

Annual Report 2024

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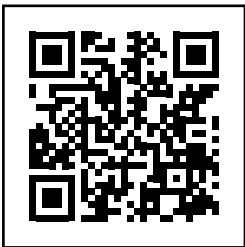
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Acronyms

Unless otherwise specified, all references to dollars (\$) are to United States dollars. Some figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

ACTIF	AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum
ADB	Asian Development Bank
AESR	Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report
AfCFTA	African Continental Free Trade Area
AI	artificial intelligence
AUC	African Union Commission
BSO	business support organization
CARICOM	Caribbean Community
CIIE	China International Import Expo
COP	Conference of the Parties
D&I	diversity and inclusion
EAC	East African Community
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EIF	Enhanced Integrated Framework
EU	European Union
EUDR	EU Regulation on Deforestation-free products
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FDI	foreign direct investment
GRASP	Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress
HR	human resources
ICC	International Chamber of Commerce
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPA	Investment promotion agency
ITC	International Trade Centre
JIU	Joint Inspection Unit
LDC	least developed country
LLDC	landlocked developing country
MARKUP	Market Access Upgrade Programme
MPTF	UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office

MSMEs	micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
NDC	nationally determined contribution
PSC	programme support cost
OIOS	United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services
RB	regular budget
SIDS	small island developing state
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SMECO	SME Competitiveness Outlook
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
TPO	trade promotion organization
UKTP	United Kingdom Trade Partnership
UNCTAD	UN Trade and Development
UNDOS	United Nations Department of Operational Support
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
UN-OHRLLS	United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS)
UN-SWAP	United Nations system-wide Action Plan
WAIPA	World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies
WEIDE	Women Exporters in the Digital Economy
WIPO	World Intellectual Property Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization
YSAU	Youth Startup Academy Uganda
XB	extrabudgetary

Foreword

On 1 May 1964, the GATT International Trade Centre (ITC) began operations at Villa Le Bocage in Geneva, Switzerland, with a staff of five people and a mission to help exporters access trade-related information that was timely and easy to use. In 1967, ITC was also brought into the United Nations.

Sixty years later, our dedication to making the benefits of trade accessible to all remains as steadfast as when we began. Today, trade-led development has proven to be an essential driver of economic growth, prosperity and resilience — especially at times of crisis.

Yet 2024 was more than just an anniversary celebration or a stocktaking exercise. It was a year during which the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) that ITC serves faced repeated tests, as supply-chain disruptions, climate change impacts, conflicts, fragility and other pressures threatened their resilience — and in many cases, even their survival.

Events such as the hurricane season that brought the likes of Hurricanes Beryl, Helene and Milton to communities across the Americas and the Caribbean laid bare how quickly natural disasters can destroy decades of hard-won economic progress. At the same time, the horrific loss of life and suffering resulting from conflicts across multiple world regions underscored how SMEs are often the sole vestiges of the private sector left in fragile settings, providing not just essential goods and services, but supporting social cohesion itself.

The Summit of the Future in September set out plainly that the coming years will be difficult. Just 17% of the Sustainable Development Goal targets are on track, and for many other targets, hard-earned advances have been undone amid the crises of recent years. But it also set out, through the Pact for the Future, the Global Digital Compact and the Declaration on Future Generations, a path to realize the vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and ensure the benefits are available to all.

Walking this path will not be easy, however, and SMEs are vital to ensure that we reach the finish line. Agenda-setting events such as the 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States drove home that resilient prosperity is a goal, not a guarantee, and one that requires a strong private sector. At the same time, negotiating forums including the 29th Conference of the Parties (COP29) to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change placed greater emphasis than ever on the role of trade, investment and finance in tackling the climate crisis and ended with declarations that foregrounded the importance of SMEs in the green transition.

The case studies in this Annual Report make clear that ITC's four big strategic pushes, or 'moonshots', on green trade, digital connectivity, gender and youth are landing, living up to the promise articulated in our new tagline of 'transforming trade, changing lives'.

They show how making trade more inclusive — such as by helping more women exporters engage in the digital economy — can create economic benefits across the board. They also make clear how working together to tackle environmental ills such as deforestation and climate change can lead to environmental benefits and economic gains, and that new technologies can help make these transitions smoother. The case studies illustrate how critical it is for SMEs to have up-to-date trade and market intelligence and learning opportunities that help them identify the right markets for their goods and services, and what steps they must take to compete effectively.

Finally, they drive home how economic diversification and value addition can help communities that have often been sidelined by trade — such as Indigenous Peoples — take part fully. And they reinforce how empowering youth to chase their economic dreams, whether through digital start-ups, the creative industries or environmental action, can ensure that future generations will have greater opportunities at their disposal to craft the lives and livelihoods they want.

ITC has spent the past 60 years working to make sure trade-led development can serve everyone's interests. We have made partnerships and locally owned and led solutions part of our calling card. Our interventions range from country-level projects to major regional envelopes, including two in Africa and South-East Asia, respectively, that were agreed in 2024 and are kicking into high gear in 2025. All the while, ITC has continued making strides in delivering on its Moving Forward Action Plan, ensuring that how we work internally lives up to the United Nations values we hold dear. Day in and day out, our ITC team's dedication, creativity and hard work is translating to lasting results for the SMEs we serve, and it is this spirit that we also celebrated in December during our inaugural ITC Recognition Awards.

It was already clear throughout 2024 that the aid landscape was facing a major shakeup — one that has continued well into 2025 as governments grapple with tighter aid budgets, geopolitical tensions and economic upheaval. Where



Presenting ITC's 60th anniversary publication, unveiling new tagline.



Visiting the Experience Space with Indigenous beneficiaries at 2024 WTO Public Forum.

Speaking at Summit for the Future at United Nations headquarters in New York.
© United Nations



Meeting Caribbean entrepreneurs at 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States, Antigua and Barbuda.



these developments will lead remains to be seen, but what must already happen now is a ramping up of efforts to help more SMEs, particularly in the priority countries that ITC serves, achieve value addition, diversification and economic integration.

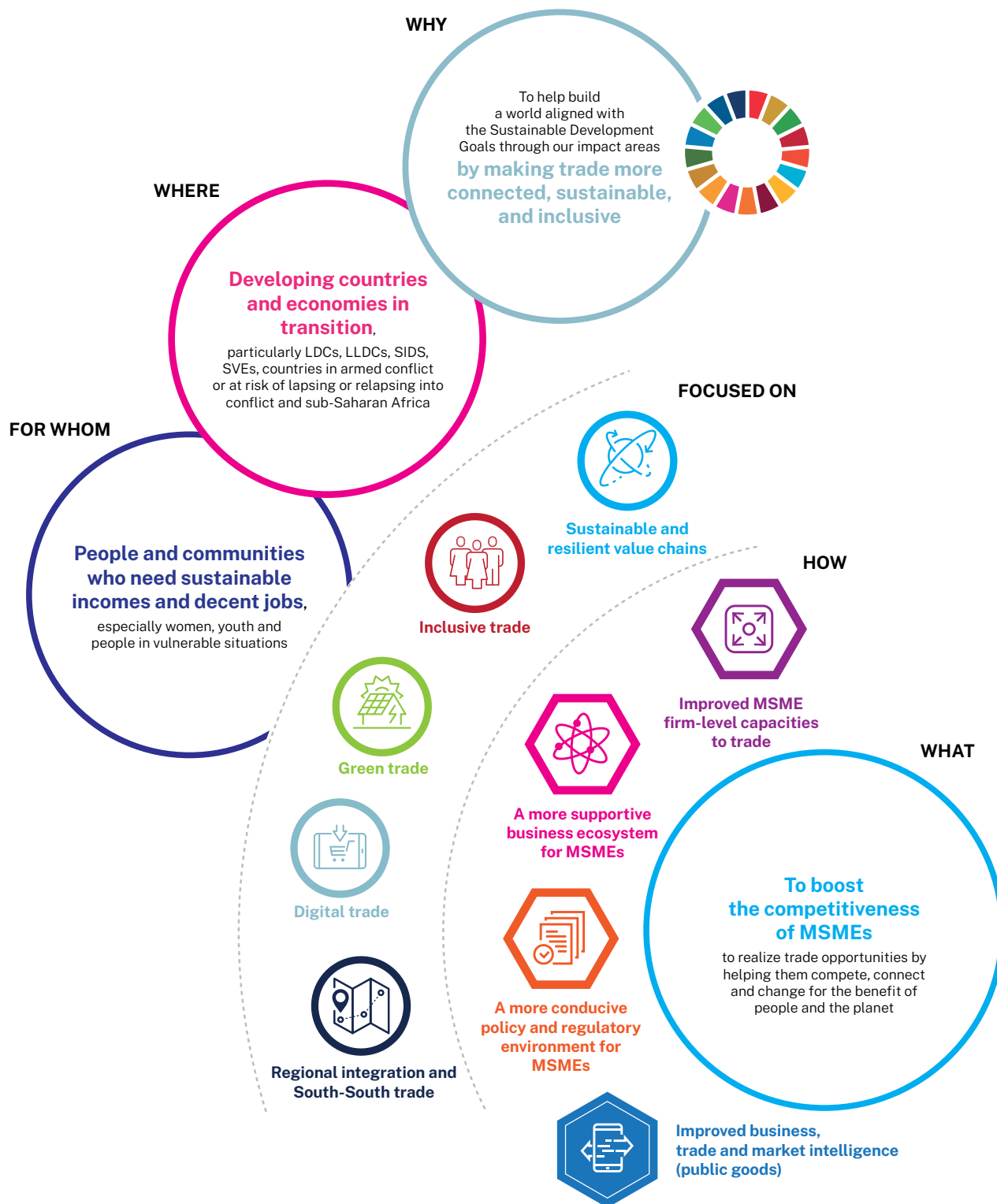
In other words, that means no tinkering at the margins. Any interventions to serve SMEs must ensure they are poised to navigate the major shifts and possibilities that lie ahead on new business frontiers. That is why ITC is preparing to host the inaugural Global SME Ministerial in July 2025 in South Africa, where these issues will take centre stage.

These same lessons and goals are helping to inform our new strategic plan to guide our work through the final years of this decade. At the same time, ITC is ramping up its country engagement strategy to bring us even closer to the beneficiaries we serve and the funders with whom we have developed key relationships.

Through these initiatives, and many others, ITC is working to make sure its approach to SME competitiveness, supportive business and policy ecosystems, and advocacy make possible connected, sustainable and inclusive trade that leaves no one behind.

Pamela Coke-Hamilton
ITC Executive Director

Our strategy at a glance: How we work





How our projects link to the Sustainable Development Goals

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by United Nations member states in 2015. It outlines a vision for a more equitable, sustainable and inclusive society, with 17 goals and 169 targets for delivering on that vision by the end of the decade.

In September 2024, United Nations member states adopted a Pact for the Future designed for spurring faster progress in achieving the 2030 Agenda, along with two annexes known as the Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations.

The below highlights from ITC's projects in 2024 give a snapshot of how our work is contributing to the SDGs, while the subsequent case studies in this report allow for closer analysis for what this looks like on the ground. These highlights are organized under the 2030 Agenda's five pillars of people, prosperity, planet, partnerships and peace.

People



- » ITC supported over 10,000 women-led businesses in 2024 to improve their knowledge and competitiveness in trade, established new SheTrades Hubs in Ghana and Brazil, and influenced policies to become more gender-responsive in five countries.
- » Over 400 refugees and individuals in host communities in Kenya, Rwanda, and Pakistan improved their market access skills in the digital, artisanal, and agribusiness sectors.
- » In South Sudan, 200 displaced persons received support that helped them generate higher incomes through soapmaking, agriculture, and retail activities.
- » The social enterprise 'Tujikuze' was legally incorporated in May 2024 in Kenya and established a youth training centre. Forty people have been trained to date, with more expected.
- » In Egypt, under the GTEX Programme, ITC supported Modern Kobba, a dyeing company, to implement gender-sensitive HR practices. As a result, female employment rose from 11 to 20 and productivity increased by 30%. Modern Kobba now offers safer, more equitable working conditions backed by clear policies and strong management support, contributing to decent work for all employees.

Prosperity



- » Over 28,000 agricultural SMEs in 46 countries in seven sectors increased their competitiveness in sustainable production, climate adaptation, value addition, financial management and business development. Commercial alliances between buyers, distributors and traders were established both at the regional and international levels, generating almost \$24 million in sales.
- » A trade intelligence platform was developed jointly with the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Centre for Development of Trade (ICDT) to boost exports and increase trade transparency across OIC Member States.
- » ITC supported the launch of an electronic queue management system (eQMS) at the Kyzyl-Kiya Road border crossing between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. The system allows truck drivers to reserve time slots online before arriving at the border, helping reduce wait times, ease congestion, and improve the efficiency of border operations.
- » ITC supported the launch of the National Programme on E-Commerce in Tajikistan for 2025–2029. Developed in close collaboration with national institutions and the private sector, the programme outlines a five-year action plan to accelerate e-commerce growth by addressing nine key policy areas, ranging from infrastructure and fintech development to cybersecurity and regulatory frameworks.
- » In Madagascar, the UK Trade Partnerships (UKTP) Programme facilitated a collaboration between Anaka Atelier, a local raffia accessories producer, and luxury brand Longchamp, generating over €400,000 in revenue and creating over 100 jobs for local women artisans, providing them with greater economic independence through stable employment and increased market access.
- » Over 2.3 million users accessed ITC's market analysis tools more than 10.3 million times in 2024, supporting \$170 million in trade transactions through data-driven export and import decisions.

Planet



- » ITC's Social and Labor Convergence Program (SLCP) Gateway supported 72 countries and 14,970 factories through enabling unified social and labor assessments, reducing audit duplication, and improving working conditions across global supply chains.
- » The Deforestation-Free Trade Gateway (DFTG) was launched, an online platform that aims to facilitate compliance with the EU Regulation on Deforestation-free Products (EUDR) and help SMEs maintain market access through transparent tools and collaborative data sharing across the supply chain.
- » In Peru, five cocoa cooperatives representing hundreds of smallholders improved their services, offering enhanced technical support to members on sustainable production and export under the Basic Guidelines for Sustainable Cocoa (LBCS, by its Spanish acronym) Peru programme.

Partnerships



- » At the Chinese International Import Expo (CIIE) and the China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE) 2024, 30 MSMEs from Asia and Africa concluded or identified over \$17 million in new business opportunities with China.
- » Following the Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing MSMEs' access to information endorsed by G20 trade and investment ministers in 2023, the Global Trade Helpdesk integrated Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese into its language offerings, bringing the total number of languages to eight. This was thanks to partnerships with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade and ICC Indonesia, along with additional outreach support from the China Electronics Chamber of Commerce.

Peace



- » ITC supported WTO accession processes and trade integration efforts in Iraq, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Timor-Leste, and provided LDC graduation analysis for Nepal. The lessons learned from WTO accessions support and from ITC interventions supporting SME competitiveness in fragile and conflict-affected settings have been highlighted at events like Geneva Peace Week 2024 and the WTO's Trade for Peace Week 2025.
- » In Trinidad and Tobago, 144 stakeholders from the public and private sectors engaged in a national dialogue to shape the new Strategic Trade Development Roadmap, ensuring inclusive and representative policy planning.
- » In 2024, through the Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-food Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy (SAAVI) project in Iraq, a total of 199 tons of produce was transacted between farmers from agri-business alliances and reputable buyers, generating approximately \$397,087 in sales.
- » The second Iraq National Trade Forum convened 800 participants, including 400 Iraqi and international companies, facilitating 240 business-to-business (B2B) sessions and generating \$5.8 million in potential deal value.

Shooting for the Moon

In 2022, ITC launched four moonshots that represent our bold solutions to confront the challenges that small businesses in developing economies face when engaging in trade.

Now in their third year, these four big strategic pushes are delivering big results — showing that by prioritizing gender, youth, the digital economy, and the green transition, ITC's interventions on the ground can achieve outright transformational results that will stand the test of time.

Gender Moonshot

To deliver gender-transformative interventions, grounded in women's economic empowerment



Youth Moonshot

To put young people in the driver's seat of a sustainable and prosperous economic future





Digital Moonshot

To enable more SMEs to make full use of new technologies and the digital economy



Green Moonshot

To ensure SMEs can lead the way towards, and benefit from, a just and inclusive transition



Celebrating ITC at 60

In 2024, ITC celebrated a landmark milestone with our parent agencies, partners, clients, and beneficiaries: 60 years of being in operation. Part celebration, part stocktaking, and part visionary exercise, ITC's anniversary year showcased how the successes and lessons learned from six decades of trade-led development could inform the future direction of ITC's work.

Activities held throughout the year had this objective in mind. They included the launch of a special photo publication about ITC's history, along with the production of an interactive timeline and dedicated website marking how our work has evolved to meet our beneficiaries where they are. At the same time, video testimonials from beneficiaries around the world spoke to

how ITC's interventions, emphasis on locally-led and locally-owned solutions and strong history of partnerships are making a difference on the ground. For the ITC community, a new internal publication titled *Humans of ITC* showcased the stories behind the people who make our work possible.

Finally, a high-level event at WTO headquarters in late June brought together ITC's parent agencies, funders, beneficiaries, and the wider trade and development community for an afternoon of celebrations. The conversations that these events inspired about the next years of ITC's history, in turn, prompted the development of a new tagline: 'Transforming Trade. Changing Lives.'



Keynote address by H.E. Ms. Amina J. Mohammed, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations.

Swiss State Secretary (Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs) Helene Budliger Artieda, ED Coke-Hamilton, WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala at ITC 60th anniversary celebration.



Georgie Ndirangu (co-moderator), ED Coke-Hamilton, UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan, WTO Deputy-Director General Xiangchen Zhang at ITC 60th anniversary celebration.

ITC staff at event celebrating launch of *Humans of ITC*, 60th anniversary internal publication.



Audience at ITC's 60th anniversary event at WTO headquarters.

ED Coke-Hamilton, DED Dorothy Tembo marking 60th anniversary at an internal event at ITC headquarters.



Live music at 60th anniversary event by Li-Li Octave, a singer from Dominica.



Linda Chepkwony, Founder/CEO of RiftValley Organics Africa in Kenya, explains at 60th anniversary event why regional integration matters.



Our year in review: A snapshot of 2024

January



- ITC, World Intellectual Property Organization sign MOU to help SMEs, especially in the creative industries, sports and green technology sectors, protect and use their intellectual property

March



- Global campaign on gender-responsive public procurement launches at 68th session of Commission on the Status of Women in New York
- ITC, Asian Development Bank ink partnership on supporting women's economic empowerment, sustainability for SMEs in Asia and the Pacific

May

- ITC participates in 4th International Conference on Small Island Developing States, launches SIDS Trade Tracker and agrifood BSO guide
- ECOWAS, ITC launch West African Competitiveness Observatory



February



- WTO-ITC High-level Event on Women and Trade and SheTrades Summit held alongside 13th WTO Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi
- WTO-ITC Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund launches, with United Arab Emirates as inaugural donor
- ITC supports second edition of Iraq National Trade Forum, featuring participants from SMEs, BSOs, suppliers, investors, donors and development partners

April



- ITC engages in ECOWAS Investment Forum in Togo, facilitates participation of nine investment promotion agencies from West Africa

June



- ITC takes part in 3rd AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum, held in the Bahamas, and brings SME and BSO delegation
- ITC participates in Global Review of Aid for Trade 2024, with sessions on trade development strategies, disability-inclusive trade, e-commerce, investment facilitation, LDC graduation
- ITC holds 60th anniversary celebrations at WTO headquarters
- ITC holds 58th meeting of Joint Advisory Group
- AD Ports Group, ITC sign MOU on cooperation for trade facilitation initiatives

July



- ITC, GSMA sign MOU to scale up work on bridging the digital divide for MSMEs
- Strathmore University Business School, ITC team up on new digital trade hub for Kenyan SMEs
- EU, ITC, international agency partners kick off new project tackling child labour in coffee, cobalt supply chains

August



- ITC publishes checklist on EU Deforestation-free products Regulation, outlining useful tools and technological solutions for SMEs

September



- ITC takes part in WTO Public Forum, with panels on disability-inclusive trade, Indigenous Peoples and trade, ethical fashion and gender-responsive public procurement; organizes Indigenous Trade Experience Space
- ITC holds flagship Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) Forum in Bern
- SheTrades Hubs hold annual meeting in Geneva
- Kenyan start-ups AgriTech Analytics Limited and Rethread Africa win Youth Ecopreneur Awards pitching contest on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly and New York Climate Week
- ITC Executive Director addresses Summit of the Future

October



- ITC launches SheTrades Hub in Brazil, in parallel to G20 trade and investment ministerial meeting
- ITC, Ukraine host ambassadors' roundtable at ITC headquarters on Ukraine's economic recovery
- ITC's Deputy Executive Director speaks at Biashara Afrika event on SMEs, World Cotton Day in Benin
- ITC's Executive Director joins first Hamburg Sustainability Conference
- Winners of the 2024 World Trade Promotion Organization Awards announced

November



- ITC takes part in climate COP29, launches 'NDC 3.0' guidelines, backs SME declarations and highlights climate finance for SMEs
- SME Trade Academy Forum examines how AI is transforming online learning
- WEIDE Fund receives record donation pledge from FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Legacy Fund™
- More than 1,000 entrepreneurs graduate from Youth Startup Academy in Uganda

December



- ITC hosts inaugural Recognition Awards
- ITC and fellow members of the Inter-Agency Working Group on Trade and Disability Inclusion, with the Permanent Missions of Finland and South Africa and the support of UN WOMEN, co-organize high-level meeting hosted by International Labour Organization on disability-inclusive trade

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Our value proposition

ITC's value proposition is built around our organizational strengths of trust, expertise, connectedness, and agility. Whether through our steps to manage data securely or through our dedication to innovation, how we work is as important as what we are working towards as an organization.

Trust

We generate trust as a neutral and inclusive organization.

Expertise

We create knowledge and skills to empower stakeholders.

Connectedness

We facilitate dialogue and support between and among clients and partners.

Agility

We customize and innovate to make sure clients receive the right solutions.

