International Trade Centre

2023 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report

ITC Independent Evaluation Unit

2023 ANNUAL EVALUATION SYNTHESIS REPORT

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

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

This is an independent publication published by the ITC Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU).

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2023 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report at a Glance

This AESR is based on information from 8 evaluations, 11 reviews, and 51 project completion reports carried out in 2022 covering interventions with start dates from 2016 onwards.

Main findings

Generally high **relevance** of ITC projects, focusing on the systems underlying MSME competitiveness.

Overall good **coherence**, with opportunities found to improve external and internal synergies.

Very positive **Effectiveness** especially with engagement in design and implementation in concerned communities.

Efficiency could not be fully captured by the current results frameworks.

Most interventions had a positive **impact**, especially for contributing to countries' national development objectives.

Capacity building activities and partnerships have positively influenced **sustainability.**

Key conclusions

- Although the project portfolios demonstrate the intention to **work on cross-cutting issues** at design stage, implementation appeared to be uneven, with gender aspects generally emphasized more than other cross-cutting dimensions.

- ITC is recognized for the added value of its **hybrid delivery model that requires partners' participation** in projects as a mean to ensure impact and sustainability. MoUs played a positive role in ensuring effective partnerships, providing clarifications on the terms and responsibilities of all parties involved.

- Aligning projects with client needs proved to be a general strength of ITC, although several evaluations noted that the integration of MSME needs into the project approach could be further improved to **continue making projects even more responsive to beneficiaries' needs.**

- In terms of **synergies with the UN family**, the intensity of in-country collaboration and partnerships with other UN entities varied by project and appeared to remain limited and ad hoc, rather than strategically prioritized.

- Regarding **Results Based Management** tools and practices: logframes and related documentation generally did not sufficiently clearly explain how the inputs and outputs were articulated to achieve medium- and long-term results. Consequently, current M&E practices mainly focus on what can be counted as intended in the results frameworks (i.e., mostly tracking inputs and outputs) and hence, fail at capturing both intended and unintended direct effects of interventions.

Lessons

1. Continue to prioritize work on cross-cutting issues.
2. Optimize the formalization and quality of partnerships.
3. Develop specific needs assessment tools for grassroots MSMEs.
4. Continue optimizing collaboration with UN agencies at country level.
5. Continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools.

Contents

Abbreviations

AESR	Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ARISE	ASEAN Regional Integration Support
BSO	Business Support Organization
CAR	Central African Republic
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease pandemic
DaO	Delivering as One
DCP	Division of Country Programmes
DECI	Division of Enterprise Competitiveness and Institutions
DoI	Department of Industry, Nepal
DSIT	Division of Sustainable and Inclusive Trade
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations
FCDO	Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GEEW	Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women
GIZ	Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GRASP	Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IEU	Independent Evaluation Unit of ITC
ILO	International Labor Organization
LNOB	Leave No One Behind
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MARKUP	Market Access Upgrade
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MENATEX	Middle East and North Africa Clothing and Textile programme
MOALI	Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Irrigation, Myanmar
MOC	Ministry of Commerce, Myanmar
MOICS	Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Supplies, Nepal
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MSME	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
NES	National Export Strategy
OECD-DAC	Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PAPEUR	Projet d'Appui à la Promotion de l'Entreprenariat en Milieu Rural
PCR	Project Completion Report
PSC	Project Steering Committee
PUEDE	Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization

RBM	Results-Based Management
ROM	Results Oriented Monitoring
RQ	Research question
SAAVI	Strengthening the agriculture and agri-food value chain and improving trade policy in Iraq
SCORE	Sustaining Competitive and Responsible Enterprises (ILO programme)
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SME	Small and Medium-sized Enterprise
T&C	Textile and Clothing
TEPC	Trade and Export Centre, Nepal
TIP	Trade and Investment Programme
TMI	Trade and Market Intelligence
ToC	Theory of Change
TRTA	Trade-Related Technical Assistance
UCDA	Ugandan Coffee Development Authority
UN	United Nations
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNCTAD	UN Conference on Trade and Development
UNSDCF	UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
USD	United States Dollar
WACOMP	West Africa Competitiveness Programme
WE	Women Entrepreneur
WG	Working Group
WOB	Women Owned Businesses
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

Introduction

i.   The Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR) is a knowledge product of the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) that aims to synthesize key messages emerging from recent evaluation reports and related reviews to consolidate and share acquired knowledge on ITC interventions.

ii.   This 2023 AESR provides an overview of the progress made in the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, based on (a) the findings extracted from the evaluations and reviews analyzed according to the main dimensions of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025; and (b) the baseline assessment provided in the 2022 AESR.

iii.   A methodological framework was developed for this purpose (see Annex 3). Each of its fields contains criteria in the form of research questions against which the respective objectives of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 (columns) can be assessed in relation to each of the evaluation criteria defined by the Development Assistance Committee of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD-DAC).

iv.   This year's AESR covers evaluations and reviews from January to December 2022, ranging from evaluations carried out by the IEU (3 documents), self-evaluations (2 documents), funder-led evaluations and reviews (12 documents), and Project Completion Reports (PCRs 51 reports). In addition, the sample included a sustainability review and a developmental review, both produced by the IEU. These source documents cover projects and programmes with start dates as early as 2016.

Key findings

v.   **Relevance –** Overall, the projects were in line with ITC's vision, mission, principles, and priorities. In assessing the projects' alignment with ITC's core mandate and strategic priorities, they were found to improve both the competitiveness of micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and the inclusiveness, sustainability, and prosperity of national economies. Moreover, the projects were designed to contribute to systemic change. There are several examples of how the project design, linked enterprise competitiveness objectives with structural and systemic change, although some projects show that the integration of MSME needs could have been strengthened through better consultation with them at the design stage.

vi.   All interventions demonstrated that a modular approach was used to customize services based on the needs of clients and partners, which provided countries with "tailored capacity building, technical and advisory support services, and specialized tools". In addition, projects enabled in-country stakeholder leadership.

vii.   Support for the work of the World Trade Organization (WTO) was observed in all interventions, designed to support institutions and enterprises to take advantage of opportunities arising from trade agreements developed under the WTO. Either directly, e.g.,

through specific activities such as trainings on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, or through advocacy efforts such as those in *SheTrades*. Or indirectly, like all other ITC interventions aimed at supporting trade at the export level.

viii. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were explicitly integrated into the results framework for some projects. However, it was not necessarily made clear how projects were intended to contribute to selected SDGs or cross-cutting objectives, especially when these were not linked to specific objectives. Furthermore, reporting on these aspects did not go far beyond the intention to collect data disaggregated by age, sex, or gender on beneficiaries' participation in project activities.

ix. Some project evaluations indicated that communication plans and outreach on strategic issues could have been improved by further differentiating the content and communication channels according to the types of project stakeholders and by informing stakeholders more regularly about the planned interventions.

x. **Coherence –** Regarding internal coordination in the design and implementation of interventions, while internal synergies were generally planned from the design stage, several evaluations and reviews also identified areas for improvement, particularly in the use of materials from other ITC Divisions and in-country collaboration.

xi. The intensity of in-country collaboration and partnerships with other UN entities varied by project, ranging from no collaboration at all to full collaboration in the implementation of some project components. Other external synergies were quite successful. On the one hand, projects such as *PUEDE in Colombia* developed "excellent synergies and complementarities on the ground with multiple actors". On the other hand, some reports also highlighted challenges and missed opportunities in establishing useful partnerships with existing and potential co-implementation partners.

xii. **Effectiveness –** Most projects were assessed as effective in terms of delivering high-quality outputs, but the picture is more nuanced when it comes to outcomes, either because of delays or because the outcomes were difficult to track.

