5	5	--	--	4	--	1
Total	**40**	**38**	**2**	**1**	**13**	**1**	**25**

Of the 40 recommendations, 38 were accepted, and two were partially accepted. In terms of implementation, all but one had been started, and 13 were ongoing. One recommendation was partially implemented, and 25 were fully implemented. Further details for each evaluation have been elaborated based on management feedback to the IEU and are provided below.

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[7] 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.
[8] International Trade Centre (2018). *ITC Evaluation Guidelines, Second Edition*. Geneva: ITC, p. 46

DaO

Implemented: ITC, an official signatory of the UNSDCFs for more than 40 countries, actively participates in the UN Common Country Analysis (CCA), providing technical support and advice upon request. ITC has continued to engage with other UN agencies to collaborate more systemically and strategize for Delivering as One. It also remains active in the Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, working closely with UNCTAD and other group members.

A working group on the Country Engagement Strategy was set up with representatives from all ITC Divisions to ensure the participation and buy-in of all key stakeholders across the organization in the process of developing the document. An updated version of the draft Country Engagement Strategy was presented to Senior Management and approved during a retreat in March 2024.

ITC has also expanded its strategic partnerships with other UN agencies, including an MOU signed in October 2022 between ITC and UNCDF to facilitate and strengthen collaboration in areas of common interest, particularly developing an integrated offer for small businesses in LDCs. ITC's senior management will continue high-level engagement with Resident Coordinators (RCs) through regular email communications and meetings with them during missions. DCP has also drafted a business case for a potential in-country office.

The Country Intelligence Portal has been developed to provide country-related information and serve as an effective monitoring system within ITC.

Not started: ITC will include the required roles and responsibilities related to engagement in the UNSDCF in the job descriptions of relevant staff (existing and new).

TMI

Implemented: The TMI team has prepared a revised version of the market analysis tools (MAT) and strategy. It is committed to improving the tools' effectiveness and impact by refining its strategic approach and intervention logic. The team's participation in the Partnerships for Purpose working group underscores its dedication to enhancing collaboration and outreach efforts. By actively contributing to the organization's strategy for promoting partnerships, the team aligns its initiatives with broader organizational objectives and leverages external resources to enhance the tools' effectiveness.

New user statistics and survey solutions have been piloted, exemplified by the introduction of BigQuery and Conjoint Analysis for the GTH platform, leveraging technologies to enhance data collection and analysis capabilities. Implementing MAT Single Sign-On (SSO) in 2020 represents a significant milestone in streamlining user registration and aligning it with corporate standards. This initiative simplifies the registration process for users and ensures the authenticity and compliance of user accounts, laying a foundation for accurate performance assessment. TMI initiated an outreach campaign targeting inactive users. By prompting users to confirm their accounts or face deletion annually until achieving a feedback rate above 5%, the section aims to enhance the accuracy of information by focusing on actively engaged users and eliminating redundant accounts.

The updated "ITC Export Potential Methodology" is now available on the ITC website, and senior management has been presented with a presentation on global public goods (GPG).

A mapping exercise was carried out in the context of developing the new website, which now features Trade Statistics for ITC's core sectors and countries of intervention. This allows users to understand aggregate trade and market access trends and point to further reading materials and activities in these areas.

Ongoing: A plan to increase the tools' outreach was presented and approved by SMC as part of the Global Public Goods phase II project, co-funded by ITC and EU. The project (2023-2028) also encompasses the redesign of the Trade Map and maintaining the Market Access Map and Export Potential Map. TMI continues seeking additional funding for other market analysis tools (e.g. Investment Map, Procurement Map, etc.). The section has prepared an inventory of the current partnerships with third parties, and the main highlights are published in ITC annual reports.

NTF IV

Implemented: The NTF V projects underwent thorough research and consultation to assess needs and priorities, ensuring relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. These needs and priorities were documented in project plans and validated by SPPG. The Steering Group continues to review the relevance of interventions quarterly and every half-year at the project level. However, due to the programme set timeframe, NTF V did not fully implement the recommendation to consider a longer programme lifecycle of five or six years.

NTF V has been integrated into ITC's Digital Moonshot and has collaborated with other ITC teams, such as the Institutions and Ecosystems team, SheTrades, and the Digital Moonshot. Building partnerships is a core aspect of the implementation approach, with partnerships with Dutch NGO BOPINC, Smart Africa, and I4Policy. A Theory of Change was established in the Programme Document, and a Programme-level Results Chain was designed to complement ITC Projects Portal entries. Programme implementation is documented quarterly, and risk management is updated on the Portal.

Partially Implemented: One recommendation was to consider a longer programme lifecycle of five or even six years for future NTF programme iterations to allow for a full participatory design phase before programme activities began. The recommendation was accepted, although the NTF V programme could not fully implement it since it had already been approved (July 2021) before the recommendations were issued (April 2022). The NTF V duration and the related inception phase were already set in July 2021; thus, the recommendation could not be fully implemented. Nevertheless, NTF V included a six-month inception phase, with in-depth needs assessments across the four levels of intervention: policy, BSOs, MSMEs, and Market partners. The inception phase was followed by baseline data collection, which allowed NTF V to collect additional information on specific support needs. This is documented in the project plans and validated by SPPG. In addition, the Steering Group reviews the interventions' relevance quarterly and every half year at the project level by the Project Steering Committees.