Corporate Results

Our 2024 Results



>80%
country-level
interventions
in priority countries*

≈39%
interventions
in least developed
countries

Awareness

- » 1,200,000 clients gained greater awareness of international trade from using ITC's business, trade and market intelligence tools
- » 1.54 million registered users of ITC's global public goods



Knowledge, skills and capacity building

- » 4,800 days of trainings to over 70,000 beneficiaries; many pursue more than one course
- » 70,000 SME Trade Academy participants, of which 46% were women and 27% obtained a certificate; many pursue more than one course





Consensus, plans to act, policy actions

- » 100 cases of trade-related policies, strategies, regulations introduced, improved or developed in favour of MSMEs' competitiveness, with business sector input



Institutional performance

- » ≈ 375 (cases of) improvements in BSO performance
- » > 800,000 members reached by client BSOs



MSME trade competitiveness

- » 58,000 MSMEs either improved business operations, transacted international business or received investment, out of which 28,000 MSMEs were led by women
- » \$240 million of new business and investment transactions by MSMEs

* **Priority countries** include least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), small and vulnerable economies (SVEs), countries in armed conflict or at risk of (re-)lapsing into conflict and countries in sub-Saharan Africa. In 2024, ITC was active in 142 countries.

2024 funders for impact areas

ITC is fortunate to have the financial support of several funders, which makes our work possible. Below we would like to particularly thank our ITC Trust Fund Window I contributors, along with our project-specific funders, who are powering our projects under our impact areas. A full list of funders by geography and project is available in Appendix I.

Core extrabudgetary funders

ITC Trust Fund Window 1 funders



Canada, Germany, Iceland, India, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates

Project-specific funders

General (non-impact area specific)



European Union, Netherlands (the), Republic of Korea (the), UN-OHRLLS, Swisscontact, Japan, Germany, Revolving Fund MLS-SCM, CrimsonLogic, Revolving Fund MAR, Palladium, Physikalisch-Technische Bundesanstalt (PTB), Revolving Fund TS, Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), Amer Sports, Switzerland Global Enterprise, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Unilever, German Institute for International and Security Affairs, International Organization for Standardization (ISO), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the), CAPSA Group, EIF, Futec Global, UNCTAD, Australia, Economica Institute of Economic Research, TradeMalta, European Brands Association

Sustainable and resilient value chains



European Union, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, Netherlands (the), Switzerland, Republic of Korea (the), Germany, Sweden, Italy, Belgium, International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, Asian Development Bank, China, Japan, United Nations Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS), ENI, ILO, HALBA, FAO, Trinidad and Tobago, United States of America, Shenzhen Technology University, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF), Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI Platform), United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), Social and Labor Convergence Program, UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund Office (MPTF), Global Coffee Platform, Coop Genossenschaft, Curaçao, FEFAC, Palladium, Mongolia, African Export Import Bank (Afreximbank), Revolving Fund MLS-SCM, Unilever, Revolving Fund MAR, Revolving Fund TS, Finance in Motion, Switzerland Global Enterprise, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Initiative for Compliance and Sustainability, CAPSA Group, Economica Institute of Economic Research

Inclusive trade (women, youth, other vulnerable groups)



European Union, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the), Republic of Korea (the), Germany, TradeMark Africa, Italy, MPTF, Visa, Social Impact, Switzerland, United States of America, ENI, Japan, UPS Foundation, Belgium, United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), Asian Development Bank, International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, Sweden, United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN-DESA), Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), FAO, African Export Import Bank, UNIDO, Netherlands (the), HALBA, Alibaba Group, Trinidad and Tobago, Unilever, Palladium, Revolving Fund MLS-SCM, Revolving Fund TS, Curaçao, China, Mongolia, Switzerland Global Enterprise, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, Danish Refugee Council, CAPSA Group, UNCTAD, Economica Institute of Economic Research

Green trade



European Union, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the), Switzerland, Republic of Korea (the), Sweden, Italy, Germany, UNCCD, ENI, TradeMark Africa, United States of America, Japan, STDF, Netherlands (the), HALBA, Alibaba Group, Shenzhen Technology University, UNEP, Sustainable Agriculture Initiative (SAI Platform), FAO, Curaçao, Global Coffee Platform, Coop Genossenschaft, MPTF, Revolving Fund TS, FEFAC, Mongolia, Revolving Fund MAR, Finance in Motion, Initiative for Compliance and Sustainability, Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF)

Digital trade



European Union, Netherlands (the), United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the), Republic of Korea (the), United States of America, Switzerland, Japan, Visa, Sweden, China, TradeMark Africa, Alibaba Group, UPS Foundation, International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, MPTF, Trinidad and Tobago, Italy, Curaçao, Revolving Fund TS, UNCTAD

Regional integration and South-South trade and investment



European Union, Germany, China, COMESA, International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, Italy, UN-DESA, African Export Import Bank, Mo Ibrahim Foundation, Japan, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (the), MPTF, UNIDO, Trinidad and Tobago, EIF, Islamic Centre for Development of Trade, FAO, Federation of U.A.E Chambers of Commerce and Industry, Switzerland, Palladium, Switzerland Global Enterprise, Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, CAPSA Group, UNCTAD, Economica Institute of Economic Research

SMECO 2025 sneak preview

A transformation fit for the digital age:

New research shows how firms can seize technological opportunity



Concept image on digital transformation.
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In today's world, not a day goes by without new digital technologies entering the scene, promising to transform how businesses work and what they can offer consumers. But a full-scale digital transformation remains out of reach for many firms, begging the question of what factors are preventing these businesses from adopting digital technologies, tools and platforms.

These uneven levels of digital transformation, in turn, have major implications on firms' abilities to grow, compete and trade. They also have far greater ramifications: these imbalances can influence how well firms can build their resilience to shocks and crises, including those prompted by supply-chain disruptions, conflicts and climate change.

In short, either the digital revolution of the 21st century can be a powerful force for democratizing trade and economic growth and opportunity, or it can lead to inequalities rising across a host of metrics. But until now, a wide gap existed in the research literature and policy arena — namely, a concrete way to measure firms' adoption of digital technologies, as well as their ability to digitally transform.

The forthcoming 2025 *SME Competitiveness Outlook (SMECO)* is set to bridge that knowledge gap. It creates a new metric for assessing digital adoption at the firm level, while featuring a digital transformation roadmap from which governments, international agencies and SMEs can choose as they determine how best to make a country more digitally ready and how to help firms improve their digital adoption.

The process to develop the firm-level metric was manifold, beginning with surveys of more than 7,400 firms across 78 countries, representing a range of economic sectors

and sizes. The questions asked covered topics such as the firm's use of a digital strategy, its management's understanding and knowledge of digital tools on offer, and how much of its financial resources it devotes to digital technologies and platforms.

Thanks to the responses and extensive economic research, ITC then developed the Enterprise Digital Transformation Index, or e-DTI. The index provides a standardized way to assess a given firm's adoption of digital technologies in its practices — the first of its kind to do so.

SMECO is ITC's flagship research publication, made possible through support from ITC's core extrabudgetary funders, known collectively as Window 1. Since its first edition in 2015, SMECO has provided insights, analysis and guidance that respond to the trends and developments that most affect SME competitiveness and which have then fed into ITC's interventions on the ground.

Its most recent edition on fragility and conflict's impacts on small and medium-sized enterprises has played a pivotal role in informing ITC's projects in fragile and conflict-affected settings.

With the new SMECO due to launch in July 2025, the results have reinforced that there are many steps firms can take to adopt digital technologies and improve their competitiveness — such as incorporating skills training or improving their financial management, even in settings where enablers are limited or largely absent.

Launch of different sector strategies by the government of Sindh, the EU and ITC in Pakistan.



Livestock and fruits and vegetables market, Pakistan.



SheTrades workshops on adopting a gender-sensitive lens for the agricultural sector, Karachi, Pakistan.



Achieving whole-scale digital transformation, however, relies on what enablers are in place in the surrounding environment—namely, in terms of the available digital infrastructure, skills and regulation.

Prioritizing these enablers is an increasing imperative in a world where a firm's ability to sink or swim depends on whether it is online and how well it can use technologies to its advantage. These needs have grown more and more urgent, especially with only a few years remaining to deliver on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which is what helped prompt United Nations member states to address them in both the Pact for the Future adopted in September 2024 and in the Global Digital Compact.

While the next edition of SMECO is launching imminently, the methodologies and insights from this research are already starting to change the daily realities of SMEs in Pakistan's Sindh province, where ITC has worked over several years under its Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) programme.

Funded by the European Union, GRASP has worked extensively with SMEs in rural communities in the Sindh and Balochistan provinces. Its goal is to help tackle poverty by supporting the development of SMEs in rural areas.

A new SME Digitalization Strategy, designed specifically for the Sindh province but shaped by SMECO's findings, aims to provide data-driven insights that can help local SMEs adopt digital tools and technologies. The strategy is also designed to support digital service suppliers, SMEs and other stakeholders in Sindh as they work on the different enablers of digital transformation—such as policy reforms or skills.

The process has involved close collaboration with Sindh's Industries and Commerce Department, Information Sciences and Technology Department, Planning and Development Department, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises Development Authority, and the Government of Sindh's Provincial Working Group on SME Development.

Looking ahead, the insights from the 2025 SMECO will help inform discussions taking place in July 2025 at the first-ever Global SME Ministerial, a new biennial event organized by ITC and hosted by the Government of South Africa's Department of Small Business Development.

The Global SME Ministerial is the only event of its kind, convening ministers to help identify priority interventions that can support SME development, along with agreeing on a roadmap for ministers' collaboration ahead of the event's next edition. Under the theme 'Navigating New Business Frontiers', one of its three main tracks is devoted to digital connectivity.



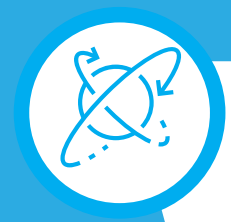
FUNDERS (SMECO)

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

FUNDER (GRASP)

European Union

Sustainable and resilient value chains



The slew of crises that have beset the global economy have made clear that now, more than ever, it is essential for producers and countries to turbocharge value addition efforts and diversify their economic sectors and export markets.

Doing so is more than just an exercise of making more processing facilities available or more market connections possible. It also means integrating economic, social and environmental considerations throughout every step of the value chain, looking at how these same value chains can help make trade more connected, sustainable and inclusive.

Window 1 support from ITC's core extrabudgetary funders is essential for these efforts: it makes possible the **global public goods** that help shape decisions by value chain actors as they seek to understand trade and market trends and choose potential markets. It has made it possible to provide critical support for BSOs as they advise SMEs looking to **protect their intellectual property** before exporting, and to ensure **e-learning opportunities** can reach more SMEs looking to move up the value chain.

The case studies in this section and the highlights named below typify how this kind of foundational support allows ITC interventions, including those funded by Window 2 project grants, to punch well above their weight.

2024 highlights

In **Rwanda**, ITC has been working under the second phase of the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme with Baho Coffee, which supports over 16,000 smallholder farmers and has over 70 permanent staff, with over 2,000 additional workers during harvest season. Baho Coffee has now expanded its number of coffee washing stations from one in 2017 to 18 today. Its export capacity has grown to 50 containers per year, and it has also received support to attend World of Coffee events, while obtaining technical guidance in areas like product quality and operational efficiency.

In **Sierra Leone** under the EU-funded West Africa Competitiveness Programme, ITC has supported SMEs in the cocoa, cassava and palm oil sectors to overcome hurdles like limited market access, low processing capacity, difficulties in accessing finance and issues with compliance and certification. Support included financial literacy workshops and bootcamps, field visits for SMEs to learn from other firms who had achieved compliance with sustainability standards and sponsored participation to trade fairs.



Baho coffee, Fugi coffee
washing station, Rwanda.
© Baho Coffee

Business owners from Sierra
Leone visiting the Fairafric
chocolate factory in Ghana.



Uzbek employee selecting dried
apricots before packaging.



Training of trainers on
WACOMP Business
Matchmaking Platform
© Rayvolution

In **Uzbekistan** with support from Switzerland, ITC has worked to develop a multi-year roadmap to support the strategic growth and sustainability of the dried fruits sector. Other interventions include helping set up a public-private partnership committee and put in place a strong industry association. The strategic roadmap was approved by the Uzbek Cabinet of Ministers and four Uzbek companies have used the recommendations to improve their fruit processing technology, product quality and ability to meet international standards, with some SMEs also taking part in trade fairs.

In **Senegal**, with support from the European Union under the West Africa Competitiveness Programme and working closely with the Ministry of Trade and Small and Medium Enterprises of Senegal, ITC has helped organize onion and mango producers into cooperative societies, facilitating connections with buyers, revenue turnover and greater incomes through higher sales. ITC has also provided trainings for meeting standards of target markets, along with support in packaging and marketing.

Case Study

Shaping the future of skincare: Pacific Island entrepreneurs find new audiences



Potential buyers testing skincare products from Samoa at Olympia Beauty Trade Fair, London.

From Fiji to Samoa, the beauty and skincare sector has developed international renown for its sustainability and quality, along with the wide range of products on offer for both children and adults. While their reputation is well established, getting these products onto store shelves and into beauty salons in new markets also requires extensive expertise, connections and finance — often a tough ask.

Thanks to the support from the United Kingdom Trade Partnerships (UKTP) programme, funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, that is now changing.

Today, Pacific Island entrepreneurs are forging new and lasting relationships with European and United Kingdom-based buyers they have met at international trade fairs such as the Salon Beauty Trade Fair and Tones of Beauty, both in London.

‘The response I got from the customers [at these fairs], and even the people that I travelled with, was so encouraging that it gave me enough hope and encouragement to continue the journey,’ said Maria Leota of KUKI Company, a Samoan firm that incorporates traditional remedies into the creation of skincare products.

‘The expertise provided has been nothing short of transformative,’ agreed Purnima Singh, whose firm Loloma Fiji makes organic virgin coconut oil and who has taken part in UK-based trade fairs under the UKTP programme. ‘The guidance we’ve received has helped raise both our brand and professional profile.’

Across the board, entrepreneurs report that participating in these trade fairs is making a difference in the futures they envision. For these trade fairs to deliver in the long term, however, entrepreneurs also need the skills and resources to make the most of their new connections and market opportunities — such as knowing how to navigate the logistics involved in exporting or how to target marketing to new audiences.

Local BSOs, such as Invest Fiji and the Samoa Association of Manufacturers and Exporters, have stepped in to help. Working with ITC, they are ensuring that entrepreneurs in their communities have regular chances to build up their skills back home, such as how to craft effective export strategies, alongside their leadership capabilities.

Entrepreneurs are also benefiting from new networks that help them remain connected and support one another, long after the workshops and trade fairs have drawn to a close. The Pacific Skincare Network, for instance, has proven so effective that it has been featured in European trade magazines, including Italy’s Export.

‘Every three months, we get together and we talk about our issues, about compliance or issues on how to get into this country or how to get into that country,’ KUKI Company’s Maria Leota said about the network. ‘Everyone in the group had their own story and knowledge and level... We’re not in competition with each other, because we believe the more cosmetic companies in the Pacific, the better, because we want to be the hub of skincare.’



Beneficiary from Fiji showcasing her skincare brand, Nama.



Naturally Fiji, one of the Pacific brands showcased at UKTP trade fairs.

For European and British buyers and distributors, these new relationships with Pacific Island entrepreneurs are opening exciting possibilities that used to be unavailable. Nigel Palmer, Chief Executive Officer of the United Kingdom-based health and beauty products distributor Palmer Wilson Associates, noted that Pacific brands such as Naturally Fiji could be a natural fit for major UK-based department stores.

‘We believe that the product range has a real opportunity here in the UK. Consumers are looking for aspirational products and from that point of view, we felt that the Fiji line—which is natural, it’s totally organic—has a resonance with our customers here in the UK,’ he said.

The Pacific businesses involved in these activities have enjoyed major growth. Total sales topped \$1.7 million in 2024, a one-third increase from 2023. These figures include significant sales to the EU and British markets, accounting for nearly \$89,000 in 2024 alone—a 927% increase from 2023. In some cases, these companies had not had sales in the EU and the United Kingdom before. A few also sold their products to the Australian and New Zealand markets for the first time.

The benefits extend well beyond sales. Participating businesses have been able to access new financing

opportunities through the project’s activities, including investments, loans, credit and equity. More than 117 jobs have been supported in the sector, 98 of which have been held by women.

What these numbers speak to goes well beyond just market opportunities: they signal new approaches that these companies adopted to how they work, following their participation in the programme. In some cases, new opportunities emerged after incorporating e-commerce into their business strategies. In others, they integrated new approaches to marketing and branding, sales and distribution, regulatory compliance, financial management and the products and services they offered, to name a few.

The work shows no signs of slowing down. Already in early 2025, six Pacific companies from the programme took part in the world’s largest trade fair for the beauty sector, CosmoProf, held in Bologna, Italy. Together, they reported accessing 130 business leads valued at more than \$100,000 in total, thanks to the networking opportunities on offer. Meanwhile, the Pacific Skincare Network has a full slate of activities underway, as it looks to build deeper connections within its membership and with new collaborators.



FUNDER

United Kingdom of Great Britain
and Northern Ireland

Case Study

Protecting ideas, boosting exports: Pilot programme on intellectual property rights aims for global reach



ED Coke-Hamilton, WIPO
Director General Daren Tang
signing MOU on helping SMEs
better protect, use IP rights.

Intellectual property is one of the most vital assets for any business, reflecting its creative strengths and unique attributes. But for small and medium-sized enterprises looking to export, securing the right protections for these intangible assets is far from straightforward: it requires expensive legal expertise, along with a familiarity with both domestic and international systems. The result is that many may leave some key rights unprotected—risking a loss of competitiveness later on.

That's why ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton and World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) Director General Daren Tang signed a memorandum of understanding in early 2024 setting out a series of areas where the two agencies would work together more closely, all with the goal of making it easier for SMEs to protect their intellectual property rights before exporting to new markets.

Along with undertaking activities specific to SMEs in sectors like sports, the creative industries and green technologies, to name a few illustrative examples, the agencies have spent the past several months undertaking a pilot programme to train selected BSOs on how to integrate WIPO's intellectual property diagnostic tool in the services they offer, and then take the lessons learned from these experiences and channel them into resources that can be used globally.

Business support organizations encompass a wide range of local institutions. Among them are chambers of commerce, trade promotion organizations and business associations, to name a few illustrative types. These institutions are an invaluable resource for SMEs in their communities, closely attuned to local needs and circumstances, and able to respond quickly when situations change.

The ITC–WIPO pilot programme's strategy was designed to account for varying local contexts. That is why the two partner agencies, when testing out how best to craft their intellectual property trainings—including on how SMEs can use WIPO's intellectual property diagnostic tool to evaluate their intellectual property needs—reached out to selected BSOs operating in different world regions.

The pilot took place in Panama, Sri Lanka and Uganda, working with local BSOs ProPanamá, the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce and National Chamber of Commerce of Sri Lanka, and Innovation Village, respectively.

The trainings themselves covered extensive ground: from how to use WIPO's intellectual property diagnostics tool to how participating BSOs could integrate tailored services on intellectual property rights into their offerings. In the latter instance, the training covered everything from how to launch the service itself to how to allocate related resources effectively and measure the impact of their offerings.

One of the most notable features of the training was that participating BSOs could test out the tools and techniques they were learning with SMEs directly, as part of the workshops themselves. This was key so that BSOs could field questions from SMEs in real-time and ask these questions to trainers themselves where needed. This, in turn, made it easier to see what it was like for SMEs to assess their intangible assets to determine what protections served their needs.

Already one of the participating BSOs, ProPanamá, now lists intellectual property services on its website as one of its offerings to SMEs. It has developed guides on patents, protecting authors' rights, industrial design and trademarks, and also directs users to WIPO's online



'SME Competitiveness, Export Procedures, Intellectual Property and Competitiveness' event, Bangladesh

Business support organizations and intellectual property publication.



New handbook, intellectual property trainings help Bangladeshi women entrepreneurs boost exports.



intellectual property diagnostics tool. Sri Lanka's National Chamber of Commerce has similarly updated its website to share intellectual property-related information for users.

One survey respondent from ProPanamá told ITC after the training that what they had learned, and which their BSO would now be applying, could benefit more than 400 SMEs that are in their database and already have an export-ready offer. 'The creation of a specific roadmap to offer tools to businesses interested in exporting' was especially helpful, the respondent said.

Another respondent, also from ProPanamá, highlighted how the training is helping them rethink client strategy, improve their processes and better serve clients on the day-to-day. Learning how to best identify the right intellectual property services for SMEs in their community was among the key takeaways from the pilot project, they said.

Representatives from Sri Lanka's National Chamber of Commerce also reported that the training had changed what they can now offer the SMEs in their network. One respondent, for instance, said the training's benefits could lead to changes in the products and services they provide, while helping them improve their processes, their marketing and communications, how they measure performance and how they manage their human resources.

Another respondent said that 'case-by-case diagnostic workshops and information awareness and signposting' were now in the works. The number of SMEs that could benefit from the improved services could be anywhere from nearly 100 to more than 750.

Thanks to the lessons learned under the pilot, there is now a [joint ITC-WIPO guide](#) that any business support organization in the world can use to help its SMEs safeguard and commercialize their intangible assets. Rolled out in January 2025, it incorporates the lessons from this pilot project on how BSOs can update their services to cover the various facets of intellectual property rights.



FUNDERS

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland),
World Intellectual Property
Organization (in kind)

Case study

Ready for the runway: Pan-African Fashion Alliance prepares to launch



A big change is underway in the international fashion industry, with designers from the African continent and its diaspora increasingly making their work known in fashion shows and fashion houses around the world. This trend is adding a new, vibrant dimension to an already vital economic sector, while making it possible to showcase techniques and products that often reflect the heritage of many traditional and Indigenous communities.

Nigeria and Ghana, for instance, are renowned for their woven textiles. Uganda's barkcloth making is a practice that dates back to prehistoric times, and is recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as an example of humanity's intangible cultural heritage. From dyed artwork in Mali to beadwork in Kenya and South Africa, there is growing international demand for these products—but demand alone is not enough.

For too many of the SMEs that make up the African continent's fashion sector—which, according to UNESCO, accounts for 90% of all firms in the sector—accessing affordable financing for their businesses is a goal that often remains out of reach. This can limit their potential to grow and undertake value-added activities that can lead to better incomes. It can also hamper their efforts to access international markets and find overseas buyers for their products.

These are far from being the only challenges that designers face. Protecting their intellectual property rights effectively is also a major hurdle—one that can influence how well they can compete with their peers. The informality and fragmented nature of much of the African fashion sector is another, with larger formal players running the scene.

A new alliance, underpinned by cooperative principles and set to launch in 2025, aims to address these challenges, and many more. Thanks to support from Afreximbank, ITC and the International Cooperative Alliance (ICA) have been working for the past few years to help designers as they weigh the best approach for such an alliance, including by undertaking a feasibility study and related efforts.

The proposed group is known as the Pan-African Fashion Alliance, and its creation is being informed by feedback from designers themselves on what they want most—and

what approach best serves their needs. The alliance was officially announced in October 2024 during a high-level panel featuring a video statement from ITC's Executive Director at CANEX WKND, the leading event for Africa's creative and cultural industries, which took place in Algeria.