xiii. Hubs and hybrid delivery models were identified as success factors for effectiveness. In several cases, local business support organizations (BSOs) took on the role of multipliers and delivered services on behalf of ITC within in-country hubs. Hybrid delivery models, combining remote and in-country delivery, were found to be particularly useful in addressing the prolonged challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. As ITC does not have permanent in-country offices, the active involvement of project teams on the ground was considered crucial, and evaluations also emphasized the positive role of Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in securing effective technical partnerships.

xiv. Projects demonstrated a high level of effectiveness in the creation and use of communication tools. It is worth noting that *SheTrades* positioned ITC as a thought leader in multilateral discussions on trade and sustainable development.

xv. Gender was raised more frequently than other cross-cutting issues (youth, gender, environment, human rights, etc.). This is somehow coherent with the precursor role of the SheTrades initiative has played in progressively mainstreaming the gender dimension since its inception in 2015. However, project performance on gender mainstreaming still varies from possible gaps in fully addressing gender-related issues to efforts to promote gender equality and empower women (GEEW) through the active inclusion of women in decision-making processes.

xvi. **Efficiency –** Despite delays brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic, the projects overall proved to be effective. However, weaknesses were also found in some few cases due to long decision-making processes originating at the HQ level that led to efficiency losses on the ground.

xvii. The evaluations highlight that project logical frameworks (logframes) as such do not seem to be a sufficient tool to fully identify and articulate all the necessary elements to illustrate and adequately justify how projects intend to achieve the proposed results chain. Three categories of problems were identified during the evaluations: (1) the long-term objectives at the end of the causal pathways were too broad to realistically track and report on their contribution; (2) the inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes were sometimes loosely defined or articulated; and (3) the integration of context analysis into the results framework was also found to be inadequate in several evaluations; and baseline data was found to be missing from the results frameworks.

xviii. All projects had results frameworks, annual reports, communication materials, and other relevant documents that could facilitate knowledge sharing on activities and results. However, these components of a knowledge management system were not systematically organized.

xix. At the project governance level, steering committees within project management structures, which bring together stakeholder representatives and project management, were valued as efficient mechanisms for sharing information on past and future activities. However, the lack of delineation of roles and responsibilities related to monitoring and accountability was highlighted in some projects.

xx. Contributions from implementing partners or clients were observed in several cases to support the implementation of project objectives, in the form of in-kind contributions (provision of staff time and office facilities); evaluations also reported clients' participation in the form of financial contributions.

xxi. Some evaluations noted some synergies between ITC and the UN Country Team (UNCT). ITC has become as of March 2023, an official signatory of the UNSDCFs for more than 30 countries. However, ITC needs still better enhance the efforts to further integrate the trade agenda into country programmes, the AESR did not find yet clear evidence of this in the analysed reports.

xxii. **Impact –** Several projects were found likely to contribute to building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. The *PUEDE in Colombia* project was perhaps the best example in 2022. Through this project, ITC has demonstrated that it is possible in an area deeply affected

by insecurity, to live legally and with dignity through the creation of trade, which in turn has contributed to building peace.

xxiii. In terms of impact on cross-cutting issues, these issues are interlinked in such a way that planning interventions to address one cross-cutting issue has produced positive impacts on other cross-cutting areas. In many cases, these effects may have been unintended either positive or negative, but the results frameworks were not considered flexible enough to capture and report on these unintended results. Some evaluations also highlight that expected impacts could not be adequately captured by the current results frameworks as they provided mostly quantitative data, leaving little room for reporting on the qualitative performance of the interventions. Complementing this analysis, other projects found that it was mainly data that fit positively into the results frameworks that were reported, while information about what worked less well and for whom was not necessarily captured.

xxiv. **Sustainability –** Some interventions demonstrated that ITC contributes positively to strengthening the country's trade capacity and sustainability, especially through knowledge transfer, policy influence, public-private networks, and implementation mechanisms. In this respect, the creation and/or promotion of spaces for discussion and advocacy was considered positive.

xxv. ITC interventions have generally worked towards the sustainability of improved practices, particularly through the empowerment of individuals and organizations. Capacity building was identified as one of the most important enabling factors for sustainability. Sustainability was further enhanced when capacity building was linked to complementary enabling factors such as investment in infrastructure and multi-year engagement. Hindering factors for sustainability, on the other hand, were mainly associated with coordination problems within ITC interventions, the need to better tailor ITC support to country needs, and the lack of exit planning or sustainability strategies developed from the beginning of the interventions.

Conclusions and lessons

xxvi. Looking at the findings organized according to the methodological framework (see Annex 3) the clearest findings continue to come from the OEDC/DAC evaluation criteria of "relevance", "coherence" and "efficiency." This may be due to the fact that the portfolio of evaluations in 2022 consists mainly of midterm evaluations and reviews (15 out of 18 reports), where the statements regarding "impact" and "sustainability" are limited because the evaluated projects are not yet mature.

xxvii. The number of evaluations analysed this year is lower than in previous years (18 reports compared to 26 in 2022) and the assessment of performance is also more heterogeneous, with some projects performing well in some areas and others not at all. The reduced number and higher heterogeneity of the portfolio implies that, depending on questions and topics, it is not always possible to provide an average appraisal, nor to determine to which degree the observations can be generalized into conclusions and subject to new recommendations.

xxviii. Nevertheless, as far as the emerging patterns are concerned, they are largely consistent with those of previous years. The reports contain a number of converging findings that confirm the

themes raised in the conclusions of previous years, such as the need to improve work on sustainability aspects, to strengthen synergies with complementary measures, and the encouragement to continue working on the RBM system. For this reason, conclusions in this year AESR lead to lessons learned that come and complement previous AESR recommendations rather than new recommendations. This implies that these lessons should not be subject to a management response but should be considered when implementing the related previous AESR recommendations and when reporting on their implementation.

Conclusion I: Work on cross-cutting issues

xxix. In line with the increased focus on sustainable development introduced by the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the project portfolios integrated cross-cutting dimensions into the design with the clear intention of building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. However, the scope appeared to be uneven, with gender aspects generally emphasized more than other cross-cutting dimensions; the AESR notes that this an area in which ITC started working earlier than on other cross-cutting issues.

xxx. Performance within each cross-cutting issue also varied, for example, from no gender strategy to systematic and comprehensive efforts to promote GEEW. At the same time, monitoring and reporting information on the work done by projects on cross-cutting issues is still limited.

xxxi. This raises the question of the multiplicity of cross-cutting issues. For example, while the portfolio shows a particular focus on women, prioritization on other cross cutting issues such as Leave No One Behind (LNOB) is not yet to show significant consolidation, perhaps due to the focus of these coming later than gender. This seems to confirm the challenge for projects to comprehensively cover cross-cutting issues and the need for a stronger focus on environmental sustainability, which was already highlighted in the 2022 AESR.

xxxii. At the same time, there was positive evidence of the impact and sustainability of results achieved on cross-cutting issues, as achievements obtained on some issues had reinforcing effects on others. For example, the work done at the environmental level to improve farmers' agricultural practices had positive effects on productivity and income (green growth) and social and health aspects of their lives (social responsibility). This virtuous cycle between interconnected cross-cutting issues and the combination of sustainable development results were assessed as the building blocks for the impact and the sustainability of results.

Lesson 1: Continue to prioritize cross-cutting issues

xxxiii. It is important to prioritize which cross-cutting issues will be addressed and why, as well as what are expected results for these, in view of supporting the production of meaningful monitoring and reporting information, including from implementing partners.

This lesson is addressed to the recently created ITC Division (DSIT) fully dedicated to sustainable and inclusive trade. It can be taken into account within the implementation of the moonshots on "Green", "Youth" and "Gender" that were elaborated for 2022-25 with annual action plans. The lesson also links to the previous AESR 2021 recommendation 2 to develop a clear, organization-wide understanding of internal value chains (see Annex 5 page 54).