Ongoing: RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme management are in place, and baseline data is adjusted through a change control process. A midterm evaluation of the NTF V programme was initiated in Q3 2023; an evaluation service provider was contracted in January 2024. It is expected that the midterm evaluation will be completed by mid-July 2024. Defined exit strategies will be developed following the midterm evaluation.

MENATEX

Implemented: Building on the development of a brochure and PowerPoint presentations that explain how the ITC's Fibres, Textiles and Clothing (FTC) Unit contributes to the SDGs, presentations were made to the donors (Sida and SECO) and stakeholders during the Global and Regional Steering Committee meetings. One comprehensive programme document was developed for phase II and approved by ITC and both donors. It includes a new theory of change, with details on how the programme contributes to gender and poverty reduction and mitigates climate change. Both donors signed the same document, avoiding differences in documentation and approaches or

misunderstandings. It includes details on other development partners' activities and how the programme complements and synergizes. In addition, round tables with other development partners were organized in all project countries.

The programme has strengthened its communication with stakeholders, which has resulted in a substantial increase in the use of the Global Textile Academy. Many companies have responded to the calls for Expressions of Interest to participate in Phase II. New presentation material was developed, such as the SDG brochure, the results flyer, and the film, among others.

Standard operating procedures for the M&E function were also developed, which will be used for Phase I and II final reporting. In collaboration with SPPG, the data-capturing tool was fine-tuned and aligned with overall ITC corporate requirements. A standard repository of activity evaluation forms was elaborated and is being used. All country-specific exit strategies have been developed, and a document explaining the MENATEX contribution to SDGs has been developed.

Ongoing: Work continues to include an adaptive mechanism to better target and integrate the needs of beneficiaries, including how these evolve in the design, planning, and implementation of activities. A new format for PSC meetings was introduced that focuses on strategic issues and synergies rather than operational discussions. The programme's annual report and the presentation of results are now distributed to members three weeks before the meeting. This has encouraged in-depth discussions on strategic aspects and necessary adjustments, allowing for a more substantive exploration of these critical aspects instead of operational aspects of the project. Technical meetings have also been set up to take place after the inception phase of Phase II ends once beneficiaries have been selected. The reassessment will be done during the inception phase, which is still ongoing, as well as at the beginning of the implementation of Phase II.

SheTrades

Implemented: The SheTrades Initiative developed a strategy to support young women entrepreneurs, as well as a methodology and toolkit for informal cross-border traders (ICBTs), expanding its target group to include those previously underrepresented. It has set up an M&E learning system to track qualitative outcomes, which is being rolled out across various SheTrades projects targeting different sectors and types of beneficiaries. It has cancelled its flagship event and has changed its approach to leveraging participation in other existing high-level events to reduce resources needed from the SheTrades team.

ITC has fully implemented the new governance structure of the SheTrades Hubs with a dedicated team. The team has strengthened cooperation frameworks (MoU revised and updated), delivered services of clear benefit to the Hubs (one trade fair and three capacity-building activities), and implemented a robust M&E framework and comms strategy. Moreover, ITC has facilitated online and face-to-face peer review activities, which provided the Hubs with opportunities to connect and learn from each other.

Ongoing: The new version of SheTrades.com was launched in 2023, and outreach scale-up will be carried out during 2024. The toolkit was finalized and presented to ITC staff on 7 December 2023, and portal development will be completed in 2024.

Staff needs were reviewed to align with SheTrades' expected workload and mandate, including as an institutional knowledge hub for advancing gender mainstreaming in ITC programmes. Staffing issues have been addressed; however, more resources are needed for training to strengthen gender expertise.

UKTP

Implemented: As recommended, UKTP regularly discusses this with UK Missions, regional trade advisers, and the Trade for Development Unit. This has led to increased demand by UK Missions (Uganda, Zimbabwe, Pakistan) for additional proposals funded by the UK Missions.

Ongoing: In February 2024, the SEC Section Chief and the Programme Officer (UKTP) visited the donor (FCDO) in London and advocated for a more robust central coordination function. Strengthening the M&E function was on the agenda, which ITC presented. FCDO acknowledged that the FCDO Trade Centre of Expertise concept would include strong KPIs and M&E (not managed by UKTP-ITC). FCDO plans for the future Trade Centre of Expertise to include an independent M&E and research function. Also discussed with FCDO was the issue of incorporating work on the national quality infrastructure. FCDO organized a joint discussion with the responsible officers for the Standards Initiative, where it was agreed that UKTP had a role to play in promoting the national quality infrastructure in Francophone Africa and that knowledge sharing could be organized with the British Standards Institute/Standards Initiative. FCDO is designing the concept for the UK Trade Centre of Expertise, which was not initiated before FY25-26. It is unclear at this stage whether UKTP's role in this initiative would include trade facilitation.

The programme produces annual delivery plans for 2024-2025, including activities to be fulfilled during the financial year. These plans are going through a streamlined approval process with the FCDO Trade for Development Unit, Regional Trade Advisers and Embassies to ensure buy-in and channel programmatic guidance. UKTP has placed more emphasis on systemic activities that can create lasting impact while retaining company work that will provide more immediate results. The programme is currently working on delivery plans for 2024-2025 with a view to renewal for 2025-2026. FCDO sent an amendment to ITC extending UKTP until March 2026.