The cooperative model is a deliberate choice, designed to limit risk and increase reward. Smaller firms within this cooperative grouping will not have to carry the full weight of any setbacks caused by an ever-shifting international economy and ongoing restructuring in global supply chains. Having several designers under one umbrella also improves their attractiveness to financial services providers.

When asked, 83% of the 144 designers that responded to a related survey said the cooperative model was their preferred option.

"I am really appreciative of this monumental initiative, which comes as a much needed piece to the puzzle for African fashion. For me, the [Alliance] represents a strategic opportunity to build sustainable business networks, access regional and international markets and strengthen value chains across Africa's fashion ecosystem," Kibonen Nfi, Founder & Creative Director of Kibonen, said. "I look forward to leveraging PAFA to scale my brand, collaborate with like-minded entrepreneurs and contribute to shaping a globally competitive African fashion industry."

Other features of the Pan-African Fashion Alliance are activities for participating designers to share their expertise and the best practices they have developed. They can also join forces to pursue procurement opportunities, source materials and fabrics, navigate daily logistical needs and make sales.

Efforts like these come at a time when there is a concerted effort to develop the textile and cotton value chains in Africa, especially now that full trading is taking place under the AfCFTA. According to the *Made by Africa* report prepared by ITC in partnership with the African Union and the European Union, Africa could export up to €5.8 billion (\$6.3 billion) in cotton garments alone by 2026. A substantial portion of this potential would involve trade within the continent.



Masterclass on 'Collective Disruption: Strengthening the Fashion and Textile Ecosystem' at CANEX WKND 2024..



Fashion designer Kibonen Ny in her studio in Cameroon.
© Kibonen Ny

A fashion masterpiece by South African designer David Tlale.
© David Tlale



Santosh Kumar at the Creative Africa nexus event at the Intra-African Trade Fair 2023 in Cairo, Egypt.

With 2025 marking the second United Nations International Year of Cooperatives, the Pan-African Fashion Alliance aims to register itself formally with its founding members. Key next steps will include the launch of a website, a first general assembly meeting and targeted capacity building for founding designers.

These steps will lay the groundwork for the planned alliance to increase the value of designers' exports, resolve production constraints, build skills and create new jobs — all while promoting the creative brands that are emerging and thriving across Africa.



FUNDER
Afreximbank

Inclusive trade



Trade policy and practice have varying impacts on different populations. At the same time, different populations do not always have access to the same opportunities and resources that can bring trade and its benefits within reach. At ITC, our 60 years of experience in trade-led development have shown, in no uncertain terms, that making trade more inclusive is not just a social imperative, but an economic one.

A big part of making that possible involves a blend of outreach, innovative pilot projects and research, which is made possible at ITC thanks to the dedicated support of Window 1 core extrabudgetary funders. Together, the results help show decision makers what the practice of trade looks like, and which factors can hinder the participation of different populations.

They demonstrate, for instance, how these populations do not compete on a level playing field when it comes to accessing finance, or how they may be held back by societal norms or laws. They indicate where the absence of disaggregated data in areas such as gender, disability and other statuses can lead to decisions that do not factor in different populations' unique needs and circumstances—and how to rectify those data gaps. It is work that has proven essential across ITC's efforts to make trade more inclusive, from the **SheTrades Initiative** to the new **Indigenous Peoples and Trade Strategy** to work supporting **refugees** to our participation in interagency working groups to make trade more **inclusive of persons with disabilities**.

The case studies in this section set out how Window 1 support is fuelling our interventions in support of inclusive trade, while turbocharging the work underway via our Window 2 project-specific grants. The highlights briefly summarized below give a further dimension to the various facets of how inclusive trade works in practice and what factors help make it possible.

2024 highlights

In **Eswatini**, gender-responsive trainings and coaching are helping business support organizations expand and adapt the services they offer women farmers, while a Household Profile Tool maps out the roles and responsibilities of women and men within farming households to better understand how gender dynamics impact agricultural productivity and household decision-making. The project is made possible through EU support and blends approaches from ITC's **Alliances for Action** model and the **SheTrades Initiative**.

In the **Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)**, ITC has worked with the ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs Network to develop a long-term vision and strategic plan.



SheTrades event for ASEAN Women Entrepreneurs' Network, Cambodia.



Indigenous woman entrepreneur speaking at session on 'Towards Ethical and Inclusive Trade', WTO Public Forum.

Gender and agriculture workshop at SheTrades event in Eswatini.



Value-Added Initiative to Boost Employment (VIBE) for Refugees, a project supporting refugees in Rwanda's agricultural sector.

It has also helped the network map out ways to put these ideas into practice through establishing partnerships, building financial sustainability and identifying areas for organizational strengthening. This work is made possible under by the United Kingdom-funded **SheTrades Commonwealth+ programme**.

The Value-Added Initiative to Boost Employment (VIBE) for Refugees is helping refugees in Rwanda's agricultural

sector that are producing value-added goods to connect to markets beyond their settlement areas, have more income opportunities, and be part of the value chain leading to international markets. With support from the Mastercard Foundation, the project has provided training sessions, helped SMEs connect with buyers and businesses from other locations and built awareness with value chain actors and support institutions.

Case study

'Her success, our future':

How SheTrades is changing the game for women in trade



The United Arab Emirates was the inaugural donor to the WTO-ITC Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund.

For decades, women's economic empowerment and trade policy and practice have often been treated as separate issue areas. Trade, for its part, was often treated as being agnostic regarding its impacts on different segments of society, with related laws, regulations, treaties and practices developed accordingly.

This situation has changed dramatically amid a growing recognition that trade—including related areas, from digital economy to public procurement—can and does affect women and men differently. Women and men seeking to own or lead their own businesses, including those that wish to trade, often face very different scenarios when it comes to their respective abilities to access finance, digital tools and platforms, public tenders and knowledge that relates to their work.

Since its inception in 2015, the SheTrades Initiative has worked to ensure more women-led businesses can reap the full benefits of trade. It has done so through partnerships with donors, corporations, financial institutions, business support organizations and policymakers.

This work has been made possible through ITC's core extrabudgetary funders, whose support plays an integral role in scaling up SheTrades. The foundational work made possible by these donors, known collectively as Window 1 funders, then underpins further work both on the ground and on the international stage, supported by specific project grants from additional partners.

Examples include the SheTrades partnership programme, which has attracted funding from the likes of UPS, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) and VISA, along with the SheTrades Hubs network, which has received financial support from the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and Mastercard Foundation, among others.

One of the SheTrades Initiative's big objectives in 2024 was to bring women entrepreneurs to the centre of some of the biggest global forums dealing with economic policymaking—while making sure that people making policy decisions could hear firsthand from the women these decisions affect.

The timing could not have been more apt: February 2024 saw the hosting of the WTO's Thirteenth Ministerial Conference, the organization's highest decision-making body, in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

While trade and women's economic empowerment are usually not part of the formal ministerial conference agendas, they are increasingly part of policy discourse in the halls of the WTO, particularly given the work underway by several members within the Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender, the WTO's Gender Research Hub, and the work of organizations such as ITC.

To make sure women's economic empowerment was top of mind for trade ministers and senior officials attending the Abu Dhabi conference, the WTO and ITC hosted a High-Level Event and SheTrades Summit in the days immediately prior to the negotiations.

The event was the first of its kind to take place on the margins of a WTO ministerial conference, bringing together women entrepreneurs, business leaders and representatives from across the spectrum of economic activity to showcase their work and make their case to policymakers about why gender considerations must be part of economic policy decisions.

In other words, it was a chance for a meeting of different communities—and ultimately a meeting of the minds.

By the numbers, the WTO-ITC High-Level Event brought together 319 participants from 74 countries, including

142 women-led businesses. One of the highlights was the SheTrades Innovation Festival, which showcased young women pitching innovative solutions in various fields, including assistive technologies for people with disabilities, environmental sustainability, freelancing opportunities for young refugees and market information for farmers.

Masterclasses, panel discussions and networking events gave the international trade policy community a chance to witness what women's economic empowerment looks like for themselves just before heading into their negotiating rooms.

Women-led businesses reported afterwards that the masterclasses and networking opportunities would help them make better use of their intellectual property rights, adopt more sustainable practices, engage with more business support organizations and develop a greater presence online.

Overall, 9 in 10 respondents to a post-event survey confirmed that the time in Abu Dhabi had served to increase their knowledge about how best to scale their businesses — including what tools, skills and connections they would need to do so.

'We're leaving with a wealth of information, but above all with more hope and confidence,' said Marieme Aissatou Ndiaye of Senegal-based Felir Design.

The event, Marieme said, gave participants the chance to gain 'many tools and contacts that will enable us to be more professional and efficient in the management of our business, but above all to have the capacity to increase our visibility and presence on the international stage'.

Those days in Abu Dhabi also featured the early phases of two major institutional pushes to change how decision makers around the world approach public procurement and the digital economy. One of these was the soft-launch together with Chile of a new endeavour dedicated to gender-responsive public procurement, ahead of the official kick-off of a global campaign on the subject during the 68th session of the Commission on the Status of Women in March in New York City.

The [campaign](#) aims to tackle one of the biggest sources of economic opportunities for women-led businesses, and one that often remains out of their grasp.

The global public procurement market is worth roughly \$13 trillion, according to the World Bank, and can account for 10%–15% of developed countries' gross domestic product and up to 40% for developing countries. Today, however, only 1% of public contracts are awarded to businesses owned by women, World Bank data confirm.

The campaign aims to mobilize support for making public procurement more gender-responsive on behalf of both countries and organizations. Countries are also encouraged to make pledges outlining the steps they will take to make the playing field more level for women-led and women-owned businesses wishing to bid for government contracts.

Lastly, and critically, it aims to raise international awareness of the value gender-responsive public procurement (GRPP) can have for everyone, given the

need for goods and services to reflect the full needs and experiences of a society.

As of January 2025, the campaign had received 24 statements of support from governments and international organizations. It also received five pledges from countries — Australia, Bangladesh, Canada, the Dominican Republic and Ecuador — on steps they are taking to make public procurement more gender-responsive.

'The launch of the... gender-responsive public procurement [campaign] is a testament to the fact that we can work to achieve gender economic equality one policy at a time,' said the Rt Hon Patricia Scotland KC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth. 'The Commonwealth Secretariat supports this initiative and will continue to promote GRPP across all platforms and work programmes.'

The campaign has been paired with close collaboration with fellow United Nations agencies and divisions, including the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) and the United Nations Department of Operational Support (UNDOS), to deliver trainings to women-led businesses on United Nations procurement processes and related opportunities, with more than 1,100 women trained.

Events on gender-responsive public procurement have also taken place at WTO headquarters since the campaign's launch, including at meetings of the WTO Committee on Government Procurement and the WTO Public Forum.

Finally, those days in Abu Dhabi also witnessed the kick-off of a new fund that aims to make the digital economy more accessible to women entrepreneurs around the world. The Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund is a joint WTO–ITC initiative, aiming to make sure more women-led businesses can benefit from the digital economy through grants and technical assistance.

As of January 2025, the fund had received financial support from the Government of the United Arab Emirates, which was its inaugural donor, as well as from the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Legacy Fund™.

The WEIDE Fund has launched its first call for applications, receiving more than 600 responses from BSOs in developing countries. Four were selected in early 2025 to collaborate with WEIDE to roll out grants and technical assistance programmes for women entrepreneurs in their countries. The WEIDE Fund is already seeking out new partnerships, especially with the private sector, to support its activities.



FUNDERS

Overall SheTrades, Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Iceland; Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates)

WEIDE

United Arab Emirates, FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 Legacy Fund™.

Case study

Charting new horizons at home and abroad: Uganda's Youth Startup Academy



Ugandan entrepreneurs sign \$100,000 investment deal with Korean venture capitalist.

Start-ups are increasingly taking hold across Uganda's economic landscape, spanning sectors from agritech to sustainability to healthcare. While creating innovative solutions that meet local and international needs, they are also creating another critical benefit for the country's economy: namely, as a source of new jobs for more Ugandan youth.

The country's working-age youth population — defined as those between 15 and 24 years old — that are not in school, working or in some sort of training stands at just over 4 million, or more than 42% of all people in that age bracket, according to Uganda's National Population and Housing Census for 2024.

The country's burgeoning start-up ecosystem is well-positioned to help change that. But to get there means ensuring that more start-ups can grow and compete — and fast.

The Republic of Korea has a long tradition of supporting youth entrepreneurs as they start and develop their businesses. For example, its Korea SMEs and Startups Agency (KOSME), which sits within the Ministry of SMEs and Startups of Korea, has hosted a renowned training programme known as the Youth Startup Academy for more than 13 years.

The Korean-based academy has proven so successful that international partners have sought to see how this model might be replicated and adapted to serve aspiring youth entrepreneurs in other countries, including in Uganda.

With the support of KOSME, a Kampala-headquartered version of the academy has now been in place for nearly three years. ITC implemented the academy alongside

key local partners, including co-working hub Hive Colab and Uganda's National Information Technology Authority, which have deep links to the start-up community.

The activities of the Youth Startup Academy Uganda (YSAU) are manifold. The primary objective, as with its Korean counterpart, is to train young entrepreneurs in everything they need for their start-up to thrive, from finance to pitching to exporting. Participants undergo a full-fledged bootcamp, followed by the pre-incubation and incubation stages, before graduation.

'Before joining the Youth Startup Academy Uganda programme, we weren't sure if we could ever become investment-ready or qualify for funding,' said Anatoli Kirigwajjo, the founder of Yunga Technologies. 'However, through YSAU's expert training and mentorship, we transformed our business, gained critical investment-readiness skills, and connected with a powerful network of investors and mentors.'

Anatoli credited these opportunities to major growth, both in funding and in customers, with Yunga Technologies now reaching 3,600 households — up from 400. New markets have also opened up in South Africa and Democratic Republic of the Congo, and the company now has a start-up visa to work in the Republic of Korea.

The academy has helped many start-ups make connections between Korean and Ugandan entrepreneurs, leading to new partnership opportunities. For instance, the Ugandan company M-SCAN has made it its mission to ensure that pregnant women in rural areas can have access to ultrasounds, which are critical for foetal and maternal health. Its portable ultrasound devices have been distributed in several remote areas of the country, already



ITC's local partner in Uganda, Hive Colab, signing partnership MoU with Korean AI company.

Tua company presenting products to the Korean ambassador to Uganda at the Uganda Manufacturers Association (UMA) International Trade Fair.



changing the medical landscape for the better.

Not only did Phyllis Kyomuhendo, one of the company's co-founders, graduate from the Youth Startup Academy herself, but the programme helped make it possible for M-SCAN to connect with a Korean business that could help provide critical hardware for its products, improving the quality of the final devices.

'At a time where many entrepreneurship support programmes would stop at referrals, the YSAU programme proved to be refreshingly different,' Phyllis said. 'YSAU has not only given referrals but has gone the extra mile to help us sift through potential partners, foster in-person meetings with them and even facilitate our pilot project with the potential partners through the YSAU donation.'

Supporting Uganda's youth-led start-ups also means ensuring they have the necessary recognition to operate effectively at home. That is why the project has involved close collaboration with the Uganda National Bureau of Standards to help more than 200 businesses become formally registered.

Since kicking off in June 2022, the Youth Startup Academy Uganda has served 1,129 start-ups to date — well exceeding its initial goal of serving 1,000 youth entrepreneurs by 2024. The fourth cohort of start-ups graduated in November 2024.

These start-ups have already achieved fast and lasting results: in terms of livelihoods, they have created 3,700 jobs and counting, with a 58% jump in full-time jobs and even greater increases in the number of part-time jobs, which have grown by 105% since the academy began. Overall, participating start-ups have achieved \$7 million in sales since taking part in the academy — while attracting nearly \$3 million in investments.

The academy has also helped these entrepreneurs take part in international events where they can meet new business contacts, engage with potential investors, gain

exposure for their companies and learn more about different market opportunities.

Some Youth Startup Academy Uganda participants recently travelled to the Republic of Korea for the COMEUP 2024 festival in Seoul — the largest start-up festival of its kind in the country.

From trips to the United Arab Emirates so academy participants can take part in major tech and start-up shows such as GITEX Dubai, to visits to local trade fairs closer to home in Uganda, the programme has continued to help young entrepreneurs in sectors as varied as fintech, healthcare technology, agritech and energy forge new links with potential partners — while showcasing the country's vibrant, robust start-up ecosystem.

Now well into its third year, the academy has already set its sights on the long term. Training-of-trainers programmes for Hive Colab staff on topics such as fundraising and venture capital are ensuring that future academy participants will continue to access best-in-class guidance. Meanwhile, the site where the academy takes place has undergone an extensive renovation to continue serving the start-up community effectively.

The academy model, for its part, is also being trialled in other locations. In Colombia, for instance, a local version kicked off in 2024, with the support of KOSME and with implementation being undertaken by ITC and Colombian government agencies and ministries.



FUNDERS

Republic of Korea, Window 1
(Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

Case study

Stars of the silver screen: A new generation of Ugandan film professionals takes to the stage



Young Ugandan filmmakers working on a series.

Uganda's film industry, sometimes called 'Ugawood' or 'KinaUganda', has gone from strength to strength in recent years, with many filmmakers, actors, screenwriters and producers channelling their time and talents into cinematic projects known both at home and abroad.

But for young people still looking to make their mark on the Ugandan and international cinema scenes, the road can often be challenging: job opportunities can be scarce, training opportunities limited and connections to other film markets difficult to find.

A programme called Opportunities Are Here has been laying the groundwork to make it possible for more of Uganda's aspiring film professionals to thrive in the creative industries. Funded by the European Union, the project has been underway since 2019 and was previously active in Côte d'Ivoire and Kenya.

Opportunities Are Here brings together film professionals from all walks of cinematic life for hands-on training and coaching. These cover topics that span the full breadth and depth of the filmmaking experience: from pitching film projects to get the necessary financial backing, to protecting intellectual property rights, to building a public profile for their work through multimedia outreach and marketing.

Participants also have the chance to compete on a reality television series, named after the programme and aired on national television in primetime, where they get exposure to new audiences and contacts—along with feedback from celebrity judges from both the local film sector and abroad.

The programme has already been responsible for creating or supporting 1,813 jobs for Ugandan filmmakers. Its reputation has earned it contributions worth \$170,000 of in-kind support from partners, along with extensive coverage by online and printed media, with more than 700 posts that include commentary via social networks.

Participants from the television programme's seasons say Opportunities Are Here is changing not just how they understand the inner workings of the industry, but also how they envision their own cinematic futures.

'Opportunities Are Here has made me realize that filmmaking is not just about holding a camera: it is a business that we need to invest in,' said Elly Debuni, one of the winners of the TV show's second season. 'They helped me learn that if you are good at something, you can earn from it.'

The programme is also spurring a surge in creative outputs, with more than 276 audiovisual projects being made and circulated in local, regional and international markets. Nearly two dozen events have brought together the wider Uganda film community—from creators to buyers to fans—to connect, share their experiences and embark on new ventures.

'Before I joined this project, I was a hustling filmmaker shooting with my phone,' said Emmanuel Ilungole, one of the finalists of Opportunities Are Here Season 1, who goes by the nickname Emma. 'Now I have had a chance to shoot with professional cameras. Now people know that there is someone called Emma who makes films, not just my friends.'



Gaetano Kagwa, Cleopatra Koheirwe, Nana Kagga and Michael Wawuyo Jr. were judges and mentors of Opportunities Are Here Season 2.



The premiere of the anthology series 'Ugandan Superheroes' created by beneficiaries of Opportunities Are Here Season 2.



Nana Kagga, EU Ambassador to Uganda Jan Sadek, Dakore Egbuson, Cleopatra Koheirwe, Gaetano Kagwa name Nodryn Evanci as a winner of Opportunities Are Here Season 1. © Kabanda Samuel Kines

The interactions with other early-career filmmakers in the programme are leading to new creative partnerships. Some have even teamed up to create their own film company, known as McVore Studio O2.

Founded by seven of the programme's participants from Season 2, McVore Studio O2 has already received investments of 10 million Ugandan shillings (about \$2,700) for commercial work. A feature film is also on the way, with the idea inspired from a superhero-themed episode developed by programme participant Colline Manirahari for the Opportunities Are Here TV show's Season 2 finale.

Other participants have seen their careers flourish since taking part in the programme, thanks to the skills and exposure they have gained — leading to new opportunities, such as the chance to join writing teams for Hollywood-based film projects or take part in movies in other film markets. One such participant is Nodryn Evanci, who won Opportunities Are Here Season 1 and is both an actress and a filmmaker. Joining the programme was the logical next step in bringing to bear a lifelong dream.

'As a child, I always watched movies,' she said, reminiscing about theatre visits with family members during school holidays. She later realized that she wanted to become a producer — but needed to learn how.

'I had a story, but things weren't adding up, so Opportunities Are Here gave me the opportunity,' Nodryn said. 'The fact that it was not just about acting, but writing, producing... yes, everything filmmaking. So it was the best, best chance for me to produce.'

Nodryn's film *Half Chocolate Half Vanilla*, funded and incubated by the programme, was part of the official selection for the 2024 Silicon Valley African Film Festival

and won in the category of 'Best Short Film' at the 2024 Pearl International Film Festival, among other accolades. It will be screened at California State University-Chico, even as new opportunities keep coming Nodryn's way.

She has already secured an acting role in a feature film being made in Rwanda and was hired to serve as the operations manager for the second edition of the Kampala Slum Mobile Cinema Festival — the same festival where she was named 'Best Emerging Filmmaker' for *Half Chocolate Half Vanilla* in 2024. More recently, Nodryn was chosen to participate in the Movies that Matter festival in the Netherlands in 2025.

Looking ahead, Opportunities Are Here is committed to expanding its impact by strengthening international partnerships, enhancing market access for young creatives and scaling its model to new regions. The project aims to leverage digital platforms and strategic collaborations to increase visibility and sustainability, ensuring long-term opportunities for emerging talent. With a growing network of industry stakeholders, Opportunities Are Here will continue to serve as a catalyst for job creation, skills development and regional trade in the creative industries.



FUNDER
European Union

Green trade



Crises like climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss — known in environmental circles as a ‘triple crisis’ — are increasingly making their impacts felt throughout the world. One of the driving factors behind these crises is economic activity, which is why it is critical that trade and the private sector contribute effectively to solving these challenges, rather than making them worse.

Governments, SMEs and other value chain stakeholders have taken this to heart. Trade-related environmental regulations are becoming increasingly common as a tool in a larger policy toolbox, as governments look to ensure that their supply chains do not contribute to environmental harm. Meanwhile, many key agricultural commodities are seeing an increase in the areas certified under sustainability standards, reflecting producers’ efforts to make their practices more environmentally sound, along with demand from buyers and consumers for sustainably-produced goods.