Conclusion II: Partnerships to support ITC hybrid delivery model

xxxiv. Several projects demonstrated how ITC's technical assistance to trade and sustainable development adds value to a complex group of various stakeholders with different challenges and capacities. The quality of partnerships is crucial, as ITC's hybrid delivery model implies that partners' participation in projects is instrumental to ensuring their impact and sustainability.

xxxv. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) played a positive role in ensuring effective technical partnerships, especially as they helped clarify the terms and responsibilities of all parties involved, including the provision of reporting information (effectiveness). The same applies to the governing frameworks of the projects, as they ensured that the projects were embedded in the official structures of the government and paved the way for the complementary role of the partners (coherence). The importance of establishing formal agreements with countries' partner institutions was emphasized to ensure mutual accountability and transparency at the project governance level (steering committees). Formality in partnerships also facilitated the provision of in-kind and financial contributions from project implementing partners as wells as beneficiaries (efficiency).

xxxvi. The importance of establishing structured partnerships was also confirmed by the project self-evaluations, in form of PCRs. About 30% of the PCRs that submitted in 2022, highlighted the importance of engaging partners and coordinating between all partners from an early stage in the project. (See Annex 2).

Lesson 2: Formality and quality of partnerships

xxxvii. Formal / contractual instruments between ITC and its partners are crucial to ensuring mutual accountability, predictability, and transparency, thus, helping to improve partner commitment to projects. These are helpful instruments to recall work priorities including on cross-cutting issues, and for delineating roles and responsibilities of implementing partners in delivering activities, and in monitoring and reporting on results.

As the development of these instruments require knowledge of partners' capacities, needs and their specific situation, and as several ITC Divisions, including administration, are involved in the creation of contractual instruments with implementing partners, this lesson is conveyed to the ITC Steering Mechanism[1] for its consideration and possible recommendations to senior management to mainstream good practices within the ITC.

Conclusion III: *Continue making projects even more responsive to vulnerable beneficiaries' needs*

xxxviii. Aligning projects with client needs proved to be a general strength of ITC, ensuring the high relevance of projects. As in previous years, the evaluation reports highlighted the

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[1] The Steering Mechanism on the Lessons Learned from the Implementation of the Strategic Plan is an ITC consultative group that has been established in 2023. It will act as a structure for learning and knowledge management purposes on the lessons learned provided by evaluations on the Strategic Plan implementation as well as on improving the performance and results of ITC in delivering trade-related technical assistance.

organizational strengths of "expertise" and "agility" as all interventions adopted a modular approach to tailor their services to the needs of clients and partners.

xxxix. The evaluation of the *Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization (PUEDE) in Colombia* project described how, in meeting the needs of grassroots producers and vulnerable communities, the use of inclusion processes and deliberative communication was effective in ensuring the participation and ownership of community members. Shared decision-making on project priorities paved the way for enhancing the capacities, opportunities, and ultimately the dignity of the stakeholders and rights holders involved, including the most vulnerable (impact).

xl. In other projects, this AESR confirms the positive trend that internal, in-house needs assessment tools for BSOs, such as CUBED, are being used more systematically. However, it is not always clear to what extent projects conduct the same type of needs assessments for the other categories of ITC clients, especially for grassroots MSMEs and informal workers.

xli. Several evaluations noted that the integration of MSME needs into the project approach could be improved, particularly informal MSMEs. The importance of conducting studies, diagnostics, and consultations on MSME needs was highlighted to enable better-tailored and more inclusive support for MSMEs and ultimately enhance the impact and sustainability of project results.

xlii. Here again, a notable proportion of ITC project managers seem to acknowledge the importance of conducting a pre-market study or an assessment at an early stage of the project to integrate MSMEs' needs in a more targeted manner (see examples in Annex 2).

<u>Lesson 3: Specific needs assessment tools for grassroot MSMEs</u>

xliii. It is important from the inception stage, to improve strategic assessments and consultations, especially with grassroot MSMEs and informal workers, to better identify their needs along the supported value chains.

This lesson is related to the AESR 2022 recommendation 2 to make projects more responsive to beneficiaries' needs through an enhanced in-house toolbox assigned to SPPG (see Annex 5 page 51). It should be part of the ongoing development of a compendium of needs assessment tools that will enable projects to further respond to beneficiaries' needs, identify, adapt, and integrate assessment tools that have been successfully developed by ITC projects to identify MSME needs.

Conclusion IV: Synergies within the UN family

xliv. In alignment with the reform agenda of the UN, which emphasizes the need for collaboration with UNCTs and the community of development partners present at the local level, the ITC reports having become an official signatory of the UNSDCFs for more than 30 countries (see Annex 6, page 59) however based on the reports analysed by this AESR, the intensity of in-country collaboration and partnerships with other UN entities still varied by project and appeared to remain limited and ad hoc, rather than strategically prioritized.

xlv. At the same time, the AESR notes that the opportunity to reinforce synergies with UNCTs depends on country context (mix of UN agencies present at country level, organizational capacities of concerned UNCT, etc.), and that work to reinforce synergies with other UN agencies might be subject to related contingencies.

Lesson 4: Continue optimizing collaboration with UN agencies at the country level

xlvi. This suggests that the recommendation for the implementation of a corporate strategy to strengthen engagement with the UNSDCF remains valid – and should be built on a clear assessment of opportunities on the ground.

This lesson is linked to the AESR 2020 recommendation 6 assigned to DCP (see Annex 5, page 58). The roll-out of the ITC's Country Engagement Strategy should pave the way for more systematic identification and use of opportunities for joint implementation with other UN agencies at the country level.

Conclusion V: Results Based Management

xlvii. Logframes and related documentation generally did not explain sufficiently clearly how the inputs and outputs would lead to achieving the medium- and long-term results. As conveyed in last year's AESR, logframes are overall based on M&E requirements set by the funder at the design stage for accountability and compliance purposes (e.g., through the funder's logframe template). Also, a gap was highlighted in relation to baseline assessment, which was generally not available to support tracking and reporting against logframe indicators.

xlviii. Consequently, current M&E practices mainly focus on what can be counted (i.e., mostly tracking inputs and outputs) and hence, fail at capturing both intended and unintended direct effects of interventions. Effective development interventions are more complex than simple inputs-process-outputs-outcomes-impacts results chains. For example, emergent processes and outcomes may be more valuable than planned ones, which makes systems thinking and complexity-informed approaches important when planning complex programmes.

xlix. In terms of managing complex projects, there is room for improvement for M&E systems tracking the quality and appropriateness of project activities or taking stakeholder feedback into account, and ultimately to support course correction. As a result, the existing reporting frameworks did not allow for capturing the full extent of the results achieved, which in some cases even led to underestimating the impact of the projects.

Lesson 5: Continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools

l. The 2022 AESR recommendation to continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools is still valid. This is particularly the case for large projects, which combine a complex set of interlinked project components, for which RBM tools should allow for tracking and reporting on emergent processes and results.

This lesson is related to the AESR 2022 recommendation 4 to continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools assigned to SPPG (see Annex 5, page 53). It should be reflected in the checklist to support the preparation of M&E plan at inception stage -especially for large projects, to help

project manager in reflecting on M&E needs and support adequate planning on specific roles and responsibilities, tools, resources, etc. from the early stages of project design.

1. Introduction and methodology

1. **Background –** The Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU) of the International Trade Centre (ITC) has published its Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR) every year since 2013. The AESR provides ITC stakeholders with an analytical synthesis of the key messages emerging from all types of ITC-related evaluations. The AESR is presented to ITC Member States and discussed at the annual meeting of the ITC Joint Advisory Group. Since 2017, ITC senior management has issued a management response to the AESR recommendations.

2. **Purpose –** The overall purpose of the AESR is to support both accountability and learning, to continuously improve ITC's performance and results in delivering trade-related technical assistance (TRTA). The review aims to assess how ITC is faring in view of its strategic objective to contribute to inclusion, sustainability, and prosperity. It also aims to maximize the learning potential of evaluations.

3. **Scope –** The AESR uses independent evaluations and reviews, self-evaluations, including the Project Completion Reports (PCRs), funder-led evaluations, Results Oriented Monitoring (ROMs) Reviews, other types of evaluations, and other relevant ITC reports such as the IEU results-based management (RBM) and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) documents[2] to draw overarching conclusions aimed at ITC management and other staff. This 2023 AESR assesses documents from 2022, and some finalized in the first quarter of 2023. These source documents cover projects and programmes with start dates as early as 2016.[3]

Table 1: Types of evaluations and reviews included

	Independent evaluations	Self-evaluations	Funder-led evaluations and reviews	Sustainability reviews	Results-Oriented Monitoring Reviews	Project Completion Reports
Commissioner	IEU	Project manager	Funders	IEU	European Commission	Senior Management Committee
Evaluator or reviewer	External evaluator	ITC manager and/or external evaluator	External evaluator	External evaluator	External reviewer	Project Manager and Project Team
Independence	High	Medium-low	High	High	High	Low
Number in 2023 AESR	3	2	3	1	9	51

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[2] Annex 1 provides a full list of the documents used in this review.
[3] Annex 4 provides brief descriptions of the 8 evaluations and 11 reviews used as source documents, including start dates for each intervention.

4. **Approach –** Like the 2022 AESR, the 2023 AESR assesses evaluations and reviews against ITC's corporate objectives set out in the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan, taking into account the evaluation criteria of OECD-DAC. A **methodological**

*Throughout Chapter 2, **research questions** (RQ) are positioned in **boxes** next to the related text so that the reader can easily identify them.*

framework (see Annex 3) has been developed to combine the evaluation criteria with the ITC's objectives set out in the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, which are summarized as follows:

- Alignment with ITC's vision, mission, and principles, ITC's MSME competitiveness framework, and ITC's value proposition.
- Achieving results under ITC's matrix approach in core services and impact areas.
- Responding to country needs, engagement in WTO and UN, purpose-driven partnerships, and leadership on MSME competitiveness, trade, and development issues.
- Enhancing a purpose-driven corporate identity, building on lessons learned, and focusing on cross-cutting development objectives and a people-centered approach, gender equality, diversity and inclusion, and environmental sustainability.
- Improving ITC's organizational strengths (trust, expertise, connectedness, and agility) and mobilizing resources to deliver tangible results.

5. The results of these **research questions** are presented in Chapter 2 ("Findings"), insofar as the assessments and reviews in 2022 provided observations that allowed such conclusions to be drawn. In addition to an analysis guided by the OECD/DAC criteria (Chapters 2.1 – 2.6), the AESR includes a summary of the findings per the Strategic Plan objective (Chapter 2.7).

6. The main **method of data collection** was desk research. Because of their lower level of independence, the recommendations expressed by the project managers in their PCRs served as a back-up to support the findings and conclusions conveyed by evaluations and reviews.

7. The **limitations** relate mainly to the diversity of evaluation-related documents. They contain different types of information, ranging from comprehensive independent evaluations to self-reporting of project implementation progress to funders. Hence, they vary significantly in-depth and quality (descriptive versus analytical/critical). This reduces the extent to which common patterns can be identified.

8. Another challenge is that the evaluation and ROM reports may not fully reflect the current situation. Many of them are midterm evaluations and reviews i.e., assessments that were carried out about two years after the project started. This is too early in the intervention life cycle to provide a definitive judgement on several aspects of the intervention's results chain, including their achievements at outcome level.

2. Findings

2.1 Relevance

10. Relevance is about doing the right thing, more specifically about ensuring that the objectives of an intervention are consistent with international and partner countries' policies, ITC's corporate goals and the needs of the beneficiaries.

> RQ 1.1.1: Conformity of projects to ITC's vision, mission, and principles.
>
> RQ 1.8.1: Consistency with ITC's core mandate and strategic priorities.

11. **Projects conformed to ITC's vision, mission, principles, and priorities**. In examining projects' consistency with ITC's core mandate and strategic priorities, the evaluations assessed that they were both improving MSME competitiveness and improving the inclusivity, sustainability, and prosperity of economies.

12. **In addition, projects were designed with the intention to contribute to systemic change**. Multiple examples are provided on how project design was linking enterprise competitiveness objectives with more structural and systemic changes. For example, the actions at

> RQ 1.2.1: Design focusses on MSME competitiveness as a leverage to generate systemic change.

policy, institutional and enterprise levels of *National Export Strategies (NES)[4]* were targeted to address a wide array of objectives, extending from improved trade performance and increased foreign exchange earnings, to stimulating job creation, raising small business competitiveness, and attracting investment.

> RQ 1.2.2: Design is client-focused.
>
> RQ 1.3.2: Use of client-focused needs assessments.

13. With a view of better leveraging clients' potential to support systemic change, some interventions, such as the *ASEAN Regional Integration Support (ARISE+)* projects, show that, although MSMEs were considered in the project document, the **integration of MSME needs could have been strengthened** by improving consultations with them from the design stage. For example, although the *ARISE+ Malaysia* project was designed to contribute to an improved business environment by building on better policies, procedures, and systems to support the private sector and in particular MSMEs, these "were not directly consulted during project preparation." Project design should have "indicated through which mechanism the SMEs would be involved in a pro-active way throughout the project." In some cases, delivery mechanisms were not appropriate as in the *Growth for Rural Advancement and Sustainable Progress (GRASP) project in Pakistan*, where due to literacy requirements, some illiterate SME owners who were initially targeted, were excluded from some of the trainings.

14. Although all interventions integrated "clients" needs into their design and systematically used some form of clients-focused needs assessments, the term "clients" was sometimes in

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[4] As found in the Sustainability Review of the ITC programme 'Trade Development Strategies', Results and lessons after project completion.

practice rather "vague" given the array of stakeholders to which it may apply. This has been for example, hampering the clarity of what was done to assess the specific needs of MSMEs such as in the *Projet d'Appui à la Promotion de l'Entreprenariat en Milieu Rural (PAPEUR) in Central African Republic* which did not sufficiently assess contextual needs of clients at stake.

15. On a positive note, the strategies of the *Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization project (PUEDE) in Colombia* project, to access new markets through knowledge transfer and quality certification processes, greatly benefited from the studies, diagnoses, and consultations that the project conducted during the project inception phase, with producers and their organizations, to collect productive and commercial information.

16. All interventions demonstrated that a **modular approach was used to customize services based on the needs of clients and partners**. For example, the *National Export Strategies* (NES), which provided countries with "tailored capacity building, technical and advisory support services, and specialized tools" for designing strategies because of supporting their successful implementation.

> RQ 1.2.3: Design integrates modular and customized approach when offering core services.

> RQ 1.3.1: Evidence of country leadership over the partnership for development with ITC.

17. **Projects enabled in-country stakeholders' leadership**. In terms of country leadership being integrated at the design stage, the *Market Access Upgrade programme (MARKUP) in East Africa* explicitly "supported African leadership and aspirations." It did align its interventions with the African Union's Agenda 2063 and with the strategies of each of the regional partner institutions. The same applied to the *ARISE+ Myanmar* project where all relevant country's trade priorities, were embedded in… the previous Government's relevant key strategic documents. Concerning country leadership being integrated at inception phase, the *PUEDE in Colombia* project focused on conducting its "activities to develop beneficiaries' leadership" at local level, although the level of involvement and appropriation of some stakeholders, such as the City Halls and the Governor's Office, was less evident.

18. **Support for the work of the WTO** was observed in all interventions, which were designed to support institutions and companies to take advantage of the opportunities arising from trade agreements designed under the WTO. Directly, e.g. through specific activities such as trainings on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (*ARISE+* and *MARKUP*) and through advocacy efforts such as in *SheTrades*, which led to the launch of the WTO Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment at the WTO Ministerial conference in Buenos Aires in 2017.