From advocating for SMEs to have a seat at the table in environmental decision-making forums like the **United Nations Climate Change Conferences** to developing

online platforms like the **Deforestation-Free Trade Gateway** and **Standards Map** that can help producers and other supply chain stakeholders navigate new regulations and standards, ITC has been working to help position small firms as drivers of the green transition. Events like the annual **Trade for Sustainable Development Forum**, held in Bern, Switzerland, in 2024, provide a space where policymakers and private sector actors alike can examine how SMEs contribute to sustainable development and what they need most to thrive.

This work is vital for our interventions on the ground and is made possible thanks to the dedicated support of ITC’s core Window 1 extrabudgetary funders. The case studies in this section set out how this Window 1 support is pivotal for the freely accessible online platforms, research, advocacy and capacity building that will help make a more environmentally sustainable world possible. They also show how this work provides the foundation for our project-specific interventions supported by Window 2 grants, including some of those briefly summarized below, to deliver on their full potential.



Young ecopreneurs at UNCCD COP16's Business4Land Forum Land of Opportunities Pitch Competition, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

A HALBA team from Switzerland undertook field visit to see how farms work with the Sankofa project.



Youth ecopreneur Fernando de Lucca from Ceres Seeding at YECO Awards pitch competition.



ProtofabTT, an innovative green tech company, has created the SolarPonix garden tower.
© Ancel B

2024 highlights

The **Ye! Youth Ecopreneur** programme for young business leaders with environmental solutions has now been expanded to include a global bootcamp and accelerator phase, in addition to the longstanding awards. A joint endeavour by ITC, the G20 Global Land Initiative, the World Intellectual Property Organization, Sidley Austin LLP, and Google Startup for Sustainable Development, the 2024 edition had over 850 applications from 100 countries.

The **Sankofa** project in **Ghana** has helped small-scale farmers in the cocoa sector develop dynamic agroforestry practices, helping them build greater resilience to climate change, while diversifying their crops and increasing incomes. This project incorporates the Alliances for Action model and is funded by HALBA and the Max Havelaar

Foundation Switzerland, and implemented together with Fairtrade Africa, COOP Supermarkets, Kuapa Kokoo Farmers' Union, the Government of Ghana and the Swiss Platform for Sustainable Cocoa, among other partners.

In **Trinidad and Tobago**, support through the United Kingdom Trade Partnerships programme has helped ProtofabTT, a Trinbagonian company, in developing portable, AI-ready, and solar-powered towers for people to use when growing herbs, along with root and other vegetables, at home. The towers have a zero-toxin pest deterrence system. They have also benefitted schools and institutions and have served persons with disabilities. A pilot programme using these towers in Burkina Faso is underway.

Case study

Shaping the response to the climate crisis:

Small businesses in the spotlight at COP29



KOBİA, SEBRAE and ITC signed first-of-its-kind declaration to facilitate the green transition of SMEs at COP29.

Small and medium-sized enterprises around the world already live with the costs of climate change. Whether they are seeing their businesses harmed from climate-induced natural disasters, adapting their daily practices to shifting weather patterns or working to lower their greenhouse gas emissions, firms across sectors must reconsider their futures amid an increasingly pronounced climate crisis.

SMEs produce 40%–60% of greenhouse gas emissions and they make up the vast majority of companies in any country. They are also driving ground-breaking innovations in climate change mitigation and adaptation, while serving as pivotal contributors to the global supply chains that must decarbonize to fight global warming.

Yet these firms often struggle to obtain the support they need—be it skills, finance, technical expertise or other resources—to engage effectively in the green transition.

Another common challenge for SMEs is ensuring that their needs and concerns are made known to policymakers, from the national to the international levels, that are crafting responses to the climate crisis. One space where SMEs have been absent as a recognized constituency until recently has been United Nations climate conferences, known as Conferences of the Parties (COPs), which bring together the parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

The private sector has been present at these forums for several years. However, the emphasis historically was mainly on the role of large corporations in tackling climate change, even though these firms have different needs and circumstances than their smaller counterparts.

ITC has been working to change that, thanks to the support of its core extrabudgetary funders under Window 1. Since 2022, it has brought delegations of SMEs and business support organizations to United Nations climate negotiations to share their perspectives and experiences,

while providing thought leadership on SME issues that can help inform the climate talks themselves.

Trade policy has also largely been outside UNFCCC conversations and negotiations, with the notable exception of response measures and carbon markets. The same applies to governments' nationally determined contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement. NDCs mention trade measures outright only infrequently, according to ITC analysis, though data from UNCTAD indicate that several NDCs have measures that allude to trade indirectly.

Today, the separate worlds of climate change and trade policy are now increasingly beginning to converge. For instance, since COP28 in 2023, there has been a dedicated pavilion on trade issues at the climate conferences, co-hosted by ITC, the WTO, UNCTAD and the ICC. The Export and Investment Promotion Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan (AZPROMO) joined the co-hosting agencies for the expanded pavilion in 2024, which covered both trade and investment.

COP28 also marked the first United Nations climate conference where a COP presidency organized a thematic day on trade. This was repeated in 2024 and expanded to include investment and finance.

And with governments now developing their next round of NDCs ahead of COP30 in Brazil, ITC released at the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29) in Baku, Azerbaijan, detailed guidance for how trade could be incorporated more directly in these 'NDCs 3.0,' along with how SME issues and perspectives could be integrated effectively.

To further make the case for why SMEs must shape the response to the climate crisis, ITC brought several small business leaders to COP29.

These included a bilum weaver and fibre artist from Papua New Guinea, the creator of a digital waste management platform from Nigeria, a BSO representative from Tajikistan working to make climate finance more accessible to local firms, a Brazilian entrepreneur using drones to support land restoration and a Pakistani entrepreneur working to make banana fibres a viable and more sustainable alternative to their non-degradable equivalents.

‘COP29 was a transformative experience,’ said Phebe Olamide Ilesanmi of the Nigerian digital waste management platform Trashcoin. ‘I gained a deeper understanding of global climate policies, especially how public and private sectors can collaborate to drive sustainable solutions. I also sharpened my networking skills, connecting with industry leaders and policymakers, which broadened my perspective on scaling climate innovations.’

The goal was to ensure these SMEs had the opportunity to make the case to climate negotiators and the wider climate community directly. An experiential pavilion in Baku gave COP29 participants the chance to see some of the climate innovations that these SMEs and others are putting into practice.

TED-style talks and a dedicated SME blog and videos complemented the outreach, alongside a full-fledged campaign through social and traditional media, with COP29 posts on ITC’s corporate LinkedIn page reaching a high of 232,000 impressions.

‘I gained a deeper understanding of how we can empower small and medium-sized businesses to adopt green technologies, improve resource efficiency and contribute to the global effort to combat climate change,’ said Nilufari Farrukhi of the National Association of Small and Medium Business of the Republic of Tajikistan.

‘Additionally, I now recognize the need to create tailored solutions that facilitate access to climate financing for SMEs, ensuring they have the tools and support to integrate climate action into their business strategies.’

The work did not end there. A notable aspect of ITC’s advocacy and engagement efforts at COP29 involved its role in the Baku Initiative for Climate Finance, Investment and Trade (BICFIT) Dialogue, an initiative spearheaded by the Azerbaijani COP presidency and where ITC is coordinating the SME-focused pillar.

The dialogue, co-facilitated by UNCTAD and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and featuring a host of other partners, including the WTO, aims to create a space for sharing ideas, knowledge and best practices for how trade, investment and finance can support the work underway under the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

This includes UNFCCC parties’ work on their NDCs, as well as their national adaptation plans and long-term low-emission development strategies.

Another major step on the SME front at COP29 was the signing of the Joint Declaration on Baku Climate Coalition for SMEs Green Transition by ITC, the Brazilian Micro and Small Enterprise Support Service (SEBRAE) and the Small and Medium Business Development Agency (KOBİA) of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

The declaration, designed to better position SMEs as critical players in tackling the climate crisis, was paired with letters of intent between ITC and the two respective BSOs for putting this work into practice.

As part of the COP29 agenda, the High-Level Climate Champion advanced the Greening of SMEs Campaign, which aims to help 1 million SMEs slash emissions, boost climate resilience, and improve resource efficiency by decade’s end. The campaign also seeks to mobilize \$1 billion in green finance and help make possible 1,000 partnerships. ITC joined the campaign in 2024, contributing through the Sustainability Faculty of its longstanding e-learning service, SME Trade Academy. This new faculty provides training and tools to help SMEs adopt low-carbon, nature-positive business models. ITC’s involvement focuses on strengthening the campaign’s capacity-building pillar and promoting inclusive climate action across global value chains.

With the conversation around trade and SMEs still a relative novelty in the COP space, ITC also worked at COP29 to advance the knowledge base around the role trade can and must play in climate change mitigation and adaptation. New research, for instance, highlighted how trade policy can support the greater deployment of renewable energy, drawing from the experiences of seven developing countries.

In parallel, ITC also held workshops on the Green Performance Toolkit—launched the previous year at COP28—to help SMEs monitor and evaluate their environmental sustainability efforts. Other contributions included papers on the integration of SMEs into sustainable socio-bioeconomies.

In a global landscape where economic uncertainty, climate-induced disasters and disruptions, and volatile markets remain the order of the day, SMEs face mounting challenges to stay competitive and resilient. ITC is committed to ensuring that their voices and solutions are not only heard but shape the agenda, particularly with COP30 holding the potential to be the COP *da Virada*—a turning point where inclusive, nature-positive, and SME-driven climate action can take centre stage.



FUNDERS

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

Case study

Deforestation-free value chains: New online portal set to bridge information gap



Environmental challenges are increasingly putting lives, livelihoods and economic growth at risk around the world. As a result, many governments are turning to trade-related environmental regulations to tackle these problems through their supply chains, aiming to spur faster changes in how people produce and consume.

Deforestation is one of these challenges, exacerbated by the production and trade of agricultural commodities, if not done sustainably. According to the World Resources Institute, 3.7 million hectares of [tropical primary forest](#) were lost in 2023 — a figure made even more striking given the essential role forests play as carbon sinks, as a key source of livelihoods for 1.6 billion people and as host to crucial biodiversity.

This has placed governments enacting trade-related environmental regulations in a position where they must navigate complex situations: namely, how to craft regulations that are effective in addressing environmental ills, while ensuring producers across value chains know what they must do to comply and have the means to do so.

Otherwise, smaller firms in producer countries may find themselves cut out of global value chains completely, even when they have sustainable practices in place or would do so if they had the right resources and skills.

That is why ITC and its partners have been working for the past few years to help make sure these regulations — including the European Union Regulation on Deforestation-free products (EUDR) — deliver on their promise for mitigating environmental harm, without shutting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) from producer countries out of their target markets.

The support of ITC's core extrabudgetary funders, known as Window 1, has been critical for making this work possible, from the early days of raising awareness and sensitizing people to the different potential impacts of EUDR to more recent steps for developing technology platforms that actors across different value chains can use.

This support, paired with project-specific grants from funders such as the European Union, has also had another benefit: it has opened up avenues for all key actors across the value chain to come together on a regular basis, including farmers, processors, brokers, standards bodies, buyers and government officials.

These conversations have often taken the form of roundtables, allowing for sharing experiences across value chains and the chance to brainstorm solutions, such as where accompanying measures may be needed. They have also been informed by experiences from many of ITC's projects on the ground, working with SMEs in commodities including palm oil, cattle, rubber, soya and wood that all experience high demand in the European market and are highly exposed to the EUDR.

'The International Trade Centre is helping us in collecting coffee from all small-scale farmers with traceable coffee gardens,' said Batte Abubaker, coordinator of Ugandan-based social enterprise Ndugu, which connects coffee cooperatives with aggregators. 'It enables us to comply with global coffee market requirements such as the EUDR. We are strengthened to develop and expand our cooperatives, benefiting from good price deals and premium quality.'

More recently, ITC has developed a series of [handbooks that producers](#) can use to comply with the EUDR; [a checklist](#) to help producers assess the different tools and technological solutions available for supporting EUDR compliance; and [free online courses](#) on the EUDR, from basic concepts to proving compliance.

'Given that 60% of Uganda's coffee is exported to the European Union, and it is a source of income for over two million farmers, that is a big backbone that feeds so many households,' said Agume Bless, director of operations at the Ndugu coffee cooperative and a coffee SME investor. ITC's support, he added, has been vital for making sure these coffee exports can continue making it to the European market.



ITC and EU delegation in El Salvador visit coffee plantation from Cajamarca Estate in El Salvador's Nejapa district.

El Carmen Estate barista serving speciality coffee from ancestral clay pot in Concepción de Ataco, El Salvador.



Deforestation-Free Trade Gateway online platform.

Looking ahead, a recently launched online platform known as the Deforestation-Free Trade Gateway is set to make it easier for everyone along the value chain to share data, connect on solutions and ensure complying with the spirit and the letter of the EUDR is as seamless as can be. Made possible through support from ITC's Window 1 core extrabudgetary funders, it has functionalities designed for the specific needs of every value chain actor.

Producers, cooperatives and exporters can take part in the registry and data hub, so EU operators can access the right data on compliance while keeping data ownership in the hands of those who shared it. Mapping solutions and standards will help make it easier to assess land use more accurately and understand how efforts to address deforestation and protect tree cover are working in practice. Buyers will have access to data solutions designed to help them meet the requirements of the EU Information System for due diligence statements.

Looking ahead, more ITC projects will incorporate the gateway into their offerings for SMEs, BSOs and other value chain actors. Work is already planned in countries

across Latin America and the Caribbean to help support evidence-gathering to prove that products in these regions were not sourced from areas where deforestation has taken place or forests have otherwise degraded. The gateway will also be integrated in work ITC has underway in East Africa to develop a range of priority value chains.

Under the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP), ITC has been working closely with public and private sector actors in East African Community (EAC) countries to strengthen data collection practices, build capacity for EUDR compliance and introduce practical tools to ensure traceability from farm to export.

The Deforestation-Free Trade Gateway is now being scaled across several EAC countries, starting with the coffee sector, to streamline geolocation data collection, support risk assessments and enable secure and interoperable data sharing with EU buyers. This rollout includes targeted training for cooperatives and exporters and integration with national systems where feasible, to ensure long-term sustainability and uptake.



FUNDER

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

Case study

Mora producers in Ecuador eye new horizons and new markets



Ángel Matavaca, blackberry farmer from SME Nutri Frut in Guantug Cruz, Bolívar, Ecuador.

Ecuador's agricultural export sector has long been dominated by a traditional basket of goods, such as bananas or cocoa. The economic shocks of recent years, however, have reinforced the urgency of diversifying this export basket to include exotic, or non-traditional, fruits where Ecuador has clear potential—goods that are also critical to the livelihoods of producers in rural areas in the country's poorer provinces.

Targeting the non-traditional fruit sector, ITC's NEXT Ecuador project aims to build farmer productivity and competitiveness; facilitate connections to markets; ensure quality and sustainability of produce in the global marketplace; and establish stronger relationships among farmers as well as with lead firms and local institutions. The work is made possible thanks to the support of the European Union.

Among these non-traditional exports are the Andean blackberry—known in Spanish as *mora de Castilla*, renowned for its sweet flavour and ideal for making frozen pulp—along with yellow pitahayas (dragon fruit), plantains, Hass avocado, baby bananas and granadillas. These fruits, and their subproducts, are experiencing growing demand in international markets, as well as locally.

Since late 2022, ITC has worked with *mora* producers from the communities of Guantug Cruz, Palma Loma and Chillanes, all in the Andean province of Bolívar, to help them become more competitive, and thus benefit from these market opportunities. These farmers are also Indigenous Peoples, with many participating producers being women.

To make increased productivity possible, the project focused heavily on technical assistance and

capacity-building support, along with the provision of key inputs, such as plastic crates for transport and product protection, as well as brush cutters, pruning shears, *mora* plants, guides and gloves.

The project's support targeted not just quantity, but quality. For instance, the project team has worked closely with producers in adopting more innovative farming techniques to reduce their reliance on chemical pesticides. These techniques were designed to put farmers on a path to obtain certifications such as G.A.P. (Good Agricultural Practices), denoting food safety and quality.

Another major hurdle that producers faced, both for growth and for export, was the lack of connections to markets and to formal buyers—and the infrastructure and services to get their products to markets in the first place.

A linchpin of the project's approach has been to strengthen producers' organizational capacities, making it possible for them to partner with market-facing lead firms. This put them in a better position to connect with buyers and markets, pool their resources, obtain better prices and ensure a more stable supply. Also critical has been the creation of field schools—in close collaboration with local institutions—to train 27 farmers and five technical leads, who can then pass on their knowledge to others.

These field schools brought together experts and students from the Bolívar State University (Universidad de Bolívar, or UEB), as well as the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Ecuador (INIAP). The training was comprehensive: spanning six months, it covered topics such as sustainable production, quality standards, logistics, transport, commercialization and financial literacy.



Laura Rumiguano, a blackberry farmer from Guantug Cruz, and Wilson Torres, an intern from the Universidad Estatal de Bolívar, receive plants for practice during field school session.



Karina Merino, an intern from the Universidad Estatal de Bolívar, and Carmen Milán, a small-scale blackberry farmer from Guantug Cruz, participated in a field school session.

As of January 2025, the number of farmers taking part in the field schools had grown from the initial 27 participants to 100, hailing from four communities, with more than half from Guantug Cruz. These higher participation rates are creating greater resilience among the local farming sector against climate-related impacts and other threats, as farmers work more closely together to ensure they can meet commitments made to buyers.

Eight of the participating producers have obtained G.A.P. certification—an even more notable achievement given poor literacy rates in the communities. Meanwhile, the use of harmful chemicals among participating farmers has fallen by more than 60%. These producers are swapping harmful agrochemicals for organic products and other methods to protect harvests from pests and disease.

‘When the NEXT Ecuador project first arrived in my area, my crop was full of botrytis [a dangerous fungus], with my plants failing,’ said Aurelio Aucatoma, a *mora* producer in Guantug Cruz. ‘Thanks to the capacity-building support and technical assistance, this has changed. I’m now applying good agricultural practices, starting with the pruning and the staking, avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and focusing generally on the care of my crops.’

These interventions mean farmers can produce far greater quantities. Previously limited to 80 tons a year at most, they now produce 120–150 tons a year—up to a 67% increase. At the same time, they have limited the amount of product they must discard due to a lack of markets and buyers in certain seasons. Those losses are now down to just 20% of annual production at most, compared to 40% before.

A cold storage space that will be installed at a newly built collection centre—the first in the province—will make it possible to limit losses further. Farmers will be able to preserve any products not sold when *mora* prices are too low, which they can then sell in the off-season when production is scarce.

Mora producers say they now obtain better prices for their products. Previously varying widely between a maximum of \$1.50 per kilogram—often just during a month or so

each year, at times of scarcity—and a minimum of \$0 when their products had to be discarded due to a lack of buyers, prices are now far more predictable.

Joint sales climbed 91% to \$128,000 in 2024 from \$67,000 in 2023. With the creation of a community bank and an endowment of farm equipment and inputs that farmers can share, the group can now ensure that their incomes are more consistent and sustainable.

Working with two lead firms participating in NEXT Ecuador, *mora* farmers have obtained buyer guarantees ensuring that 40% of their harvest will be sold for at least \$0.90 per kilo and 40% of the harvest at \$1.30 per kilo. The remaining 20% of their output would be subject to market fluctuations. This amount—or more, if other farmers join on board—can even be sold in the off-season after the installation of the cold storage space.

‘This is the first time that we have received capacity-building support, workshops and support of this kind,’ said Vilma Runiguano, a *mora* producer from Guantug Cruz. ‘Now we are dreaming about not just selling our fruit in our own country, but also to get it to other countries, along with growing our business and making better futures possible for our families thanks to our *mora*.’

Looking to the future, the field schools are set to continue—and farmers in the Guantug Cruz community now have a wealth of supporting partners to choose from.

Along with the local EU delegation, Bolívar State University and the National Institute of Agricultural Research of Ecuador, Ecuador’s Ministry of Agriculture, the country’s food safety agency Agrocalidad, the municipality of Guaranda and the Bolívar Prefecture all have close ties to the community today, which previously had been absent.



FUNDER
European Union

Digital trade



More and more, being part of the digital economy is a precondition for business success. It can help businesses save valuable time and resources by reducing the need for paper-based transactions or by making it possible to complete key operational steps in one place. It can open new doors—and income streams—for people who have become displaced due to conflict or other factors. It can enable firms to connect with buyers and consumers on the other side of the world, helping them become more resilient to supply chain disruptions and other shocks.

With any wave of technological change, there are also pitfalls that firms must avoid, and the risk of inequalities growing between those who have been able to adopt digital tools and technologies and those who have not looms large.

That is why our upcoming edition of the **SME Competitiveness Outlook**, previewed in this Annual Report, puts digital transformation front and centre. This flagship report, also known as SMECO, is supported by our Window 1 core extrabudgetary funders, and is designed to keep its finger on the pulse of what issues and trends most affect SMEs' ability to grow, compete, and thrive. The **sneak preview** earlier in this report highlights what findings will be shared with SME ministers at the inaugural Global SME Ministerial in July 2025, as well as with the wider public.

It is also why ITC continues developing and updating new digital tools of its own. These include online support platforms like the **Global Trade Helpdesk** and e-learning platforms like the **SME Trade Academy**, which help exporters and others working in the world of international trade deepen their knowledge on what markets require, what trends are changing their fields of work and what tools could make production and export easier. Tools like these are among the global public goods that are ITC's calling card and are made possible thanks to the support of ITC's core extrabudgetary funders, known as Window 1.

These global public goods do far more than fill skills and knowledge gaps: they are also foundational for the work that ITC undertakes in-country to help entrepreneurs and SMEs become more tech-savvy, support tech startups as they come up with new product solutions that are commercially viable and facilitate governments' efforts to put in place the right enablers for a digital economy where everyone can thrive. The below examples typify how Window 1 support has benefited these Window 2-supported projects in practice, as illustrated in further depth in this section's case studies.



AI-generated characters illustrate case studies, scenarios in Risk Management online course.

Beneficiaries and partners at the country's first ever Game Dev Summit in February 2024, supported by ITC under the EU-funded ARISE Plus Philippines project.



Digital and freelance trading for MSMEs event in Ghana.



2024 highlights

In **Ghana**, ITC has been working with support from the Netherlands Trust Fund V to build the capacity of local business support organizations so they can provide services more tailored to the needs of tech startups.

In **Benin**, also with the support of the Netherlands Trust Fund, ITC has worked with rural entrepreneurs to build their digital marketing skills and their knowledge of related online tools, such as Google My Business and AI, focusing particularly on people working in the agro-industrial sector.