> RQ 1.4.1: Support of countries on WTO-related matters

19. Although SDGs are explicitly integrated into the results framework of projects,[5] **it was not necessarily made clear how projects intended to contribute to selected SDGs or cross-cutting objectives**. Furthermore, reporting on these aspects did not go far beyond the intention to collect data disaggregated by age and sex or gender or some form of quantitative information on beneficiaries' participation in project activities. Concerning SDG 5, for example, neither the design of *ARISE+ Malaysia* "gender equality or youth promotion objectives/outcomes/outputs" nor *PUEDE in Colombia* took gender into account.

> RQ 1.4.2: Design focus on relevance of Trade for achieving the SDGs.
>
> RQ 1.6.1: Alignment to cross-cutting objectives.

> RQ 1.5.1: Communication and outreach on strategic issues and support of the thought leadership on trade issues and advocacy.

20. Project teams included staff dedicated to communications, such as communication specialists, who contributed to equipping projects with Communication Plans and/or Strategies. In most of the EU-funded projects,[6] project teams followed the EU communication and visibility requirements. However, some project evaluations[7] illustrated that **communication plans and outreach on strategic issues might have been improved.** They could have differentiated content and channels of communication depending on the types of project stakeholders and rightsholders. They could also have updated their stakeholders on the foreseen interventions more regularly. In this respect, the *ARISE+ Malaysia* evaluation noted limited outreach in the direction of the private sector and the *PAPEUR ROM* highlights blurred strategic communication between the project and beneficiaries.

2.2 Coherence

19. Coherence is about the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector, or institution. According to the OECD-DAC, the area of coherence includes ***internal coherence*** (i.e., synergies and interlinkages between, among others, the intervention and other interventions carried out by the same institution) and ***external coherence*** (i.e., consistency of the intervention with other actors' interventions in the same context to bolster complementarity and avoid duplication efforts).

> RQ 2.2 2: Core services' roles and synergies within matrix are identified (design), and further developed (implementation).

20. Regarding **internal coordination for the design and implementation of interventions,** *SheTrades* was recognized for acting as an umbrella for synergizing the work of various ITC Divisions.[8] Internal synergies were

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[5] For example: the *MENATEX* results framework included an expected outcome an "*Increase in export value at T&C sector level (in USD) (SDGs 1, 17.11)*".

[6] For example: *Coconut project in the Caribbean*, *PUEDE in Colombia, the Capacity building and Value Chain (VC) development in Iran, SAAVI in Iraq, GRASP in Pakistan, ARISE+ in Thailand, and the project to facilitate WTO access in Uzbekistan*

[7] *SheTrades, MENATEX, ARISE+ Malaysia, the Sustainability Review on NES,* the *PAPEUR ROM, and MARKUP*

[8] *SheTrades* evaluation notes: "Global support, including tools development, partnerships, communications, outreach etc., is undertaken through the SheTrades Initiative umbrella project which is supported by SheTrades staff, consultants, and other ITC staff outside of the SheTrades team."

generally planned from the design stage to facilitate project implementation.[9]

21. However, a fair number of evaluations and reviews[10] also highlighted **opportunities for improvements**, and paradoxically, even *SheTrades* noted a "lack of collaboration between *SheTrades* and other ITC units, particularly when it comes to using each other's materials and in the area of in-country collaboration." *SheTrades*, in addition to *ARISE+ Malaysia* and *NES*, found weak coordination and/or collaboration between in-country projects or at the organizational level. This was assessed as a hindering factor to consolidate ITC's long-term responses to client needs. These instances may indicate that collaboration within ITC that is agreed upon at the project design stage, is not necessarily becoming fully operational at the implementation phase.

22. Overall, interventions were aligned with the work of UNCT in countries, through the inscription of ITC's contributions in UNSDCFs. However, the **intensity of in-country collaboration and partnerships with other UN entities varied according to each project**. In-country collaboration

> RQ 2.4.1: Strengths of collaboration and partnerships within UN and with WTO.

expanded on a continuum that went from no-collaboration at all,[11] to full collaboration for implementing some project components. For example, through its collaboration with complementary ILO initiatives (mostly the SCORE and Better Work programmes), *MENATEX* developed a focus on social sustainability aspects in Egypt, Jordan, and Tunisia, which would not have been necessarily considered otherwise.

> RQ 2.5.2: ITC positioning builds on/supports the work of stakeholders/partners.

23. **In most projects, the external synergies were successful**. On the one hand, projects such as *PUEDE in Colombia,* developed "excellent synergies and complementarities on the ground with multiple actors. The intervention participated in different "dialogue tables" with national and local authorities, contributing to sectoral coordination." At the community level, the same project also improved producers' communication, trust, and relationship skills with peers and leadership in their communities.

24. The *ARISE+* evaluations have highlighted the importance of the governing framework for enhancing ITC's support to the work of partners: "solid governance, steering, and project management structures (incl PSC, WGs, etc.) established from the outset" have facilitated stakeholder coordination and embedded the project within the official structures of the government. These positive trends were corroborated by several ROM reviews[12] which reported good coordination and complementarity of interventions, either with public or

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[9] For example, *MENATEX* was designed by the ITC Division for Enterprises Competitiveness and Institutions (DECI) and foresees joint implementation by DECI and the Division of Country Programmes (DCP).

[10] These are: *NES, MARKUP in East Africa, TIP in Nepal, WTO accession in Uzbekistan, WACOMP in ECOWAS, and PAPEUR in CAR.*

[11] *PUEDE in Colombia* evaluation notes: "several attempts by the project to collaborate with other projects in the region, including some from UN agencies, were ultimately unsuccessful."

[12] *Caribbean, PUEDE in Colombia, the Capacity building and Value Chain (VC) development in Iran, SAAVI in Iraq, GRASP in Pakistan, and the project to facilitate WTO access in Uzbekistan.*

private organizations, as well as other funders and government ministries, avoiding duplication of services. On the other hand, two reports also highlighted challenges that project have faced and missed opportunities in establishing useful partnerships with existing and potential co-implementing partners.[13]

2.3   Effectiveness

25.   Effectiveness is about meeting the intervention's objectives and more specifically about meeting the needs of intended clients and beneficiaries. The extent to which ITC interventions achieved their intended results (translated into expected outputs, outcomes, and impact) including the attention paid to any differential results obtained across groups is examined.

> RQ 3.2.1: Effectiveness in transforming activities into outputs; Effectiveness in achieving intermediate outcomes.

26.   **Most projects were assessed as effective in delivering high-quality outputs**[14] **but the picture is more nuanced in terms of outcomes**. Some of the midterm ROM reviews (*Iran, and Uzbekistan*) found that projects made progress in achieving positive results, by successfully improving productivity, quality, competitiveness, and effectively strengthening capacities, infrastructure, and facilitating market access. In other cases, effectiveness was assessed less positively. The reasons were either delays in providing certain deliverables that may hinder the achievement of some outcomes within the project timeframe (*ARISE+ in Thailand*, and *WACOMP in ECOWAS*), or a difficulty to track outcomes, as the links between activities, outcomes, and longer-term impacts were not always clear in the project-related documentation (*MENATEX, ARISE+ in Myanmar*).

27.   **Hubs and hybrid delivery models were identified as success factors for effectiveness**. In several cases, local BSOs took on the role of multipliers and provided services on behalf of ITC. This was the case with *ARISE+ Myanmar.*[15] However, to be

> RQ 3.3.1: Effective use of hub concept and hybrid delivery models.

effective, hubs need to be nurtured with a sustained focus on capacities (organizational, institutional, and systemic). An example of this is *MARKUP*, where the project actively partnered with the Ugandan Coffee Development Authority (UCDA) which played a key role in project implementation in collaboration with various public and private sector institutions. In contrast, *SheTrades* achieved uneven results in working with national institutional actors hosting embedded SheTrades hubs at the national level and was recommended to reactivate

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[13] This refers to *ARISE+ in Myanmar* which indicated that "Project partners are not fully aware of the entire scope of the project, hence implementing partners possibly miss synergies opportunities" and to *PAPEUR in CAR*) which identified an overlap of several other projects in-country projects taking place in the same area that has not been addressed.

[14] With some exceptions though, mainly related to delays in delivery due to COVID-19 (*ARISE+ in Laos*), because of low quality outputs *(PAPEUR in CAR)* or due to "remote negotiations and language barriers" (*Coconuts in the Caribbean*).

[15] *ARISE+ Myanmar* evaluation notes: "(…) project activities have been conducted jointly with the respective counterparts (…) ensuring that at least one representative from each sector association became a quality champion and a certified trainer on sustainable standards, so that they could offer relevant advice services to their MSMEs members in the short and long term".

already launched in-country hubs, refocusing on areas where there was strong local buy-in and/or where there was dedicated funding to support their operations.

28. Hybrid delivery models, combining remote and in-country delivery, were found to be particularly useful in addressing the prolonged challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was the case with *ARISE+ in Laos,* where stakeholders met in one room, while a Lao facilitator and international experts joined via the Internet.

29. Since ITC does not have permanent "brick and mortar" offices in the countries, the **active involvement of the project teams on the ground was considered crucial**. In the *PUEDE* in *Colombia* project, the project implementation team was mostly hired locally and localized close to the beneficiaries. This enabled the project to be effective by supporting commitment and focusing on people. The project office conducted comprehensive and locally focused situational analyses and continuously adapted the project's organizational structure and work processes to changes and learnings related to local realities.

> RQ 3.3.3: Contribution of local presence to effectiveness.

> RQ 3.4.1: Contribution of all types of partnerships to results achieved, in particular, through technical partnerships.

30. 2022 evaluations emphasized the **positive role of the Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) in securing effective technical partnerships**. *MENATEX* provided examples of signed MoUs with partner organizations, such as academic institutions, think tanks, and the private sector, which set out the specific commitments of each party and the areas of collaboration under the projects and the programme that was critical to building training and research services adapted to local needs and improving business processes. Similarly, *PUEDE in Colombia* illustrated the positive contribution of these technical partnership agreements, stating that the MoUs strengthened the "co-responsibility" of the associations in achieving their objectives, and have overcome the traditional view of seeing themselves only as passive recipients of benefits.

31. **Projects demonstrated being innovative in the creation and use of communication tools**. This trend was illustrated by several projects in 2022. *SheTrades* was successful in using direct communication through its digital platform and large-scale global events to reach and engage women entrepreneurs at an individual level. The same is true of *SAAVI in Iraq* and *ARISE+ in Thailand* which used effective communication tools and effectively engaged with the media to promote their objectives and achievements to stakeholders and the public. Furthermore, *PUEDE in Colombia* demonstrated how good practices[16] in creating quality communication and visibility products (including radio spots, videos, newsletters, and media tours) were planned through a continuous

> RQ 3.5.2: Use of innovative tools to produce content and reach audiences.

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[16] *PUEDE in Colombia* evaluation notes: "The Visibility and Communications Plan determined the strategy implemented to make visible and disseminate the project's progress, achievements, goals and other relevant information to national and international entities, direct and indirect beneficiaries, strategic allies and the general public. The plan, in addition to determining the audience and key messages, defined the media to be used: audiovisual materials, websites, radio, digital marketing, print advertising, traditional media, digital media, events. "

grassroots engagement of the project team with beneficiaries and partners from the inception stage and throughout the project lifecycle.

RQ 3.5.3: Consolidated ITC status in thought leadership and advocacy on trade and sustainable development issues.

32.   **Some interventions gained leadership through active advocacy for trade and sustainable development.** *SheTrades* was particularly effective in lobbying at the global level "to ensure women's equal access to ownership and control over resources as a means to engaging in trade." ITC also demonstrated a form of thought leadership on trade and sustainable development issues through *MARKUP in East Africa,* which specifically trained beneficiaries in "Advocacy for Reducing Trade Barriers". Given the importance of environmental sustainability, many projects planned to develop sustainable production models and some (such as *PUEDE in Colombia*) obtained results (e.g., using waste as raw material and compliance with international best practices for environmental protection). However, these efforts were not found to have given ITC a status as a thought leader in these areas.[17]

33. Gender was most frequently addressed in the 2022 evaluations, however, the **performance of projects in mainstreaming gender varies greatly**. A first category of projects such as *Coconuts in the Caribbean,* and *WACOMP in ECOWAS,* indicate a possible gap in

RQ 3.6.1: Effectiveness in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues.

fully addressing gender-related issues. They were found not to be implementing a comprehensive gender strategy nor were they generating meaningful monitoring and reporting information on these issues (both elements are considered essential for gender-responsive programming), due to constraints posed by required reporting frameworks. A second category, such as *Value Chains in Iran,* and *GRASP in Pakistan*, focused on the specific needs and challenges faced by women and made efforts to promote gender equality and empower women (GEEW) by actively involving women in decision-making processes, giving them equal opportunities to participate, and seeking to prioritize women-led MSMEs. A third category, represented by *PUEDE in Colombia*, did not consciously integrate gender in its approach, but at the same time ensured a high level of women's participation in the project, as they even took a significant leadership role in project implementation. However, this was by coincidence and the evaluation pointed out that the project could have been technically much more performant – if it had deliberately planned for GEEW.

34. Other cross-cutting issues (youth, vulnerable populations, environment, human rights, etc.) seemed to be less of a priority. However, some mainstreaming efforts were reported. For example, regarding human rights, some projects such as *PUEDE in Colombia, SAAVI in Iraq,* and *GRASP in Pakistan*, used a Human Rights-Based approach to emphasize the inclusion of disadvantaged groups (such as small producers and associations) and to prioritize the

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[17] It is worth distinguishing between projects and programmes regarding thought leadership and advocacy, since the contribution that individual projects make to ITC's thought leadership is not specified in their results framework.

promotion of human rights principles in their activities, by providing them with active participation, accountability, transparency, and access to information.

2.4 Efficiency

35. Efficiency looks at the relationship between inputs and outputs and whether the intervention is cost-effective by measuring the extent to which the intervention delivered results in an economic and timely manner.

RQ 4.2.1: Ratio between inputs and outputs.

36. Although no evaluation conducted a cost-effectiveness analysis of the intervention, the data included suggested that projects were **overall found efficient despite delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic**. However, weaknesses were also identified in some projects. For example, *TIP in Nepal* found that beneficiaries indicated that long decision-making processes originated at the HQ level, and led to efficiency losses on the ground,[18] a concern also expressed in other evaluations, such as *PUEDE in Colombia*.

37. Despite all projects developed a logframe or intervention logic (generally consisting of a results framework and a narrative), most evaluations began by reconstructing the intervention's Theory of Change (ToC) to understand the logic and actual story of the project interventions. This suggests that **project logframes as such, do not seem to be a sufficient tool to fully identify and articulate all the necessary elements to illustrate and adequately justify how projects intend to deliver on the proposed results chain**. The evaluations identified three categories of concerns:

RQ 4.2.2: Quality of the project logframe /theory of change and their further development into client-focused results chains.

38. The long-term objectives at the end of the causal pathways (i.e., expected impacts) were in some cases too broad for ITC projects to realistically and meaningfully track and report on their contribution. The *MENATEX* evaluation explained that the stated expected impact of income generation and job creation along the T&C value chain was not specific enough to determine ITC's contribution to trade facilitation, MSME growth, and development, or other Aid for Trade long-term objectives.[19]

39. The objectives along the predefined causal pathway to drive change, i.e., inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes, are sometimes loosely defined or articulated. In several cases,[20] projects were found to lack a clear theory of intervention that would have helped in positioning and formulating their short- and long-term objectives.