In the **Philippines**, the EU-funded Philippines: Trade-Related Assistance (ARISE+) programme has made it possible to support SMEs in the gaming sector through training, coaching on export marketing, market linkages and visits to European and other trade fairs and business-to-business events.

Case study

Taking the guesswork out of exporting: The Global Trade Helpdesk eyes new audiences



Launch of Global Trade Helpdesk in Bahasa Indonesia by the ICC Indonesia Centre of Entrepreneurship at JCI International Business Solutions Expo in Yogyakarta in 2024.

For small and medium-sized enterprises looking to trade, determining what markets are the best fit for their products is no small feat. It means consolidating information on everything from tariffs to regulations to market dynamics, many of which can change quickly and with little warning — leaving trade out of reach for many firms that lack the time or resources to parse through it all.

For the past five years, the Global Trade Helpdesk has sought to change all of that. This initiative, launched in December 2017 alongside the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Eleventh Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, has a clear and powerful mission: to make it easier for MSMEs to identify new export markets and determine what they require. The online platform was launched on MSME Day in June 2020.

Its work does not stop there: the Helpdesk also helps SMEs identify new opportunities for financing, potential buyers, regulatory requirements, distribution partners and more.

In the five years since its inception, the Helpdesk has become one of ITC's calling cards—one made possible thanks to extrabudgetary support from Switzerland and ITC's core Window 1 funders. In both its funding and its implementation, it is a team effort.

Along with ITC, 10 partner agencies are behind the Global Trade Helpdesk: UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD), the WTO, the World Bank Group, the Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), the African Development Bank (AfDB), the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Chamber of Commerce (ICC), the World Customs Organization (WCO), and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).

As with any online platform, it has continued to evolve to meet the demands of a growing audience—and to factor in an ever-changing suite of technological tools that is changing how businesses access information. In 2023, for instance, the Helpdesk expanded its coverage to help firms consider e-commerce opportunities, integrating information on 'de minimis' values (the minimum value that a good must have for duties to apply), transactional e-commerce marketplaces and digital payment methods.

Today, 300,000 users across 190 economies use the platform—and that number is growing. In 2024, the fastest-growing regions in terms of users were Africa and Asia.

The Helpdesk's track record has earned it the recognition of G20 trade and investment ministers, who, at their meeting in India in August 2023, recognized its contribution to helping more MSMEs trade. They named it in the Jaipur Call for Action for enhancing MSMEs' access to information, one of the annexes to their outcome document.

In Jaipur, ministers voiced their support for building on the Helpdesk's successes. They encouraged G20 economies to share more information with the Helpdesk that could help SMEs looking to trade abroad and made several recommendations of their own. These included a request for the Helpdesk to add to its language offerings—which already included English, Spanish, French, Portuguese, Russian and Arabic—so more small business leaders could access its resources in their local language.

Throughout 2024, the Global Trade Helpdesk has sought to do exactly that, working to make the platform more accessible in China and Indonesia, which are both home to millions of MSMEs—upwards of [52 million](#) in the former and more than [64 million](#) in the latter, according to government data.



ICC Indonesia integrated new Helpdesk in Bahasa Indonesia into Go Export Training with local entrepreneurs.



The Portuguese version of the GTH was launched in partnership with ApexBrasil in 2021.



Participants of Go Export program in Indonesia negotiating first buyer contracts at the Indonesia Trade Expo from markets identified using the Helpdesk.

The Helpdesk incorporated artificial intelligence-assisted translation to ensure users could access high-quality translations of the Global Trade Helpdesk's resources in Bahasa Indonesia and Chinese. The team also built close partnerships with the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade (CCPIT) and ICC Indonesia, which serves as the National Committee of Indonesia to the International Chamber of Commerce.

In turn, these BSOs, along with the China Electronics Chamber of Commerce (CECC), have been indispensable outreach partners, making sure the small business leaders and owners in their respective countries are aware of what the Global Trade Helpdesk has to offer and know how to use it.

The results are already paying dividends: in Indonesia, SMEs that joined the Go Export Training programme used the Global Trade Helpdesk to identify possible new markets — and upon attending the Indonesia Trade Expo, 8 out of 10 of these firms secured buyer contracts as a result.

'Our purpose is to empower Indonesian firms with the market intelligence they need to grow and be competitive in new markets,' said Nunki Juniarti, Head of the Centre of Entrepreneurship Jakarta Hub of ICC Indonesia. 'And, as we know, having updated and reliable information about the markets is one of the keys to success in international trade.'

The outreach efforts across China have been similarly far-reaching — and similarly successful. From trainings across a half-dozen Chinese cities to presentations at major trade shows such as the China International Supply Chain Expo, more than 1,300 participants from industries ranging from agriculture to pharmaceuticals to electronic vehicles have explored how the Helpdesk can support their growth.

Thus far, 84% of training participants surveyed said the Helpdesk had changed how they approach market research, and for the better — all in just a few months since the Chinese edition was launched in August 2024.

The Global Trade Helpdesk is also incorporating additional data with the support of these partners so the platform has the latest information on Chinese companies. A new Global Trade Helpdesk Service Station in Xiamen, China, for instance, is one example of these efforts, thanks to a collaboration with the China Electronics Chamber of Commerce.

'The multi-language version of the Global Trade Helpdesk provides a practical tool for global SMEs to explore international markets,' said Yao Xin, Secretary General of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade's Commercial Sub-council. 'It is also an essential tool for trade promotion organizations and management consulting agencies when conducting trade advisory services.'

Building on these successful enhancements and partnerships, the Global Trade Helpdesk is setting its sights on other ways to use new technologies, particularly artificial intelligence, to make the export research journey even simpler and more accessible for small businesses, while expanding its global network of ambassadors to include other BSOs.



FUNDERS

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, India, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

Case study

The SME Trade Academy:

Opening new doors through artificial intelligence



AI online course tutor.
© Shutterstock.com

The ins and outs of running a small or medium-sized enterprise are vast and ever-changing. They require knowledge of everything from logistics and transport to trade finance and intellectual property rights, even as new regulations, standards and technologies continue transforming the world of international trade and the needed skills.

Since its inception in 2014, the SME Trade Academy has had as its ethos the commitment to make best-in-class courses on trade accessible to everyone. Its work is made possible thanks to the support of ITC's extrabudgetary donors, allowing the academy to provide specialized training to people around the world while reducing aviation emissions from travel.

Over the years, the SME Trade Academy's catalogue of course offerings has grown to cover a wide range of topics, reflecting the various facets involved in starting or running a small or medium-sized business: everything from sustainability and entrepreneurship to e-commerce and market analysis. It also has courses designed to serve the needs of business support organizations, policymakers and trade professionals across different sectors and job types.

Delivering online courses has now become part of the educational norm—and not just in trade. Over the past 15 years, several studies have shown that asynchronous e-learning can be nearly as effective as in-person instruction in classrooms. The SME Trade Academy's online courses have borne this out in practice, with its course completion rates nearly twice the industry average.

But in today's increasingly fast-paced world, the SME Trade Academy team has been looking to ensure that its course offerings stay ahead of the curve—including how generative artificial intelligence can help students undertaking asynchronous online courses obtain support and feedback in real-time.

To determine what AI can make possible—and where its use is most suitable—the SME Trade Academy team decided to run a pilot training for a new cohort of students, taking its longstanding course on Raising Funds for Your Business and integrating three AI 'personas' into the learning journey.

The month-long course, which took place from late September to late October 2024, integrated ChatGPT-powered AI in different ways. It featured an AI tutor to guide participants through the learning experience and answer questions; an AI moderator, who would participate in the course's group forum, provide feedback and summarize students' inputs; and an AI grader, who would review and respond to participants' answers to short essay questions.

The pilot had 438 active registered users, with 86 completing the course and 78 earning a certificate. Participants hailed from more than 100 countries, with the highest enrolments and completions coming from Nigeria and Kenya.

'The AI-powered system allowed for a dynamic and conversational learning process, making the experience feel more like a personalized coaching session than a traditional online course,' one participant said after the course.



Avatar created for online courses and presented at the SME Trade Academy Forum.



AI-generated characters for the Risk Management online course. Images generated by Rendernet.



Nigerian entrepreneur Amaka Immaculata Anya improved her management skills after completing ITC's first AI-tutored course.

The SME Trade Academy team encouraged participants to weigh in on how these AI personas worked in different stages of the learning journey, identifying where they could be improved and where they were most effective.

‘The AI Grader’s timely and constructive feedback also played a crucial role in boosting my confidence, as it highlighted my strengths and guided me on areas that needed improvement,’ a participant confirmed.

Participants also shared valuable feedback on how to continue fine-tuning further AI-powered courses for future learners—such as by upgrading the AI personas, to the extent possible, or addressing potential bugs in the system, such as AI personas’ literal responses to certain questions.

Looking ahead, the SME Trade Academy team will work to see where future courses and modules might weave in AI functionalities from the outset, rather than solely adding them to existing courses. They are also identifying which courses are the best fit for AI-generated support—and which ones are better served by other approaches.

The AI tutor and moderator will become standard features across the full suite of e-learning courses. The short essay activities featuring AI-powered and AI-graded questions, however, will be integrated exclusively into advanced or extra credit activities for course participants—recognizing that not all students will be at a stage in their learning journeys to undertake these kinds of writing exercises. In 2025, these AI-powered questions will be tested further in courses aimed primarily at BSOs.

The goal, as ever, remains the same: to ensure that traditionally underserved communities can get top-tier training at the lowest cost—and, in turn, use what they learn to engage in international trade.



FUNDER

Window 1 (Canada, Germany, Ireland, Sweden, Switzerland)

Case study

Going digital:

Sri Lankan online certificate platform creates opportunities for SMEs



The e-certificate of origin system was recognized by the SLASSCOM Ingenuity Awards as the 'Best Innovative Product/Project in the Government Sector,' one of several accolades.

Faced with growing demands for faster, more efficient trade processes, Sri Lanka has taken decisive steps in recent years to modernize how its traders do business.

The COVID-19 pandemic made these efforts more urgent. After lockdowns and travel restrictions made it nearly impossible for businesses to access essential trade documents, officials saw that one particular process had become a major barrier: the preferential certificate of origin (CoO), which is used to determine a product's eligibility for tariff reductions under trade agreements.

Previously, getting a certificate of origin was a cumbersome, time-consuming and resource-heavy process. Traders had to navigate layers of paperwork while visiting multiple institutions, sometimes several times a day, to get a certificate issued and approved. For firms with limited resources, this process was not just inconvenient—it was often a deal-breaker for participating in international trade.

Working closely with Sri Lanka's Department of Commerce and Germany's Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ Sri Lanka), and with the support of the German Federal Ministry of Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), ITC has spent the past two years working to make the process simpler, cheaper and fully digital.

The impact has been immediate and far-reaching. Shifting from a manual to a digital system has helped traders cut by 93% the time spent applying for these certificates. No longer burdened by repeated trips across town or the need to assign staff to manage the paperwork, Sri Lankan businesses collectively now save more than \$3 million a year.

In parallel, transitioning away from a paper-based system has brought significant environmental benefits, considerably lowering the process' carbon footprint and saving trees.

This transformation has been made possible thanks to an inclusive and collaborative approach. From the outset, ITC and its partners engaged with more than 100 Sri Lankan businesses to understand fully the limitations and pitfalls of using the paper-based system. From there, they created together a platform that met the real needs of traders.

Having feedback directly from Sri Lankan firms helped ensure that the resulting digital platform was user-friendly and responded to the needs of the business community. Throughout the development phase, the Department of Commerce and selected companies extensively tested each module of the platform to ensure that it met real business needs while remaining secure and reliable.

After thorough preparations and troubleshooting, the e-Certificate of Origin system went live in late 2023, with the launch event presided over by then-Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe. It was one of several digital systems developed by ITC in collaboration with its partners to support Sri Lankan businesses, alongside three electronic payment gateways and a digital version of a system to register and monitor stakeholders.

Getting the certificates of origin platform online was not the end of the road. The next step was making sure the right support was in place for businesses transitioning to this new way of working. For the first three months after the launch, ITC made a 'helpdesk' service available to traders, with more than 1,200 companies getting support on how to obtain e-certificates of origin.



Launch of e-Certificate of Origin system, presided over by then-Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe.

Field visit of organic coconut farm.



Various Ceylon tea flavours from the brand Galgo Tea.



‘The e-CoO has revolutionized our operations at [the Department of Commerce], significantly boosting efficiency and optimizing resource allocation’, said Sanjeeva Pattiwila, Deputy Director of Commerce and Head of the Rules of Origin Division. ‘It has reduced time, cost and storage space, saving over 2.5 million Sri Lankan rupees (\$8,370) annually on paper costs and eliminating manual recordkeeping.’

From tracking staff performance to facilitating reporting, he credited the new system with enabling more informed and efficient decision-making. He also highlighted its enhanced security features, which help safeguard against tampering and fraud.

Companies agree that having this system in place is making a difference — especially now that certificates that once took at least a day to process can now be obtained online in 30 minutes or less.

‘We, as a group of companies, we obtain 300 to 350 certificates per month,’ said Nalaka Ratnayake, Deputy General Manager for Group Shipping Hayleys PLC. ‘With the previous process, we had to make six to seven visits per day to get the certificates. But now with this new digital platform, we do everything through the system itself.’

Since its launch, the accolades have kept rolling in. The system has now won three prestigious national awards. It was recognized by the SLASSCOM Ingenuity Awards 2024 as the ‘Best Innovative Product/Project in the Government Sector,’ winning at both the national level and for Sri Lanka’s western province.

It also won the Gold Award for Citizen Services and Digital Government in the public sector and government category of the National Best Quality ICT Awards (NBQSA) 2023, another Sri Lankan prize. Within ITC, it has won recognition as an innovative solution for trade-related technical assistance, as well as for its digital transformation bonafides.

The platform has been widely adopted, with more than 1,550 exporters now using it daily and more than 45,000 applications processed through the system, with these numbers continuing to grow. More than 25 of Sri Lanka’s trading partners now recognize the electronic certificates, which contribute to a more sustainable, efficient and inclusive trade environment.

This digital solution is being replicated in other countries, with five now putting in place their own e-certificates of origin system.



FUNDER
Germany

Regional integration and South-South trade and investment



Building trade and investment ties within and across regions is critical for economies looking to build resilience to shocks, while spurring economic growth that supports livelihoods and incomes. Recent events have reinforced that regional integration and cooperation is increasingly urgent — and those steps that have already been taken in that direction, including to boost South-South trade and investment, are bearing fruit, as the case studies in this section of the Annual Report show.

Interventions with a regional integration and cooperation focus are helping countries come together to fill in gaps in their services trade data, as seen with the **Eastern Partnership**. They are making it possible to determine how to build on historical and diaspora links, such as those between **Africa and the Caribbean**, through trade. They are making it possible for producers in one country to train those in another on sustainable practices, as seen with **Thailand and the Lao People's Democratic Republic**, and for countries from across world regions to make deeper inroads into the Chinese market.

Scaling up these efforts is vital. The crises that have buffeted the global economy in recent months and years

have made clear that regional integration and cooperation and South-South trade and investment cannot wait — and value addition and diversification are critical for this integration to lead to lasting benefits. The case studies in this section, along with the selected highlights below, showcase some of the different kinds of interventions ITC offers, which bring together the expertise and tools made possible by ITC's Window 1 core extrabudgetary funders and channel them into scalable and sustainable projects under Window 2 grants.

2024 highlights

The **WACOMP Business Matchmaking Platform**, made possible with European Union support and implemented with local trade promotion organizations (TPOs) in West Africa, has made it possible for over 600 West African businesses to set up online profiles and find partners, products and services throughout the region. TPOs help businesses use the tool, while promoting it to other SMEs and helping firms become verified on the platform.



Laotian producers visiting a workshop in Thailand.

Training on the WACOMP Business Matchmaking Platform.



Beneficiary learning how to improve photo products for his business profile on the WACOMP Business Matchmaking Platform.



Egypt's Export Council of Chemicals and Fertilizers demonstrates benefits of Euromed Trade Helpdesk.



National stakeholders from the Mediterranean region sharing experiences during the ITC, ILO closing event.

In **Ghana, Kenya and Nigeria**, ITC has worked with the Institute of Export and International Trade to roll out diploma and certificate programmes in international trade. Made possible through Window 1 support and conducted in partnership with local trade agencies, the programmes have sought to respond to local needs and circumstances that trade professionals may encounter, such as the role of regional economic communities and the AfCFTA. Participants include representatives from trade support institutions, SMEs, governments and others working in the trade space.

In the **Middle East and North Africa**, the Euromed Trade Helpdesk has helped SMEs and BSOs access critical trade and market intelligence. For instance, Egypt's Export Council of Chemicals and Fertilizers has used the online platform to help determine where they could boost export revenue and what regulatory guidance local SMEs in their sectors would need, along with helping them identify key markets. The project, made possible through support from the European Union, has also held related missions on these subjects in Jordan and Egypt.

Case study

Connecting regions and diasporas through trade: Towards deeper African–Caribbean ties



Africa and the Caribbean are regions with shared histories and diasporas, while holding immense possibilities for developing deeper economic ties – and, in turn, achieving their respective development goals.

To date, however, trade between the regions has been extremely limited. Only 0.1% of African goods exports are destined for the Caribbean, and Caribbean goods exports to Africa remain below 1% of the region's total.

In both directions, these exports also remain highly concentrated in just a few economic sectors—mineral primary products in the case of much of Africa's Caribbean-bound exports, while anhydrous ammonia from Trinidad and Tobago makes up roughly half of exports heading in the opposite direction.

Those numbers belie the actual potential for trade in both goods and services between the two regions, especially at a time when Africa and the Caribbean are making major strides at increasing their own levels of intraregional trade.

In Africa, for instance, work is continuing apace to realize the full opportunities afforded by the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), particularly following the recent ministerial decision to end the Guided Trade Initiative, which had aimed at testing out the agreement's provisions in practice among a pilot group of countries.

With the end of the test phase, attention is now fully directed towards implementing the AfCFTA across all state parties, fostering inclusive trade and economic integration across the continent.

The Caribbean, for its part, has had the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) in place since 1973 and has grown from its original four founding member states to include 15 member states and six associate members.

Together with the African Export-Import Bank, also known as the Afreximbank, ITC has been working to support stronger economic relationships between the two regions and their respective small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

This started with the inaugural AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum (ACTIF). One of the key first steps of this collaboration has involved analysing the biggest opportunities for trade and investment growth, and therefore identifying where to target efforts at removing existing barriers.

'The African diaspora, designated by the African Union as Africa's sixth region, is vital to driving Africa's economic transformation,' Kanayo Awani, Afreximbank Executive Vice President, Intra-African Trade and Export Development, explained in an interview with ITC's *Trade Forum*. 'Afreximbank's Intra-African Trade Strategy, therefore, incorporates a diaspora strategy which has redefined intra-African trade to include trade among all Africans, regardless of location.'

'The flagship AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum, held in partnership with the Africa-Caribbean Business Council, remains a driving force in fostering trade and investment linkages,' Awani added, while highlighting that the Afreximbank has also signed partnership agreements with CARICOM member states and opened a CARICOM office in Barbados.

While earlier studies indicated that there was at least \$1 billion of untapped export potential between the two regions, new research by ITC and the Afreximbank has found that trade between Africa and the Caribbean could increase by up to \$1.8 billion by 2028.

Getting to that \$1.8 billion will require tackling the tariff and non-tariff barriers that exist between the two regions, which do not have a region-to-region trade agreement in place. It will also require developing value chains that hold the most promise – which means, among other steps, marshalling the necessary investments.

To that end, ITC and the Afreximbank have been studying which value chains can not only boost trade between the regions, but also create jobs and incomes, especially for SMEs. The research shows that these value chains could include minerals and metals, machinery, electronic equipment, processed food and animal feed, travel in the form of tourism, transportation and the creative industries – particularly design and arts crafts.



ED Coke-Hamilton
visiting ITC booth at
ACTIF 2024, Bahamas.

Thanks to this analysis, ITC and Afreximbank are now consulting closely with policymakers and private sector actors on which sectors to prioritize. They are incorporating regional priorities and frameworks already adopted by the African Union Commission (AUC) and the CARICOM Secretariat, along with apex private sector bodies such as the Africa Business Council (AfBC) and the CARICOM Private Sector Organization (CPSO).

Once these value chains are selected, partners will conduct surveys to document the constraints and requirements that businesses face and come up with detailed sector profiles that map input and transformative output products.

Building a research base and identifying priority value chains is one prong of the strategy. Another is working with the Africa Business Council and the CARICOM Private Sector Organization to help SMEs in their regions to connect as they look to trade across the Atlantic.

This is where tailored technical assistance and high-level engagements come in, including at events such as ACTIF, which ITC has supported since its inaugural edition. Launched in 2022, past ACTIF editions have taken place in Barbados, Guyana and the Bahamas, bringing together national leaders, policymakers, international agency representatives, development bank officials, business support organizations and MSMEs themselves.

These events offer the chance to look at nearly every facet of the Africa–Caribbean trading relationship — from examining the requirements of a potential trade agreement between the two regions to establishing the foundation of a transatlantic business network.

These engagements are already changing how people talk about interregional trade. At its 2024 edition, for instance, leaders from the Bahamas, Barbados, Ghana, Guyana, Grenada, Kenya, Mauritania and Saint Lucia together expressed their public backing for deeper Africa–Caribbean trade ties.

These statements were paired with the news that most Caribbean countries — 12 out of 15 — have now joined onto CARICOM’s agreement with the Afreximbank, with the latter set to provide financing for projects and initiatives in participating economies that have trade at their core.

Small businesses sponsored by ITC to attend ACTIF, such as Ghana-based Suku Technologies and Bahamian firm Kanoo Pays, have had a chance to forge new relationships with potential partners, while also sharing with other firms what it is like to trade across the two regions.

For instance, Kanoo Pays is making deeper inroads into the African market thanks to connections made at the forum, notably after it inked a deal to sell two million units of its wearable payments technology.

‘The conference was pretty amazing. We made a lot of positive connections,’ Nicholas Rees, Chairman of Kanoo Pays, told the *Guardian Business* after the event. ‘We had a lot of interest from businesses, business owners and entrepreneurs in Africa as well. And we actually got some sales on the first day for the wearable technology. The wearable exhibit was a smashing hit. Everyone was interested in those wearables.’

Events such as ACTIF provide a space for showing how different projects aimed at boosting intraregional trade are working in practice — such as masterclasses for SMEs on exporting with the AfCFTA, or efforts to put in place a pan-African alliance of fashion designers, including diaspora from the Caribbean. (For more on the latter, see the related case study in this Annual Report.)

Looking ahead, ITC and the Afreximbank are zeroing in on targeted actions to facilitate business-to-business linkages, matching and investment promotion in promising sectors, including at the 2025 edition of ACTIF, being held in Grenada in June 2025.

Other activities in the works include collaboration for better market intelligence on the export potential between the two regions, as well as building the capacity of the trans-regional business support network so SMEs in Africa and the Caribbean can make the most of new market opportunities. They will continue analysing what an Africa–Caribbean trade agreement might offer, as well as its feasibility.



FUNDER
Afreximbank

Case study

Closing the services trade gap, opening new doors for the Eastern Partnership



Services trade is critical for countries to achieve a host of developmental goals: driving export growth, helping a given economy diversify and increasing integration with other markets, to name but a few. It is also an area, however, where notable data gaps exist. This is especially the case for several Eastern and Southern European economies — but that is beginning to change.

More than 15 years ago, the European Union and six neighbouring economies came together to sign a new arrangement known as the Eastern Partnership. The goal was to forge deeper political, economic and social ties, including through trade. Today, five Eastern European countries are in this partnership with the EU, namely Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

Funded by the European Union, a project devoted to supporting trade and market intelligence in the Eastern Partnership countries included among its objectives the following goal: to fill in services data gaps, based on participating countries' respective priorities, while supporting the development of deeper ties between their technical experts.

The work involved close collaboration between the European Commission, the EU4Business initiative, ITC and the central banks and national statistical offices of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine.

The initiative began by reaching out to the participating countries to understand where they needed data most, along with the challenges that their data-compiling authorities faced. For Ukraine and Republic of Moldova, travel services were key, while Georgia prioritized transport and Armenia focused on construction services. Others chose not to prioritize a specific sector.

'We have specific surveys and some information comes from administration. In this direction, we need some improvement: disaggregation of data, timeliness, etc.,' explained Irakli Apkhaidze, Deputy Executive Director of GEOSTAT, Georgia. This is critical not only for decision makers to have the right information to design policies, but also for the Georgian private sector.

Along with collecting more and better data, the project has repeatedly brought together statisticians from other

countries and sectors to exchange experiences over the last few years. These experts hailed from institutions such as the Deutsche Bundesbank, Banca d'Italia, Narodowy Bank Polski, the Polish Statistical Office, the Czech Statistical Office and Eurostat, to name a few.

This work got fully underway just as the challenges of collecting services data became even more pronounced: crises including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine made compiling survey data difficult, while also highlighting how these changing realities differed on the ground. In some instances, that meant the project had to undertake major adjustments to reflect what the countries needed most at the moment.

While the war in Ukraine complicated the Republic of Moldova's participation in the project, Angela Moraru, Head of Balance of Payments at the National Bank of Moldova, said her country still benefited from the work.

'First thing that I want to mention is the high-quality report on the analysis of services compilation,' she explained. 'The second thing that was done during this project, we started to participate in the travel workshop that was organized by the Bank of Italy. We learned a lot about the challenges of the European Union compilers in compiling travel [data].'

In Ukraine, meanwhile, the ongoing war has meant that domestic officials have needed to rethink how they collect and conceptualize travel services data, and more broadly how they measure their balance of payments, after many people fled the country due to the conflict. Determining how best to measure the situation required working closely with countries hosting large numbers of Ukrainian refugees.

This also involved assessing whether and when these refugees obtained resident status in their host countries. If they remained residents of Ukraine, their spending abroad was classified as exports of travel services by the host country and as imports by Ukraine.

If they were considered residents of the host country, however, their expenditures in the host country were excluded, as the balance of payments statistics account only for transactions between residents and non-residents. In practice, residency status varied depending on the policies of each host country.

To help the National Bank of Ukraine understand fully



Angela Moraru, Central Bank of Moldova, speaking at regional workshop on trade in services, Warsaw, Poland.

Eastern Partnership Trade Helpdesk platform.



Anush Davtyan and colleagues from the Central Bank of Armenia attending technical workshop on trade in construction services in Yerevan, Armenia.

what the war has meant for its balance of payments statistics—and whether and how it needs to account for Ukrainian citizens’ expenditures abroad as a result—ITC and its partners surveyed data-compiling agencies and held virtual workshops where they could discuss these matters further.

‘Many [Ukrainian] refugees do not identify themselves as Polish residents, and we therefore use surveys to estimate shares of refugees who wish to leave Poland within the next 12 months,’ Grzegorz Dobroczyk, Acting Deputy Director of Department of Statistics at Narodowy Bank Polski, explained during a virtual workshop in June 2023.

Changing relationships between these Eastern Partnership countries and the European Union have also had implications for collecting and processing services data. Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine now all hold EU candidate status, meaning that data collection and production processes will now need to align more closely with those of the European Union.

That is where training, alongside the development and use of a dedicated online data portal known as the Eastern Partnership Trade Helpdesk, is making a difference.

‘The ability to navigate online trade platforms and use market intelligence tools is essential for improving trade efficiency, diversifying the economy and ensuring that our policies are based on the most accurate and

up-to-date information available,’ Vladimir Cuc, Permanent Representative of the Republic of Moldova to the United Nations Office at Geneva, said at a July 2024 workshop in Geneva for a delegation of visiting Moldovan officials.

The Eastern Partnership Trade Helpdesk features extensive data on trade in both services and goods for participating countries. Looking ahead, the project will continue to support knowledge-sharing activities between statisticians, strengthen national data systems and ensure that policymakers and firms have access to reliable, timely data.

By closing the services trade data gap, the Eastern Partnership countries aim to continue making progress on their integration with the European Union, while building stronger, more resilient economies for the future.



FUNDER
European Union

Case study

'One market, one investment destination': East African Community network takes off



Brookside Dairies Ltd won two prizes at the EAC Regional Quality Awards, Uganda.

The East African Community (EAC) is one of the fastest-growing regional economic communities in Africa, spanning Burundi, Democratic Republic of Congo, Kenya, Rwanda, Somalia, South Sudan, Uganda and United Republic of Tanzania. These EAC partner states have a long history of working towards greater economic integration and cooperation—including on how to attract more foreign direct investment (FDI) and promote the bloc as a sought-after investment destination.

The timing is particularly apt. FDI inflows into EAC Partner States have been on an upward trend in recent years. According to the 2023 edition of the EAC Trade and Investment Report, the FDI licensed by partner states' investment promotion agencies grew from \$2.8 billion in 2017 to \$11.07 billion in 2022, not including Somalia. On the investment policymaking side, over the past two decades the EAC has developed a Model Investment Code, the EAC Model Investment Treaty, the EAC Cooperation Agreement on Investment Facilitation and the EAC Investment Policy, while adopting principles designed to facilitate the harmonization of partner states' investment laws. These steps are all designed to support greater FDI.

That is why the second phase of a new project known as the EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme, or MARKUP II, is working to help position the East African Community, as a whole, as a go-to place for foreign investors. MARKUP II is funded by the European Union. A critical step has been to see how best to consolidate the community's investment promotion efforts—especially given the value that foreign direct investment can have for the EAC partner states' industrialization goals.

The EAC has in place a plan known as the EAC Industrialization Strategy, spanning the years 2012–2032, which seeks 'to create a market driven, regionally and internationally competitive and balanced industrial sector based on the comparative and competitive advantages of the EAC region' and sets out related targets. One of these targets refers to ensuring that more MSMEs can drive manufacturing-related gross domestic product, to the tune of 50%.

In practice, that has meant a shift from focusing solely, or primarily, on investment promotion at the level of the EAC's individual partner states, towards presenting the region's attributes and potential collectively. To help make that happen, ITC has been working closely with the East African Community Secretariat, EAC partner state governments and EAC partner states' respective investment promotion agencies (IPAs) to set up a new network for these agencies to come together.

'By uniting our efforts, [the] EAC IPAs Subcommittee can create a cycle of economic ecosystem that fosters innovation and drives shared prosperity,' Paul Polo Ongee, Under Secretary, Ministry of Investment, South Sudan said.

The process involved several steps, all designed to ensure that the approach met local needs and circumstances. They included, for instance, developing a clearer understanding of each EAC partner state's top priorities and developing a memorandum of understanding and terms of reference to help formalize the creation of a network. Every step of the way has involved close collaboration with both the IPAs of the EAC partner states and the EAC Secretariat.



First consultative meeting on establishing a cooperation framework for investment promotion agencies.

Uganda Investment Authority was recognised by WAIPA for Excellence in Sustainability with the Special LDC Award at the World Investment Conference 2024 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.



Coffee training, Uganda.

The resulting network of investment promotion agencies is known as the EAC IPA Subcommittee. The network took part in the annual World Investment Conference hosted by the World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies (WAIPA), which took place in November 2024 in Saudi Arabia.

During the conference's networking spaces, the EAC Secretariat and IPAs' state partner representatives had the opportunity to share with their peers the work undertaken by the EAC IPA Technical Working Group. They also shared the types of regional investments they aim to promote and how the agencies within the group collaborate. The opportunity to participate in the event provided the IPA Subcommittee with access to related resources for drawing in greater investments into the EAC, along with the chance to network with other IPAs from around the world.

The network is now looking at putting into motion the different steps in its work programme, which sets out what the EAC and the IPA Subcommittee will do over the next five years to promote the EAC as an investment destination and facilitate FDI. These include strategies to attract and retain investments throughout the region, along with seeing how to forge stronger ties between different industries and develop regional value chains.

Also key will be the regular information exchanges between IPA Subcommittee members, making sure that investment-related issues that affect them all can be handled collectively and in a way that supports cross-border investments.

'Investment promotion agencies are not only responsible for promoting investment but also for contributing to the economic growth and development of our countries,' Annette Ssemuwemba Mutaawe, Deputy Secretary General Customs, Trade and Monetary Affairs, East African Community, said. 'The network for the EAC IPAs provides a platform for discussing common challenges and exploring collaborative solutions, including jointly showcasing and promoting the immense untapped investment opportunities that the region offers. This will enhance our visibility in international markets, opening doors for attracting investments.'

This work is not taking place in isolation. Rather, the work programme will highlight approaches that can support key industrialization goals, including how increased FDI flows can help the EAC partner states develop their priority value chains further. This is another critical area of work under the EU-EAC MARKUP II project.

Regional integration efforts on FDI, as set out in strategic alliances like the EAC IPA Subcommittee, bring together MARKUP II initiatives through their focus on long-term sustainability, quality investment, regional development and a forward-looking vision where trade connects everyone in the ecosystem, from the smallest microenterprise to the largest foreign investor.



FUNDER
European Union

Case study

Sharing lessons, charting new paths:

How South-South cooperation is changing the game for SMEs throughout Asia



Laotian SMEs during training on organic production methods visit rice field, Nakhon Phanom, Thailand.

South-South cooperation is critical for boosting trade and investment flows while facilitating regional economic integration. But it also has another vital dimension: it allows for experience-based solutions rooted in shared challenges and local capacity building, which can be a gamechanger for small and medium-sized enterprises. In Asia, partnerships like these are providing valuable opportunities for SMEs to learn from others facing similar realities, while offering new possibilities for value addition, exporting and more.

By partnering with the Thailand International Cooperation Agency (TICA), ITC supported SMEs in Lao People's Democratic Republic to move away from the export and production of bulk, low value-added commodities to higher value-added agricultural products that can command better prices, and in turn greater revenues and incomes.

Agricultural exports are critical for both the Thai and Laotian economies, with the sector a major source of local jobs. In response to growing demand for farm goods that have been produced sustainably, agricultural SMEs are increasingly exploring how to earn certification as organic or under other nationally or internationally recognized sustainability standards, and, in turn, forge new business relationships with other Asian markets and further afield.

Following a 'train the trainer' approach to build and transfer skills within the region, the collaboration with TICA, alongside the Thai National Bureau of Agricultural Commodity and Food Standards, aimed to equip Thai experts with the knowledge and experience needed to train Laotian farmers. Under the European Union-funded ARISE Plus Thailand project, these experts shared insights

gained from Thai SMEs on adopting good agricultural practices, pursuing organic and other certifications, and implementing improvements to enhance production and competitiveness. But another, even more critical goal was that of forging deeper connections between these institutions and SMEs themselves, laying the groundwork for even closer South-South cooperation in the future.

The Laotian farmers involved grow some of the country's most in-demand products, such as rice, mangosteen and other fruits and vegetables. In 2024, under an activity organized with TICA, 25 Khammouane-based producers had the chance to learn from Thai experts about good agricultural practices and organic production. The activity's participants also learned about technologies they could use to improve supply-chain traceability and thereby comply with environmentally focused regulations in target markets such as the EU.

'We have continued to use the information and lessons learned from the training. The knowledge has been disseminated to the community, especially through training provided to villagers and farmers,' said Dr. Siphaivanh Phommason from the Technical and Vocational College of the Khammouane Province, which is based in Lao People's Democratic Republic and is near the border with Thailand.

'I am so happy to be able to see how organic agriculture is done in Thailand in person,' Onsy Sayalath, who teaches at the same college, said. 'Last time I learned and listened to the trainer talk about organic standards. Now I can really put the theory into practice. In the past, I did not know how to produce organic [products] systematically, what are the steps involved.'



Pop-up event organized under communication campaign to promote organic agriculture and consumption of organic products, held in Bangkok, Thailand, in December 2023.

Making compost for organic production.



Sharing best practices with Laotian SMEs during field training on organic rice, fruit production in Rayong, Thailand.



Along with building capacity at the level of farming communities, ITC has also supported the regional exchange of best practices to promote organic agriculture across South-East Asia, hosting and organising discussions among interested stakeholders from Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Philippines and Viet Nam.

ITC's partnership with TICA is closely aligned with and supports the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework. It has been part of the flagship South-South and Triangular Cooperation United Nations initiatives in Thailand.

To help unlock the full potential of such opportunities emerging through South-South cooperation, ITC is partnering with other Asian organizations such as the Academy for International Business Officials (AIBO) of the Ministry of Commerce of China (MOFCOM), and the China International Import Expo (CIIE), the largest trade fair of its kind.

Every year since 2018 ITC has brought SMEs to take part in CIIE, along with undertaking related trainings and capacity-building courses with AIBO.

SMEs report that attending the fair and trainings has been more than just a networking opportunity: it has provided a deeper understanding of how markets like China work, what consumers there may want and how to adapt their business strategies accordingly. Key has been learning from Chinese institutions themselves.

A woman entrepreneur, from a Philippines-based skincare company, reported that taking part in trainings ahead of the expo made a major difference for her business' prospects.

'The study tour and networking were wonderful, and the networking with fellow participants is very good,' she said. Besides receiving valuable inquiries about possible business relationships, she was able to 'connect with people from Botswana, Lao People's Democratic Republic, and Uzbekistan, who expressed interest in our company'.

The economic results are similarly impressive: the 50 SMEs from 26 developing economies that ITC supported to attend the 2024 CIIE netted \$5 million in signed export contracts that year alone. The initiative has supported over 460 SMEs from 49 countries over the years, generating over \$80 million in deals for China-bound exports.

'I learned about the likes and choices of Chinese people, their fashion sense and price range that can be worked at,' said one representative of a Nepal-based cashmere company that attended the event. The company is known for its high-quality cashmere and knitwear and is working on developing a global reputation for its innovative techniques, creative designs and sustainable fibres. They achieved sales of \$2,000 at the 2024 CIIE alone, along with making strong business connections.



FUNDER (ARISE Plus Thailand):
European Union

FUNDER (CIIE):
China



Corporate Results

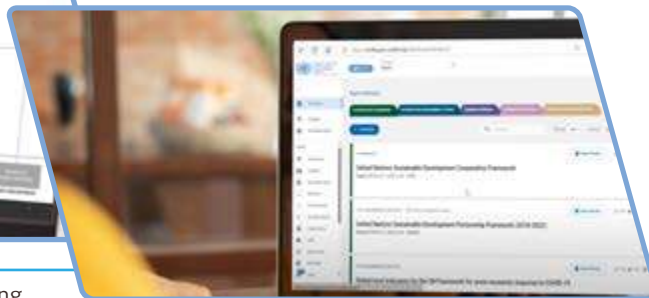


Corporate results

Managing for results



Training on monitoring and results measurement.



Training on UN INFO, an online planning, monitoring and reporting platform that digitizes the UN Country Teams' results frameworks.

The Annual Report's case studies and results illustrate the kinds of interventions and impacts that ITC has around the world. The success of these interventions, both individually and collectively, rely on comprehensive risk management measures, robust internal controls and dedicated steps and frameworks for results-based management.

The measures seek, across the board, to ensure that ITC's work delivers the best results for the beneficiaries we serve — and in a way that ensures their benefits are lasting and can be scaled up where relevant.

Risk management

The Enterprise Risk Management (ERM) Framework and Policy underpins how ITC identifies and mitigates risk, maintaining its longstanding reputation of providing consistently strong results that deliver value for money. It is a living document that recently was updated to reflect and respond to the latest recommendations of the 2020 Joint Inspection Unit (JIU) report on enterprise risk management (JIU/REP/2020/5).

The new framework aligns what are known in ITC as 'risk universe categories' with those of the United Nations Secretariat. ITC's Executive Director circulated the framework in the first half of the year.

Another notable element of the new framework was the introduction of the Institute of Internal Auditors' Three Lines model. The IIA approach was re-designed to help organizations determine which structures and processes can best serve their work, while managing risk effectively and ensuring strong governance.

The three lines approach breaks down risk management by roles that (i) deliver products or services to beneficiaries and support functions that serve internal needs; (ii) provide expertise, support and monitoring, including on risk-related matters; and (iii) ensure independent, objective assurance and advisory support on risk and achieving objectives. In incorporating this model into the new framework, ITC clarified risk roles and responsibilities accordingly.

Ensuring that ITC personnel are up to date on the latest innovations and best practices in risk management is critical. Throughout the year, this knowledge sharing took place at every level.

Senior and middle management participated in biannual risk assessment sessions facilitated by a corporate risk focal point. ITC personnel tasked with reporting on projects took part in quarterly reporting briefing sessions throughout the year that featured a standing agenda item on risk management in projects. In the second half of the year, there was also a dedicated session for ITC personnel on the relevant changes in the 2024 ERM Policy and framework.

This risk framework continues to help ITC prepare for and respond to new and existing risks. At the end of 2024, the updated corporate risk register showed that ITC's assessment of the risk of funding losses or cuts is increasingly high across all its funding sources, in light of the wider uncertainties in official development assistance and the United Nations liquidity crisis.

It also identified safety and security as an elevated risk area — due to ITC personnel's exposure when working in fragile settings — along with cybersecurity, complemented by an emerging risk of AI misuse.

Internal controls

Like United Nations Secretariat entities, ITC receives recommendations issued by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), the JIU (described further in the 'evaluation and performance' section of this report) and the Board of Auditors. All provide objective information on how well ITC is complying with internal controls and how effective these are.

These controls showed that ITC continues to make improvements in adhering to the policy of purchasing travel tickets sufficiently in advance, from 62% to 68% at year-end.

In the risk area of ethical behaviour, sexual exploitation and abuse, professional conduct, abuse of authority and sexual harassment, ITC continuously enforced zero-tolerance policies on prohibited conduct. As part of this enforcement, ITC personnel were required to complete mandatory training on prohibited conduct.

This is a critical component of ITC's Moving Forward Action Plan. ITC has paired these policies with the recruitment of a dedicated intake and investigation officer who receives, assesses and investigates reports of fraud or unsatisfactory conduct—both for third parties and internal personnel.

ITC has continued to improve other controls, such as those suggested by the OIOS audit of Implementing Partners management. In the area of human resources management, ITC continued developing the Strategic Workforce Plan. This plan aims to ensure that ITC has sufficient human resources to be able to respond to changing market demands for expertise, while preventing the loss of talent developed in-house.

Result-based management

ITC has worked to bring its results-based management in line with the benchmarks set out by the Donor Committee for Enterprise Development Standards, specifically in the areas of market systems development approaches and building and ensuring efficient result chains, which are aimed at visualising the causal relationships within an intervention and showcasing a programming logic: how the activities lead to outputs, outcomes and to the development impact.

ITC has organized trainings with select personnel from all divisions on building these result chains, incorporating examples of actual projects that were at that time in the early stages of implementation. These projects were volunteered by their respective teams, with the goal of ensuring teams can better monitor projects' progress over time, see how interventions are achieving their intended results and determine where these interventions need to adapt to changing market conditions.

Going forward, ITC will apply the lessons learned to a set of carefully selected projects. Along with publishing an internal manual on result chains, assistance will be offered to project developers as they organize their first result chains in a way that complements their project logframes. Mentoring project teams on how to apply result chains in their project monitoring will also continue.

ITC produced and delivered a course for project managers on UN INFO reporting. This involves the online platform for tracking United Nations-wide progress on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals. The course explains how ITC's corporate indicators are linked to the UN INFO output indicator framework and features a new corporate report designed to facilitate ITC's inputs into the UN INFO system.

Corporate results

Evaluation and performance

Evaluation is essential for how ITC works. It provides a means to assess ITC's performance and effectiveness while creating opportunities to gain insights from the execution of its interventions. Evaluation also improves ITC's organizational and project management, knowledge development and results accountability.

The results of these evaluations inform policy, programme and project management decisions, enhancing performance and strengthening ITC's contribution to the SDGs. The Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) leads ITC's evaluation function, managing independent evaluations and reviews while offering advisory services on project-level self-evaluation management and evaluation-related matters across the organization.

The IEU conducted five evaluations in 2024—including the midterm review of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022–2025—and one sustainability review. It also supported two project managers who carried out self-evaluations and provided technical assistance to project managers in their engagement and contribution to eight funder-led evaluations and seven results-oriented monitoring reviews.

These efforts expanded evaluative coverage across ITC. This section summarizes the independent evaluations and the sustainability review conducted by the IEU in 2024.

In accordance with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards for Evaluation and ITC's Evaluation Guidelines, the IEU monitors the progress made in implementing its recommendations. This ensures that action points considered in the management response to those recommendations contribute to ITC's organizational effectiveness, learning and accountability.

By the end of the third quarter of 2024, the biannual status review indicated that of 46 recommendations, 30 were fully implemented, one was partially implemented, nine were in progress and six had yet to start.

As part of its advisory services, the IEU helps project teams prepare their project completion reports (PCRs) upon request. From an evaluative perspective, this enables the IEU to produce and share with project managers a synthesis of lessons learned from completed PCRs, identifying areas for operational improvement in future interventions.

The IEU actively supports the work of the UNEG and also contributes to corporate reporting on ITC's engagement in the United Nations system-wide Action Plan (UN-SWAP) on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (GEEW), the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy and the United Nations Youth Strategy (Youth 2030).