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[18] *TIP in Nepal* evaluation notes: "The decision-making process was centralized in the ITC headquarters (Geneva), and it took much longer to review and approve the activities and the associated expenditures."

[19] It is worth considering that these are often pre-defined by the funder, who requires that the project expected impact coincides with the overall programme under which the project is funded (this sometimes applies to the outcome and intermediate outcome levels).

[20] For example, the evaluation of *ARISE+ in Laos* found that a "number of indicators at output level (…) are more suitable as outcome indicators. Some of the outcome indicators, for the specific objective, (…) are more relevant as impact indicators;"

40. The integration of context analysis into the results framework was also considered insufficient in several evaluations. This was particularly true for the analysis of the capacities of the existing systems and environment. This may be the capacities of ITC[21] and/or the capacities of the beneficiaries,[22] which in these cases were not sufficiently considered in the proposed theories of interventions.

RQ 4.2.3: Adequacy of M&E systems used.

RQ 4.2.4: Use monitoring and reporting information for real-time implementation assessment and course correction.

41. Considering the **role of M&E systems in project management,** overall insufficient and inadequate resources for the M&E function of projects were reported in the 2022 evaluations. For example, *ARISE+ in Laos* was found to lack "a dedicated expert or resource person undertaking regular monitoring of the project." There were also mixed messages about the adequacy and use of project monitoring frameworks: in several projects (*PAPEUR in CAR, Coconuts in the Caribbean, and WACOMP in ECOWAS*) the existing reporting frameworks did not allow to capture the full extent of the results achieved due to deficiencies in the quality of the indicators, lack of a clear vision, underestimation of goals, insufficient representation of activities, and overall progress in the country. The use of M&E data for project management was found to be insufficient to track the quality and appropriateness of project activities and to incorporate stakeholder feedback to support course correction. The evaluations of *MENATEX and PUEDE in Colombia* found that the limitation to logframe indicators contributed to the underestimation of the project's results and impact on the reporting.

42. On the contrary, some projects (*Value Chains in Iran, SAAVI in Iraq, GRASP in Pakistan, ARISE+ in Thailand, and Accession to WTO in Uzbekistan*) have put in place effective monitoring systems and processes with comprehensive monitoring frameworks and clear reporting mechanisms that ensure accurate and detailed monitoring of project activities and progress to track progress and identify areas that would require a course correction.

43. Although client needs were incorporated into project design in some form of needs assessments, these were generally not used as **baseline data** in monitoring and reporting. Again, this gap could lead to projects being compromised in their ability to track progress and manage results accordingly. To illustrate this point, the *SheTrades* evaluation explained that client women were not systematically assessed in a way that would have allowed the

RQ 4.2.5: Use of client-focused baseline assessment to underpin and guide the targeting of project activities.

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[21] The *SheTrades* evaluation outlines that "little evidence is found regarding the fact "that *SheTrades* had the capacity to deliver on the 3 million women to market target, and it is unclear on what basis that target was set".
[22] *NES* review encourages the ITC when supporting countries in developing export strategies, to better analyze the "overriding reality of climate change and eco-system breakdown, its potentially disastrous consequences on all aspects of life, and the urgent need to recognize and integrate this reality into a country's strategic considerations."

proposed activities to be tailored to their needs.[23] Furthermore, in a programme like *SheTrades* with successive projects, often in the same countries, there was simply no baseline data for the subsequent projects (the baseline data column was empty in the results framework). Consequently, the question arises whether and how the preliminary assessments carried out for the initial project were used in the subsequent project.

44. The elements to support **information sharing and build a project-wide knowledge management system** were found in most cases. All projects had results frameworks, annual reports, communication materials, and other relevant documents that can facilitate knowledge sharing on activities and results. However, these components of a knowledge management system, need to

> RQ 4.2.6: Use of project-wide knowledge management system for efficient project management.

be organized into an appropriate knowledge management plan. They need to be stored, accessible and communicated so that project managers and stakeholders can search for data and useful insights. Two evaluations found that there is still room for improvement in this respect. The shortcomings were generally related to a lack of information sharing. For example, the evaluation of *TIP in Nepal*, found a knowledge silo between the two co-implementers of the project (GIZ for the investment component and ITC for the trade component),[24] or in the evaluation of *ARISE+ in Malaysia* described that useful information did not always reach key project stakeholders.[25]

> RQ 4.3.1: Evidence of mutual accountability and transparency between the ITC and country partners and clients.

45. As for **mutual accountability and transparency,** at the project governance level, steering committees within project management structures, gathering stakeholders' representatives, and project management, were valued as efficient mechanisms for sharing information on past and future activities. They ensured accountability and transparency between ITC and its partners and clients. The evaluation of *TIP in Nepal,* for example, found that sharing and validating study reports has promoted transparency in management. At the project management level, the lack of accountability plans with clear tracking and reporting requirements hindered project accountability and transparency, as found in the *MENATEX* evaluation, where respective roles and responsibilities related to monitoring and accountability reporting were not formally delineated among different members of the project team.

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[23] *SheTrades* evaluation notes: "without proper baselines, aggregated monitoring data could not differentiate between 'women reached' and 'women to market', and it was unclear to what extent it reflected women who used *SheTrades* to upscale their current business practices, or who expanded trade activities in the local market without exporting".

[24] *TIP in Nepal* evaluation notes: "Both ITC and GIZ teams have been publishing their newsletters. Both of them are very specific to their own activities and do not even give information about the other component of the same project."

[25] *ARISE + in Malaysia* evaluation notes: "The Project Steering Committee certainly provides an opportunity for each partner to be made aware of all activities implemented by the project, but the information does not always filter down to operational staff. Surprisingly, several informants in MITI and other agencies were not fully aware that the project's ultimate beneficiaries are the Malaysian SMEs (…)".

46. **Contributions from implementing partners or clients were obligated in several cases**. In-kind contributions included the provision of staff time and office facilities. They were subject to agreements with country's partner institutions, which set out the specific commitments of each party, and the areas of cooperation within the project framework.[26] *MENATEX* and *SheTrades* evaluations also reported on financial contributions of project partners to support project implementation[27].

> RQ 4.3.2: Financial or in-kind contribution from partners or clients.

> RQ 4.3.3: Efficient use of operational capacity in the field, notably through work with UN Country Teams.

47. Two evaluations identified **synergies between ITC and the UN Country Team (UNCT)**: The *ARISE+ in Myanmar* was the subject of a scoping mission to Myanmar coordinated with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In addition, the *ARISE+ in Laos* project management contributed to the joint UN response to the pandemic through its consistent participation in UNCT coordination meetings. However, beyond these joint activities, analysed reports do not present evidence that ITC used UNCTs operational capacities to support the implementation of its interventions in the countries.[28]

48. **Multiple and significant partnerships were found.** They contributed positively to deliver activities and results. For example, *SheTrades* developed more than 200 partnerships since its inception, most of which are funders or international market partners. The project *PUEDE in Colombia* emphasized the use of local resources to support regional added value. It used extensively stakeholder consultation and business partnerships and managed to strengthen personal, community and organizational leadership, which ultimately fostered farmers' willingness and commitment to the project and its ultimate success.

> RQ 4.4.1: Contribution of all types of partnerships to efficiency, in particular, through local partnerships.

> RQ 4.7.2: Evaluative learning integrated into programmatic and resource allocation decisions.