In 2024, the IEU contributed to two publications by the United Nations Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS). As ITC's focal point for the Joint Inspection Unit (JIU), the IEU facilitated ITC's contributions to completing three system-wide JIU reviews and its participation in six ongoing reviews.

The IEU contributed to the United Nations evaluation evidence and the 2024 Quadrennial Comprehensive Policy Review (QCPR) process for the System-Wide Evaluation Office (SWEO) by validating and updating the list of all country-level, regional, strategic, thematic and policy evaluations produced by the United Nations system between 2021 and 2024. In addition, the IEU collaborated with ITC's Division of Country Programmes (DCP) to engage with the system-wide evaluation of progress towards a new generation of United Nations country teams (UNCTs) launched in 2024 by the SWEO. The IEU will continue to support DCP in this work, with the evaluation slated for completion in 2025.



Corporate results

Summary of IEU independent evaluations and reviews completed in 2024

2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR)

The 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report comprised a midterm evaluation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022–2025 and a series of evaluation-related products and activities from 2023. The document was presented to United Nations member states and WTO Members and discussed at the 2024 ITC Joint Advisory Group meeting.

The midterm evaluation found that the strategic plan had successfully positioned the organization as a credible player in global trade, greatly contributing to sustainable and inclusive economic growth. Key recommendations included defining core offerings more clearly and enhancing internal cohesion, as well as adapting the strategic plan to changing contexts. The evaluation also recommended strategic expansion at the country level.

Final Evaluation of the Systematic Mechanism for Safer Trade (SYMST) Project

This project, funded by the European Union with a budget of €2 million (\$2.2 million), aimed to improve food safety and market access for the fruit and vegetable sectors in Lao People's Democratic Republic and Viet Nam. The project ran from December 2018 to October 2023 and focused on strengthening regulatory frameworks, enhancing institutional capacities and increasing market opportunities. The evaluation found that:

- despite the COVID-19 pandemic, the project delivered all outputs, such as raising awareness on plant health and pesticide use and promoting good agricultural practices;
- the project fell short of achieving all intended outcomes due to the limited implementation period and the lack of sufficient technical staff at the subnational level; and
- continued external assistance was needed to sustain its results.

Key recommendations included a phased approach to project development, greater collaboration with other relevant development partners and support for market structure and productivity enhancements.

Midterm Evaluation of the Project Linking Ukrainian SMEs in the Fruits and Vegetables Sector to Global and Domestic Markets and Value Chains – Phase II

The Ukraine Phase II Project, running from May 2021 to December 2024, aimed to improve the competitiveness and export growth of Ukrainian SMEs in the fruit and vegetable, nuts and vine and wine sectors. The project, funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (Sida) with a budget of SEK 20,003,805 (\$2.35 million) focused on updating value chain roadmaps, strengthening SME capacities, enhancing BSOs and creating business linkages for SMEs.

The project expanded its geographical scope and sector coverage, including the vine and wine sector, and was extended to cover the entire country after the war in Ukraine began in February 2022. The project emphasizes environmental sustainability, social governance, corporate social responsibility, gender equity and youth engagement. The evaluation found that:

- despite the war, the project trained more companies and individuals than initially targeted, contributing to their improved capacities and participation in trade fairs; and
- some targets may not be achieved due to the conflict, such as the goal of enhancing BSOs to provide relevant services to SMEs.

Key recommendations for the project included improving the project's website and establishing contacts with agricultural extension services and educational institutions to raise awareness about recorded webinars.

Midterm Evaluation of the Netherlands Trust Fund Phase V (NTF V) Programme: Long-Term Socio-Economic Impact Programme

The programme is funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands with a budget of \$15 million. It is implemented by ITC in cooperation with the Dutch Centre for the Promotion of Imports from Developing Countries (CBI). Running from July 2021 to June 2025, the programme continues the successful partnership of previous phases.

The evaluation found that:

- the programme was well-aligned with strategic priorities and effectively responds to beneficiary needs, particularly in the tech and agribusiness sectors;
- it has improved business competitiveness, strengthened sector ecosystems and fostered public-private partnerships;
- it was implemented efficiently, with strong internal and external coherence, and showed potential for long-term systemic change, particularly through digital transformation and value chain improvements; and
- capacity building and local ownership supported sustainability, but continued efforts are needed to secure long-term impact beyond the programme's duration.

Key recommendations included improving access to finance, strengthening national coordination, refining monitoring and evaluation systems, optimizing financial planning and developing a sustainability strategy to ensure long-term impact.

Evaluation of the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative

The Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) aims to help marginalized workers in vulnerable communities integrate into the global fashion market. Between 2009 and 2024, it implemented 13 projects across Africa, Central Asia, Asia and the Pacific, with total funding of approximately \$48.5 million from various donors. The evaluation found that:

- EFI effectively empowered marginalized artisans by integrating them into global fashion value chains, increasing incomes and reducing poverty;
- EFI's vocational training and capacity-building efforts have benefited thousands, particularly women, fostering social resilience and economic independence;
- the initiative operated with strong national partners and donor support, despite geopolitical challenges in some regions; and
- sustainability was reinforced through the formalization of social enterprises, ensuring long-term impact beyond EFI's direct involvement.

Key recommendations included refining the initiative's demand-driven focus to avoid overlap with other value chains, enhancing market diversification to scale up impact and pursuing the autonomy of supported social enterprises.

Sustainability Review of the ITC project Operational Management of Export Support Programmes (MOPSE)

Five years after its completion, the review examined the sustainability-enabling factors of the project *Renforcement du Management Opérationnel des Programmes de Soutien à l'Exportation en faveur de vingt-et-un organisme de promotion du commerce de 21 Pays d'Afrique Sub-Saharienne*. The project started in January 2018 and ended in December 2019 and was funded by the Agence Française de Développement with a budget of \$1.6 million. The sustainability review found that:

- the project successfully strengthened export ecosystems by enhancing the capacity of trade promotion organizations (TPOs) to support SMEs, fostering sustainable networking and enabling peer-to-peer collaboration among TPOs;
- its integrated approach to technical assistance and strategic planning led to lasting improvements in business support services; and
- coordination was particularly important, demonstrating that collaboration between ITC and external partners enhances efficiency and long-term impact.

Key recommendations are that ITC should clearly differentiate types of capacity in its projects, improve how it communicates the value of its work and synergies, adopt a systems approach for better monitoring and impact assessment, follow up on demand for services exports support and provide targeted assistance to the six TPOs with limited or weak impact, focusing on their ability to secure government funding using the project's tools.

Corporate results

Partnerships

One of the most important ingredients behind the success of ITC's interventions is the wide and deep network of partners that we have been fortunate to develop over the years. These partnerships make it possible for us to meet our beneficiaries and clients where they are and respond to the full spectrum of their needs.

We are immensely proud to work alongside fellow members of the United Nations system and with local institutions, the private sector, foundations and other actors that champion trade-led development.

In 2024, ITC launched or renewed many of these partnerships, with a few highlights shared below.

Select 2024 partnership highlights

- ITC, the Brazilian Micro and Small Enterprise Support Service, and the Small and Medium Business Development Agency of the Republic of Azerbaijan signed the Joint Declaration on Baku Climate Coalition for SMEs Green Transition at COP29
- ITC and host institutions the Ghana Export Promotion Authority and ApexBrasil launched new SheTrades Hubs in Ghana and Brazil, respectively
- ITC and the World Intellectual Property Organization joined forces to help more SMEs protect and use their intellectual property, including in the creative industries and sports sectors
- ITC and the Colombian Cocoa Network (Red Cacaotera de Colombia), with the support of Swiss Contact and the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, extended their collaboration to support sustainable cocoa production in Colombia
- ITC and Microsoft teamed up to develop and provide digital skills training for Nigerian SMEs on topics such as AI, cybersecurity and e-commerce
- ITC, the Korea SMEs and Startups Agency, the Colombian Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Tourism, and iNNpulsa Colombia kicked off a Youth Startup Academy programme for entrepreneurs in Colombia and other parts of Latin America
- ITC and Visa kicked off the next phase of their partnership to support youth and women entrepreneurs in Kuwait and Qatar
- ITC and the Brazilian Agricultural Research Corporation (Embrapa) set their sights on scaling up the sustainable use, management and trade of nature-based value chains that are critical for Indigenous Peoples and traditional communities
- ITC and Japan are working together to help Ukrainian SMEs build their digital skills for export, while supporting displaced people as they access new income opportunities and building the capacity of business support organizations
- ITC joined 13 countries and 16 development finance institutions and international organizations to launch the SME Resilience Alliance for Ukraine

Colombian Cocoa Network, ITC extend partnership to enhance sustainable cocoa production with support from Swisscontact, Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO).



ITC, ApexBrasil launch SheTrades Brazil Hub; ITC, MDIC release women and trade-related policy findings.

Corporate results

Data management

Expanding reach of digital tools

In 2024, ITC's suite of data management and digital tools — ITC Surveys, ITC Events and ITC Outreach — continued to advance ITC's corporate and strategic objectives by strengthening our capacity for innovation, operational efficiency and project delivery.

These tools capture every touchpoint between ITC and its clients, whether through event participation, survey responses or mail communications, so that ITC can engage beneficiaries in a meaningful, structured and impactful way. Together, they form an ecosystem of tools that directly supports ITC's corporate objectives of systematic client data management for long-term development results.

ITC Surveys has a strong user base and plays an important part in ITC projects, with the number of surveys quadrupling to 1,362 by the end of 2024 from 333 at the end of 2023. The application has collected data from 41,940 respondents, particularly in ITC's priority countries, reaching 2,494 beneficiaries in remote areas across South Sudan, Nepal, The Gambia, Kenya and Eswatini.

Currently, 126 projects — accounting for 70% of all ongoing projects at ITC — use the application to deliver activities, including for needs assessments, beneficiary registration, results monitoring, feedback collection and evaluation.

The number of users of **ITC Events** has grown steadily. In 2024, the tool facilitated 2,726 event sessions, reporting on more than 88,948 participants.

ITC Outreach, the mass mailing and newsletter application, has also expanded its role in facilitating direct, targeted communications between ITC and its clients. More than 230 mailings were sent in 2024, engaging upwards of 162,015 external recipients. Thirty projects have been onboarded to the application and it has become an integral part of project communication efforts.

The **ITC's Single Sign-On** system, a digital authentication solution that allows users to log onto different ITC platforms and tools using the same set of credentials, has now integrated 12 out of 15 platforms. With a pool of 200,000 registered clients, the system has helped streamline the login process and made for a more seamless online experience.

ITC Beneficiaries — the first corporate beneficiary database — was launched in June 2024. It centralizes ITC's beneficiary data collected from multiple sources, including Single Sign-On and ITC Events. It captures and consolidates both individual and entity-level client data, providing a comprehensive overview of ITC's interactions across various projects, along with touchpoints that go beyond individual project lifespans.

Data governance framework advancing

Without strong data governance, data management efforts can become inconsistent and fragmented. A data governance framework ensures that ITC's data are reliable, accessible, secure and used appropriately. In 2024, ITC introduced policies and guidelines to ensure that data collection and usage across the organization adhered to the highest standards of security and efficiency.

The ITC Data Governance Group played a key role in advancing these efforts, focusing on process improvements for data-related operations. The group held three formal meetings in 2024 to address process needs in online solution development, along with working sessions to refine governance structures and implementation strategies.

Raising awareness, developing skills

In June 2024, the team organized a week-long all-ITC event on data management topics, aimed at onboarding newcomers, increasing awareness and fostering knowledge exchange and data savviness. More than 600 people took part, including 108 colleagues outside headquarters based in 24 ITC programme countries.

The training featured 18 speakers from 10 sections, sharing best practices and their experiences with various data management tools. Over the course of the thematic sessions, participants explored topics such as data management practices, policies, data security, tools and use cases. This comprehensive approach has helped inspire the practical integration of these tools and processes into project implementation and results-based management.

The team has also developed comprehensive resources and used modern communication channels to increase awareness across the organization. Data management guidelines, available on ITC's intranet, along with user guides of data management tools and the Corporate Indicator Directory, provide structured guidance on client data management and corporate reporting.

Supporting project delivery

The Data Management Team, as the central data focal point at ITC, continuously provides data collection advisory and support to trade-related technical assistance projects, helping ensure that the data collected are interoperable and can be analysed in a way that serves ITC's business intelligence needs.

In 2024, the team provided data collection support to 15 projects and teams and onboarded new multi-year projects such as MARKUP II to the data management tools, with the goal of creating project beneficiary databases and tracking long-term engagement.

Corporate results

Building on momentum: Strengthening equity and inclusion

In 2024, ITC's Gender, Diversity and Inclusion (GDI) unit reinforced its commitment to fostering an inclusive workplace, focusing on gender equality, racial and geographical diversity, LGBTQI+ rights, disability inclusion and mental well-being. Through targeted training, advocacy and new resources, the GDI unit continued to equip ITC personnel with the necessary tools to create a culture of respect and belonging.

A key milestone was the launch of ITC's 'Rooted in Respect' approach, embedding inclusion and mutual respect into the organizational culture. As part of this initiative, the GDI unit rolled out 'Inclusivity in the Workplace,' a tailored training series covering bystander behaviour, inclusive leadership and communication, alongside an introduction to the GDI unit's work and how the ITC community can engage.

Beyond training, the GDI unit held six Women's Power Lunch sessions, which provided mentorship and career development for women professionals, and seven diversity and inclusion activities led by ITC's Mental Health and Well-being, Racial and Geographic, and LGBTQI+ focal points, respectively.

These initiatives included commemorations of Black History Month, Hispanic Heritage Month and Mental Health Awareness Week. Additionally, ITC published two key resources — the Disability and Accessibility Checklist and the LGBTQI+ Travel Checklist — to support staff and help make inclusive behaviour a matter of daily practice.

Furthermore, ITC's Senior Management Committee endorsed ITC's D&I Engagement Agreement, which formally recognizes the role of the diversity and inclusion (D&I) focal points, ensuring their contributions are acknowledged in the organization. The agreement also provides a framework for focal points to seek official recognition from the GDI unit or their hiring managers, strengthening their professional development and career progression.

ITC's senior leadership continues to play an active role in promoting systemic change. Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton marked the International Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Slavery with a high-profile visit to the Château de Joux, where former Haitian general and anti-slavery advocate Toussaint Louverture was imprisoned in the early 19th century, to reinforce the importance of historical awareness in addressing racial equity.

She also highlighted ITC's commitment to gender-based violence prevention through a video message for the #OrangeTheWorld campaign.

ITC is part of the new Inter-Agency Working Group on Trade and Disability Inclusion, which brings together Geneva-based agencies working in trade and labour to advocate for more disability-inclusive trade policy and practice.

Launched in 2024, the working group has already convened sessions at events including the WTO's Aid for Trade Global Review and the WTO Public Forum and as part of the International Day of Persons with Disabilities, with these events featuring the representation of ITC's executive and deputy executive directors, respectively.

These combined efforts have drawn recognition from the wider United Nations system. The GDI unit shared insights on organizational culture at the 2024 UN-SWAP Annual Conference, hosted by UN Women.

ITC sustained its 94% compliance rate under the UN-SWAP 2.0 framework, which measures and supports the mainstreaming of gender considerations across the United Nations system. It also made further progress under the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, meeting or exceeding all 13 indicators of the strategy.



Bobicraft, a company that prioritizes hiring persons with disabilities.

Visit to the Château de Joux, a memorial to the abolition of slavery.



Luciana Viegas, Brazilian educator and advocate for persons with disabilities, spoke at ITC Women's Power Lunch on neurodiversity.



Celebration of the International Day of Women in Diplomacy.

Looking ahead to 2025

As ITC concludes the UN-SWAP 2.0 reporting cycle, the GDI unit will begin preparations for the newly introduced, updated version of UN-SWAP 3.0 and the Secretary General's United Nations Gender Equality Acceleration Plan. These efforts will align with ITC's broader work to develop a new Strategic Plan 2026–2030, which will take effect after the current plan concludes in late 2025.

Disability and accessibility inclusion is not just about how ITC works internally, but how it structures its projects and programmes. With this in mind, ITC is introducing related guidelines for how projects and programmes can mainstream inclusion into their work. The GDI unit has also finalized its first series of Cringe Videos, which are learning resources that address racial and geographic discrimination. These have been internally shared throughout the ITC community.

The GDI unit will also prioritize developing materials and communicating ITC's zero-tolerance stance against discrimination and harassment. This will be done in collaboration with human resources (HR) and the new legal officer – Intake and Investigation, along with giving personnel the necessary resources to understand what this stance means and what support is available.

Finally, as one of the international organizations that has signed onto the Geneva Alliance Against Racism, the unit will collaborate with the new HR data team to improve disaggregated data collection, beginning with racial and geographical diversity. This will contribute to a more informed approach when addressing organizational gaps in tackling discrimination and harassment.

Corporate results

Human resource management

A new structure for a new chapter

In 2024, ITC's human resources team underwent a re-structuring to serve ITC in a more holistic and inclusive way. The new structure brings together all administration of personnel—including staff administration, consultancy management and internships—into an overall HR Administration Unit.

It also combines recruitment and learning and development to create the Talent Acquisition and Development Unit, allowing for more seamless longer-term workforce planning that links capacity gaps with learning solutions, such as for upskilling, re-skilling or bringing in new talent.

Another new unit, HR Data Management and Analytics, streamlines human resources-related data collection, strengthens reporting and conducts analytics for planning and projection purposes.

By realigning teams and processes, the new structure enables a more fluid and unified work environment, one where expertise from different areas is more seamlessly integrated. The results include the ability to respond to HR client needs more quickly, tailor solutions more effectively and support cross-training to further professional development.

Improved conditions of service for consultants

The year 2024 also saw the introduction of paid time-off and United Nations holidays for longer-serving consultants and individual contractors. This move has significantly improved conditions of service for contractors at ITC, allowing for better work-life balance and necessary breaks. The result is a healthier, more balanced work environment, designed to support greater job satisfaction and well-being.

Greater and wider support for interns

For the first time, ITC introduced the payment of subsistence and travel allowances for interns, allowing interns who normally may not have the opportunity to work in locations such as Geneva to benefit from the chance to contribute to the organization's work.

The policy also introduced gender balance goals, as well

as geographic requirements whereby the majority of interns benefiting from the allowance were nationals of United Nations programme countries. The policy was later expanded to allow for internships that may not require financial subsistence, broadening access to internship opportunities and allowing more interns to participate, learn and contribute to projects.

Updated policies on prohibited behaviour and disciplinary procedures

ITC's policies on prohibited conduct and disciplinary measures and procedures were updated to emphasize a victim-focused approach, refine definitions and instructions, shift some roles and responsibilities, and provide more details on investigations, prevention and early intervention.

These changes provide ITC with a sound foundation to strengthen its system to address discrimination, harassment, sexual harassment and abuse of authority, and elaborate on the investigative and disciplinary processes related to unsatisfactory conduct. Most importantly, it focuses on the safety, security and well-being of the affected individual through a more comprehensive support system.

Continued knowledge sharing

The human resources team continued to share knowledge with ITC personnel through HR Briefings, HR Talks, Just-in-time Performance Management trainings and technical training sessions. These trainings played an important role in enhancing client knowledge and empowering personnel and managers so they could make informed decisions.

These activities helped personnel gain valuable knowledge into HR matters, empower themselves with information on best practices and support career development. These spaces for transparent communication also allowed personnel to share experiences and ask questions, promoting an organizational culture of openness and healthy exchanges.

Corporate Results

Human resources by the numbers



55%

female P staff



representing

97

nationalities

157

staff members from
developing
and transition
economies

45%

423
staff members

22

staff members from
least
developed
countries

59%

of competitive professional
-category (or higher)
vacancies won by
candidates fromdeveloping or
least developed
countries

1320

consultants
and individual
contractors

with

2276

contracts issued



302

staff utilised
work-life
balance (WLB)
options, representing

71% of the total

55%

of
Professional
category
staff

at ITC are women

67%

of
fixed-term
recruitment
competitions
won by women

35

interns
from21
countries

94%

of
UN-SWAP 2.0
compliance

in 2024



Moving forward: Transforming our culture

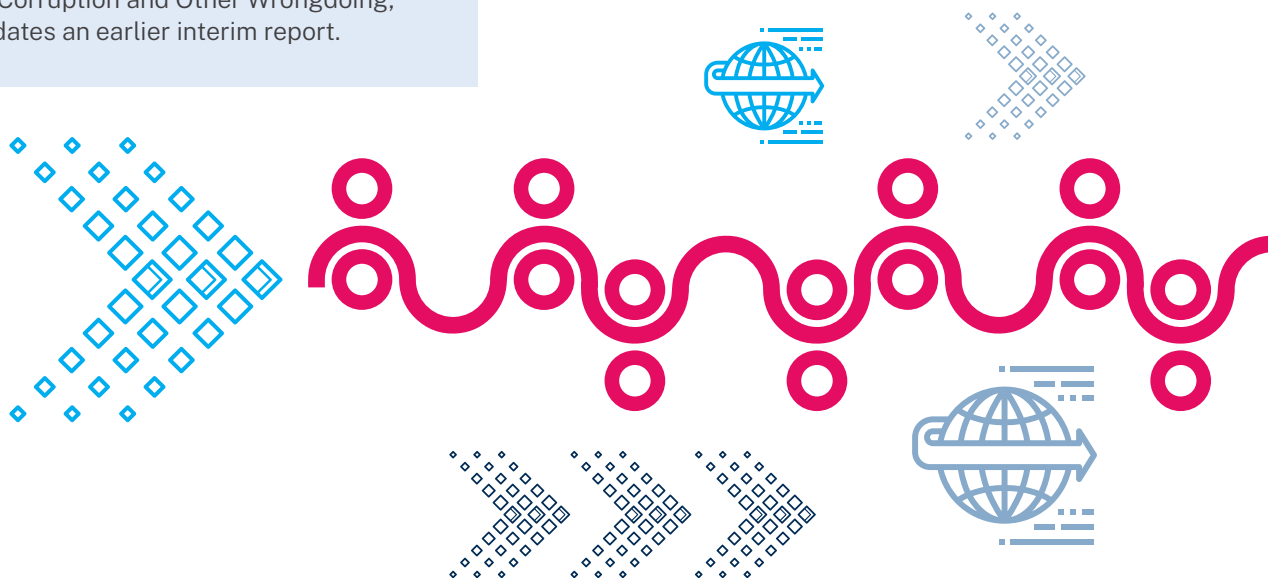
ITC's Moving Forward Action Plan is an initiative designed to help make sure how we work at home fully reflects our United Nations values. Launched in February 2023, it features a 26-point plan that is split in two parts: tackling prohibited conduct and building a better workplace. 2024 saw this plan achieve major milestones in both areas, helping make a more supportive and effective workplace possible.

Tackling prohibited conduct

- » **Policies:** Following an independent review of ITC's policies on prohibited conduct and disciplinary processes related to unsatisfactory conduct, ITC has set out revised policies for improving prevention, early intervention, and support to victims. These policies formalized the establishment of a new intake officer position at ITC, who has since joined the organization as of June 2024.
- » **Intake Officer:** The intake officer is the internal receiving point for complaints of unsatisfactory conduct, including allegations of fraud, discrimination, harassment, abuse of authority, sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. She conducts preliminary assessments of complaints, advises the Executive Director on subsequent actions, including launching internal or external fact-finding investigations, and can provide those reporting complaints regarding other resources available to them.
- » **Transparency:** As part of its commitment to transparency, ITC has released the 2023 ITC Report of the Executive Director on Disciplinary measures and Other Actions Taken in Response to Fraud, Corruption and Other Wrongdoing, which updates an earlier interim report.

Building a better workplace

- » **Consultants:** Longer-serving consultants with full-time contracts now have access to official UN holidays and up to two days of absences per month, following their seventh month of service. Work is also underway to make contractual modalities and remuneration levels more coherent across ITC.
- » **Survey:** Insights from the annual Employment Engagement Survey have been shared and discussed extensively within ITC, helping inform decisions on issues such as consultants' contractual modalities, leadership trainings and internal communications.
- » **Rules of collaboration:** New rules have been in place as of April 2025 to help ensure how we work — such as our behaviours and internal interactions — fully reflect ITC's core values, with a focus on fundraising, project design and delivery.



Dare to change: Innovation Lab on the cutting edge



Opening of ITC Innovation Fair

Booths showcasing their innovative solutions during ITC's Innovation Fair 2024.



Now approaching the 10th anniversary since its founding in 2015, the ITC Innovation Lab continues to ensure that the ITC team remains on the cutting edge — both in the trade-related technical assistance that ITC delivers on the ground and in how the organization works on a daily basis. In 2024, that meant both widening the Lab's outreach efforts, while deepening its relationships within and across ITC itself.

For outreach, one of the Lab's top priorities was building closer relationships with other leading innovators at peer organizations, making it possible to share lessons and generate new ideas. As part of these efforts, the Lab hosted the Geneva Innovation Movement Association's members at headquarters to share the work that ITC has been undertaking under the Moving Forward Action Plan. It has also held innovation-themed ITC Staff Talks with participation from this association's leadership.

The Lab has showcased ITC's culture of experimentation and innovation in the international development and policy community in Geneva, sharing examples of key initiatives and projects at the Friends of ITC lunch held during the annual meeting of the Joint Advisory Group, as well as during gatherings of the Consultative Committee of the ITC Trust Fund.

One of the Lab's crucial objectives for 2024 was to make sure that in this age of generative artificial intelligence, project teams were well equipped to use and engage with AI tools and technologies responsibly and effectively.

Throughout the year, the Lab worked closely with ITC's in-house AI adviser to provide training on various facets of AI literacy, from basic concepts to data analysis. The Lab also organized peer-to-peer sessions with the Learning and Development Hub that focused on building digital literacy more broadly in ITC and seeing

where new technologies can be used to optimize work processes.

The Innovation Fair remains a staple of the ITC calendar, with the 2024 edition devoted to the theme of 'amplifying trade impact'. The event featured a panel discussion on innovation in practical terms, an 'Enlightening Corner' featuring short, TED Talks-style presentations on innovative ITC interventions, an 'Exhibition Hall' with booths spotlighting creative methodologies and results, and a 'Pitch Corner' for proposing new ideas inspired by successful projects and approaches. Attendees included Geneva-based ambassadors and external innovation experts, alongside the ITC community.

Heading into 2025, one of the Lab's priorities is to contribute to a United Nations-wide push to modernize the United Nations system and spur progress towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals, in line with the Secretary-General's vision of a 'UN 2.0'. To that end, the Lab has set up internal UN 2.0 Communities on ecosystem building, with the goal of building up key skill areas that are known jointly as the Quintet of Change. These five skill areas encompass data, digital, innovation, behavioural science and foresight.

The Lab is also stepping up its work to embed innovative best practices and methodologies into ITC projects, offering 'training of trainers' sessions and workshops tailored to beneficiaries, support in concept development for innovative projects and advisory services to scale up existing good practices.

Communications & Outreach

At ITC, communications and outreach are a vital part of every intervention, making clear to our target audiences around the world how we work and what the results mean for sustainable development. Underpinning ITC's project and corporate communications alike is a clear message: that trade is, fundamentally, a human story.

These efforts have translated into strong interest and engagement from our target audiences, both in person and online, about how to make trade more connected, sustainable, and inclusive. The results are reflected not just in the success in our interventions, but in the growth in followers and subscribers across ITC's corporate digital channels and the high demand for ITC's publications.



362,797

Social Media followers

+10.6%

+5.5%

Twitter / X

+6.6%

Facebook

+13.8%

LinkedIn

+15.1%

Instagram



Top 10 publication downloads in 2024

- 1 The Coffee Guide, 4th edition
- 2 Model Contracts for Small Firms
- 3 SME Competitiveness Outlook 2023: Small Businesses in Fragility: From Survival to Growth
- 4 The State of Sustainable Markets 2023: Statistics and Emerging Trends
- 5 World Tariff Profiles 2024
- 6 African Market Trends in Technology Services: 11 country profiles (2nd edition)
- 7 La Guia del Cafe, cuarta edicion
- 8 Tech Hubs in Africa: Accelerating start-ups for resilient growth (3rd edition)
- 9 BRICS Digital Economy Report 2022
- 10 Agrifood Exports and Climate Change

563,035

Video views

+5.4%



5,306,291

Website views

+19.61%

829,444

+7.58%

Users

59,877

-6.1%*

File downloads

*File downloads include publications, corporate documents such as annual reports, and project document such as brochures.

Corporate results

Financial overview and resource mobilization

The International Trade Centre, a joint agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, operates within a distinctive administrative, budgetary and governance framework established through formal arrangements between the two parent organizations. These arrangements, reviewed in 1998, 1999 and 2004, were most recently consolidated and endorsed in 2024 by the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 79/257) and the WTO General Council (WT/BFA/220/Rev.1). This framework guides ITC's operations and strategic direction, underpinning its mandate to foster inclusive and sustainable trade-led development.

ITC functions under the UN Financial Regulations and Rules and the UN Staff Regulations and Rules and is subject to the United Nations oversight framework. Internal oversight is provided by the Office of Internal Oversight Services (OIOS), which operates independently under delegation of authority from the United Nations Secretary-General. External audits are carried out by the United Nations Board of Auditors (BOA) in accordance with the International Standards on Auditing. ITC's financial statements are certified by the United Nations Controller and submitted to the United Nations General Assembly along with the BOA audit report.

The regular budget (RB) of ITC is jointly and equally funded by the United Nations and the WTO. ITC also mobilizes additional extrabudgetary (XB) resources from a range of donors, including governments,

governmental organizations, international bodies and civil society, to support its mission in conjunction with the regular budget.

The RB is denominated in Swiss francs. The United Nations budget is adopted annually, while the WTO budget operates on a biennial cycle. Budgetary information is provided simultaneously to the governing bodies of both parent organizations. The ITC's proposed programme of work, progress report and budget are reviewed by member state representatives in several committees. At the United Nations, these bodies include the Committee for Programme and Coordination, the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions, and the Fifth Committee of the United Nations General Assembly. At the WTO, this information is reviewed by the WTO Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration.

Often spanning multiple years, commitments for XB contributions are outlined in the ITC Operational Plan, with oversight by ITC in line with the authority delegated by the United Nations Secretary-General. Their use adheres to the Financial Regulations and Rules of the United Nations.

To offset indirect costs associated with facilitating XB-funded project implementation, ITC charges a programme support cost (PSC) of up to 13% on XB expenditures. PSC revenue is recognized at the time of the corresponding XB expenditure, not upon the receipt of contributions. The PSC budget undergoes annual approval by senior management.

2024 FINANCIAL HIGHLIGHTS

- **\$209.0 million**
in new XB
agreements (2023:
\$159.3 million)
- **\$173.84 million**
in gross
contributions
received (2023:
\$166.81 million)
- **\$269.35 million**
in total available
resources (opening
balance + new
contributions) (2023:
\$257.92 million)
- **\$171.39 million**
in total expenditure
(2023: \$162.41
million)

ITC continues to adhere to the International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and received an unqualified audit opinion on its 2024 financial statements, affirming sound financial management practices and compliance with IPSAS and UN standards.

Table 1 highlights ITC's 2024 financial information, focusing on the regular budget, extrabudgetary resources, and the programme support account.

TABLE 1 Status of resources (\$ million gross) as of 31 December 2024

Description	Opening balance	Net income received *	Expenditures	Total cash at hand
Regular budget	-	43.53	43.53	-
Programme support cost	8.57	9.97	10.49	8.05
Total extrabudgetary resources	86.94	120.34	117.36	89.92
Extrabudgetary resources, Window 1	8.88	10.68	11.00	8.56
Extrabudgetary resources, Window 2	78.05	109.66	106.36	81.35
Total	95.51	173.84	171.39	97.97
		269.35		

* Net contribution includes refunds to donors (\$0.141 million), excludes interest and transfers to operating reserves.

In 2024, ITC planned to deliver overall \$148.0 million, while its actual delivery was above target at \$171.4 million. The XB delivery of technical assistance, capacity-building and market intelligence was \$117.4 million, approximately 4.7% higher than in the previous year.

Figure 1 shows the upward trend of RB and XB expenditures since 2020.

FIGURE 1 Expenditure pattern 2019–2023 (\$ million)

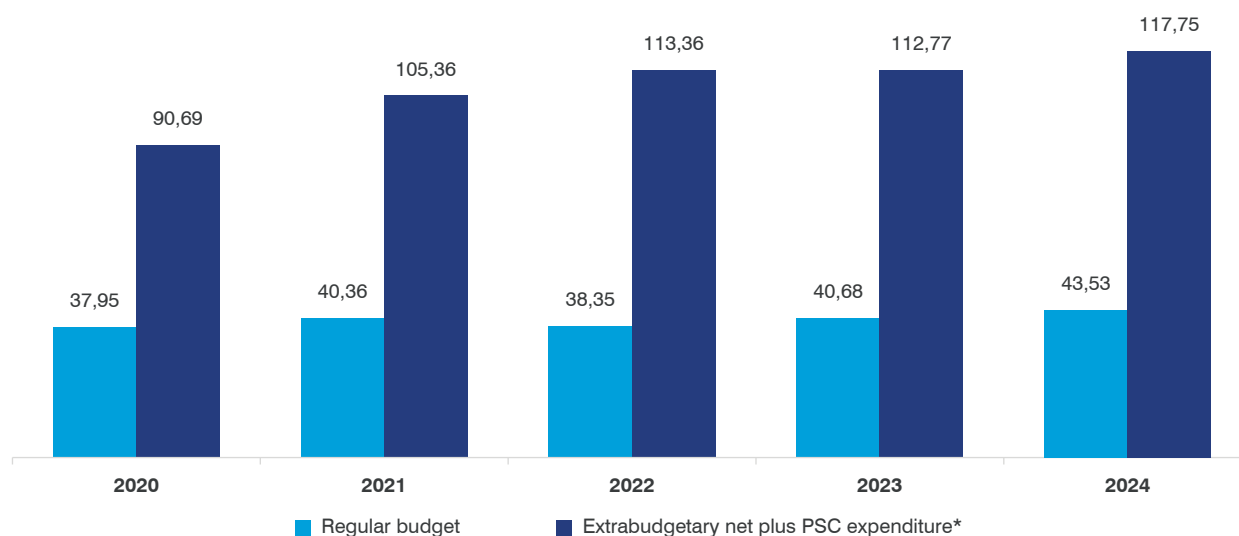


Table 1 shows gross XB expenditure of \$117.36 million, which includes PSC income earned when the related XB expenditure was incurred, while the amount of \$117.75 million in Figure 1 reflects net XB expenditure including the portion of PSC that has been spent.

Regular budget

In 2024, ITC effectively used its regular budget to strengthen its core institutional capacity and deliver on its mandate. With a 7% increase in USD expenditure, enabled by a 4% increase to the budget for rising costs and through favourable CHF/USD exchange rates, the regular budget funded 160 staff positions, supported management functions and enabled the development of global public goods such as trade data tools and publications.

ITC uses the RB contribution to fund: (a) the development and maintenance of core expertise, the expansion of ITC's intangible assets and the enhancement of key components of ITC's global public goods offering, including databases, tools and publications; (b) programme development, monitoring and evaluation; and (c) ITC core management and country coordination.

The RB funding supports salaries and common staff expenditure for 160 positions, along with organizational operating costs.

The regular budget is adopted in Swiss francs (CHF), while contributions are received monthly and converted into U.S. dollars at the UN operational exchange rate applicable on the date of each transaction. The United Nations and the WTO approved an inflation adjustment to ITC's 2024 RB budget, resulting in a 4% increase from CHF 36.7 million in 2023 to CHF 38.2 million in 2024. This increase, combined with a favourable USD/CHF exchange rate throughout the year, is the reason for the 7% increase in USD expenditure on RB. In 2024, RB expenditure amounted to \$43.53 million (2023: \$40.68 million).

TABLE 2 RB expenditure in 2024 (\$ million gross)*

Categories	Expenditure
Staff and other personnel costs	36.23
Operating and other direct costs	4.97
Contractual services	1.05
Equipment vehicles and furniture	0.66
Travel	0.36
Grants out	0.20
Supplies, commodities and materials	0.06
Grand total	43.53
Resources available	43.53
% of delivery	100%

*The RB is approved in Swiss francs. Amounts reported in the above table have been converted to U.S. dollars to make the data comparable and to provide a comprehensive view of ITC's financial situation for accounting and reporting purposes.

The updated administrative arrangements for ITC (Annex II of A/79/6 (Sect.13) were approved in 2024 by the United Nations General Assembly (resolution 79/257) and the WTO General Council (WT/BFA/220/Rev.1). They consolidate two decades of changes in the budgeting processes of both organizations into a single document, incorporating technical and administrative updates that had not been previously documented in one place. The administrative arrangements also streamline the budget format and review timeline, ensuring alignment between the United Nations' annual budget cycle and the WTO's biennial cycle.

Extrabudgetary funds

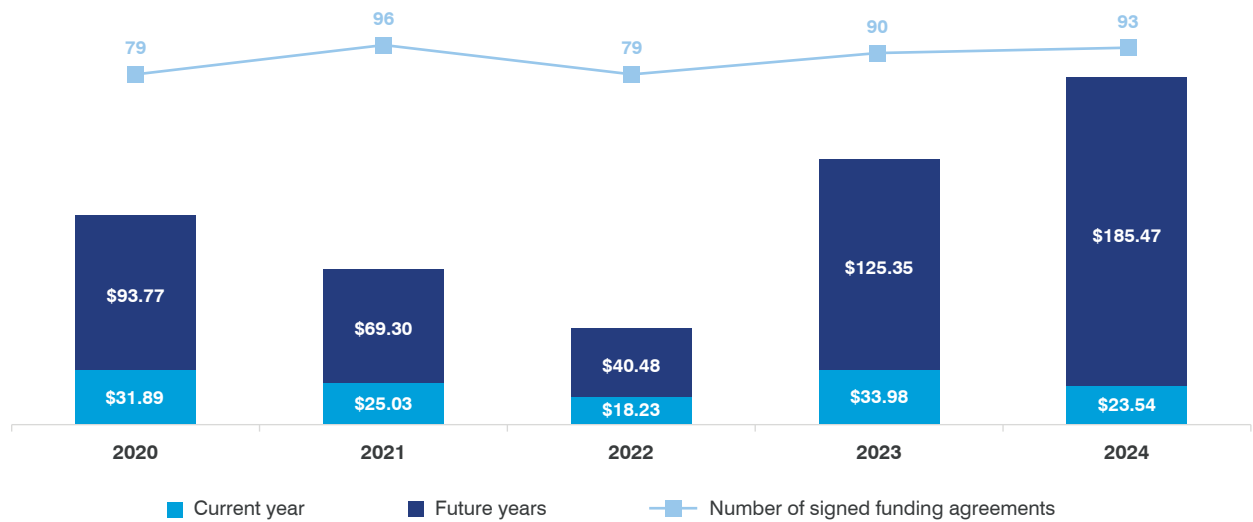
The increase in XB delivery supported new or expanded initiatives in LDCs, LLDCs, SIDS, Sub-Saharan Africa and in countries in conflict and post-conflict situations.

In 2024, ITC continued diversifying its donor base. Signed XB agreements reached \$209.0 million, marking a 31% increase compared to 2023. While this change indicates a strong funding commitment from donors, ITC maintains prudent financial management practices to mitigate any potential uncertainties related

to donor funding and remains committed to ensuring the continued delivery of its mandate. Extrabudgetary contributions received in 2024 remained relatively constant at \$120.3 million compared to \$117.4 million in 2023.

Figure 2 shows the evolution of voluntary contribution agreements signed in each year and the portion attributable to the current year and to future years.

FIGURE 2 Signed funding agreements 2020–2024 (\$ million)



Total XB available resources in 2024:

- **\$86.94 million** carried forward from 2023
- **\$120.34 million** in gross contributions received in 2024

FIGURE 3 XB contributions 2020–2024 (\$ million)

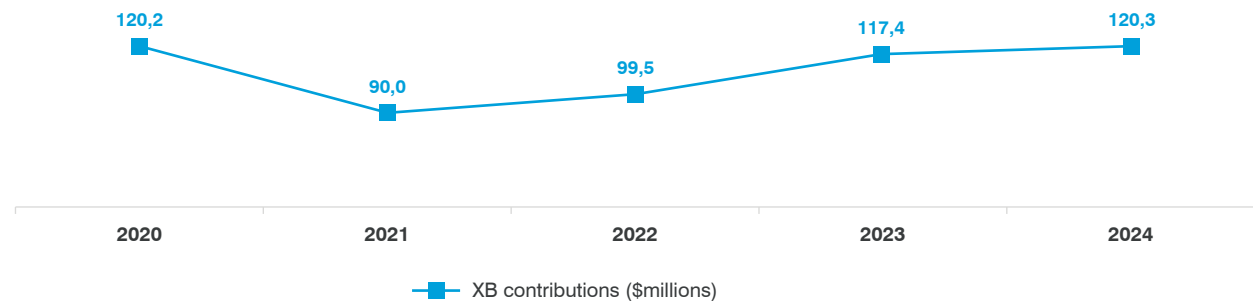


TABLE 3 XB expenditure in 2024 (\$ million gross)

Categories	Expenditure
Technical experts and other personnel	70.67
Travel	14.18
Operating and other direct costs	13.73
Transfers and grants issued to implementing partners	10.87
Contractual services	5.14
Equipment vehicles and furniture	1.34
Grants out	1.17
Supplies, commodities and materials	0.27
Total	117.36

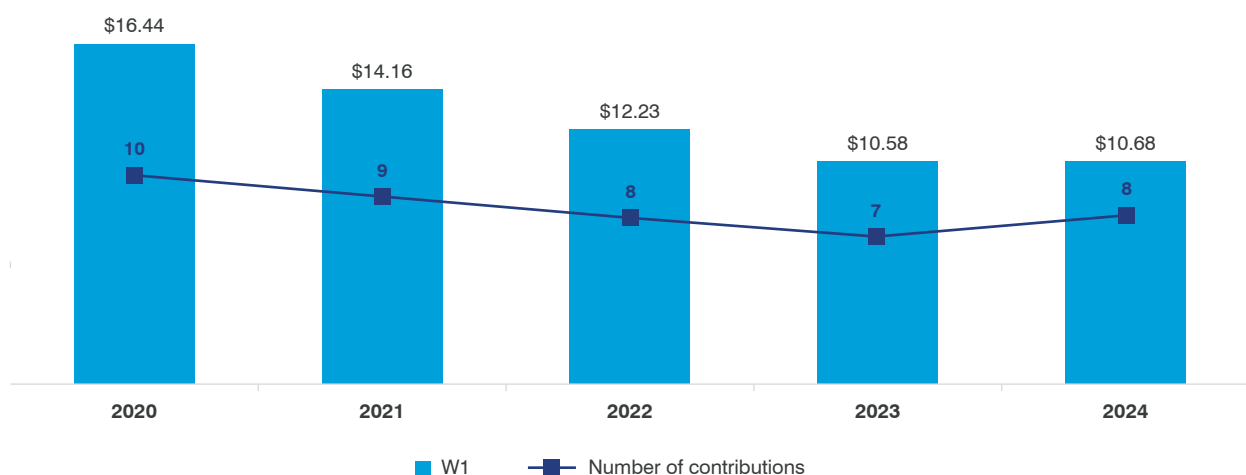
A total of \$364.78 million in XB funds is secured for future years: \$89.92 million carried forward for 2025 activities and \$274.86 million in remaining receivables from donors.

Unearmarked and soft-earmarked contributions

The ITC Trust Fund (ITF) of extrabudgetary contributions is divided into two so-called windows:

- Window 1: unearmarked or soft-earmarked contributions for corporate or thematic purposes.
- Window 2: fully earmarked contributions for specific projects, designed to meet pre-stated and time-limited objectives to be implemented at the country, regional and interregional levels.

Figure 4 illustrates how Window 1 has evolved, both in the number of contributors and in the total value of their contributions.

FIGURE 4 Window 1 contributions 2020–2024 (\$ million)

Programme support account

The PSC account was effectively used to reinforce back-office capacity and contribute to cross-cutting UN initiatives, including digital transformation and staff safety.

An indirect cost recovery called a ‘programme support cost’ is charged to extrabudgetary funds to ensure that the additional costs of supporting activities financed from XB contributions are not borne by RB resources.

In line with UN financial procedures, ITC charges standard PSC rates ranging from 7% to 13% on XB expenditures. The revenue generated from PSC is used

to cover indirect and incremental costs associated with XB-funded projects, including the central administration of human resources, financial management, and information technology services, as well as monitoring and oversight functions.

In 2024, PSC revenue totaled \$9.97 million, with \$10.49 million in expenditure and a year-end balance of \$8.05 million. PSC resources continued to be used to fund additional staff required to support programmatic delivery and to fund cost-shared corporate initiatives by the UN Secretariat, as well as the security and insurance of field staff.

- \$9.97 million in PSC income
- \$10.49 million in PSC expenditure
- \$8.05 million balance in the PSC account at the end of the year

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Trade Centre concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

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