49. The *SheTrades* evaluation recommended the **integration of evaluative learning** providing space for systematizing internal learning and reflection on programmatic lessons that can be documented and shared with others (internally in-house and/or externally). This includes examples of how, in what settings, and under what conditions different *SheTrades* tools and resources have been successfully used to promote gender-responsive outcomes,

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[26] For example, in-kind contributions in the form of office space are reported by *ARISE+ in Myanmar* (located within the premises of the MOC in Nay Pyi Taw and MOALI (Department of Fisheries) in Yangon) and by the *TIP in Nepal* where the trade component of the project was based at Department of Industry under MoICS

[27] *SheTrades* evaluation notes, based on monitoring data from the Programme: "the partnership model was assessed by the *SheTrades* team to bring in and average of USD 1 million of in-kind contributions per year and approximately USD 1 million of in-kind support from private sectors partners yearly."

[28] ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025, aligned with the United Nations System (UNS) reform agenda documentation (A/RES/72/279), calls for increasing work with UNCTs. Indeed, the UNS reform agenda outlines the need to synergize operational capacities of all UN agencies in the field to accelerate efficient delivery on their respective mandate and on the SDGs.

and how to shift gender targeting into gender-transformative results (particularly in male-dominated or male-led sectors).

2.5 Impact

50. Assessing impact is appraising the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects. More specifically, impact addresses the ultimate significance and potentially transformative effects of the intervention. It seeks to identify social, environmental, and economic effects of the intervention that are longer-term or broader in scope than those already captured under the effectiveness criterion.

51. **Projects were generally found likely to contribute to building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies**. One clear exception was *Papeur in CAR* due to a conjunction of concerns extending from unclear management arrangements and insufficient management to low quality of implementation and

> RQ 5.1.1: Contribution to economies that are more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies.

environment unfriendly design, to name a few. On the contrary, *PUEDE in Colombia* was perhaps the most impactful project in 2022, as the evaluation concluded that it made a real difference in the lives of hundreds of farmers, their families, and their self-esteem. Through this project, ITC has demonstrated that it is possible to live legally and with dignity through the creation of trade, which in turn contributed to building peace.[29]

> RQ 5.3.1: ITC strengthens country's situation / ability to meet its national development objectives.

52. Regarding **ITC's contribution to national development objectives**, several evaluations centered on the role of the ITC in supporting countries' economic integration objectives, based on the rules of the international trading system. Both *ARISE+ in Laos* and the *NES* emphasized ITC's successful collaboration with both government and the private sector. Regarding the government dimension, the three *NES* case studies[30] overall concluded that ITC's work contributed positively to the government's institutional capacity in general "…the *NES* design process has a positive influence on the mobilization of resources and funds for its implementation." ITC supported the adoption and use of government instruments such as legislation, policy, national budget, accountability provisions, national plans, etc., to ensure alignment with the priorities and actions identified in the national export strategies. Although no direct causality

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[29] The project tool place in the Nariño department (South-West of Colombia) an area deeply affected by poverty and insecurity. It focused on small producers and enabled them to make improvements on their farms, including sustainable production certification. This substantially improved the quality of their products and their productivity. The connection to international markets through trade partnerships, empowered them to more than triple their income (+336%). In turn, it triggered an expansion of local value chains as farmers began to require products and services that previously did not exist in the area and as traders and other actors began to provide to meet this demand.

[30] These three case studies included: *Saint Lucia – National Trade Strategy 2020-2024,* Developed as part of the ITC project 'St. Lucia: Strengthening the institutional infrastructure for export promotion', *Burkina Faso – Shea sector development strategy 2015-2019,* Developed as part of the ITC/EIF project 'Elaboration of a sectoral strategy for the export and development of the shea nut sector in Burkina Faso', and *Sri Lanka – National Export Strategy 2018-2022:* Developed as part of the ITC project 'Sri Lanka: Trade related assistance'.

can be established, beneficiary countries have also been able to mobilize further resources based on the strategies supported by the ITC.[31]

53. Concerning the business sector, ITC's inclusive, participatory, and comprehensive approach to the *NES* was assessed as a key factor in the development and growth of lesser-known businesses. For example, Saint Lucia's creative industries were assisted in connecting with potential funders from both the private and public sectors by engaging them in structured discussions on export strategy.

54. However, limitations on sustainability have also been identified where the potential benefits of the *NES* are not sufficient to address existing challenges at the country level, such as transaction costs, access to credit/finance, or vulnerability to natural disasters. Or where these benefits could be threatened by unpredictable endogenous factors (e.g. a change of government) and/or external shocks.

> RQ 5.6.2: Achievement of impact related to cross-cutting objectives.

55. Regarding the **impact on cross-cutting issues,** as cross-cutting objectives[32] are a web of interconnected objectives, raising awareness of a particular cross-cutting issue may increase the impact on other cross-cutting issues. Two evaluations (*Colombia PUEDE and ARISE+ Myanmar*) demonstrated how working on cross-cutting dimensions can ultimately help building resilience against social shocks including unemployment and poverty. For example, greater awareness of the adverse and harmful effects of the exposure to chemicals and the ability to take remedial action contribute to farmers adopting good agricultural practices. Their implementation, in turn, is a prerequisite for farmers to obtain the certification required to access more profitable international markets and higher incomes (impact on poverty alleviation). It also has a positive impact on farmers' ability to manage their farms in an environmentally sound manner (environmental impact) while maintaining the security of their homes and families (health and social impact).

56. This mutually reinforcing connection between achieving impact across multiple cross-cutting dimensions is recognized by project management teams in their PCRs. For example, *Afghanistan Ethical lifestyle* PCR reported how improving the knowledge of social enterprises and small producers about social, environmental, and financial sustainability enabled them to experience the benefits of this "triple-bottom-line" approach. The interconnectedness of cross-cutting issues is such that planning work to address one cross-cutting issue can actually produce unintended effects on other cross-cutting areas; these unintended effects can be positive or negative. Evaluations such PUEDE in Colombia highlight that the foreseen work done at environmental level produced positive but somewhat unintended (in the intervention

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[31] For example, Export Saint Lucia received a one million USD national budget allocation, and the shea sector strategy in Burkina Faso was considered a "positive factor in securing post-design funding for at least two shea-related projects in the amounts of approximately 1,8 million USD and 3,4 million USD."

[32] Cross-cutting objectives are related to the sustainable and inclusive development objectives developed through the SDGs. In the ITC project development system, projects are requested to check their relevance against development markers: gender, youth, green growth, and social responsibility.

framework) social and health benefits, but that the results framework was not flexible enough to adequately capture and report on these unintended positive results.

RQ 5.7.1: Adequacy of M&E systems for measuring impact.

57. Concerning **M&E systems tools and processes,** for at least three projects (*MENATEX, PUEDE in Colombia, and SheTrades*), the expected impacts could not be adequately captured by the current results frameworks. Although projects in the ITC project portal, can use whichever results indicators they like - qualitative and quantitative, these projects provided mostly quantitative data and left little room for reporting on the qualitative performance of the interventions. The evaluation of *PUEDE in Colombia* found that some results could not be captured through the proposed monitoring and reporting tools "despite having information that would allow it (the project) to monitor, report and communicate more meaningfully its impact on value chains, communities, and people's well-being." Overall, an overemphasis on quantitative objectives (*SheTrades*) or mere compliance to corporate performance quantitative indicators without reporting on the ITC project portal on Development Results Narrative (*PUEDE in Colombia*) risks not telling the whole story of project implementation, their dynamics, and their results, and thus compromise the measure of potential impact.

58. Complementing this analysis, other projects such as *MARKUP in East Africa* found that it is mainly data that fit positively into results frameworks that are reported, while information about what has worked less well and for whom is not necessarily captured. Although some of this could be valuable learning maximizing the impact of interventions. Finally, data from other reviews *(PAPEUR in CAR, Coconuts in the Caribbean, WACOMP in ECOWAS)* have highlighted issues such as weak monitoring systems, lack of clear reporting on specific objectives or impacts, inadequate mechanisms for capturing progress, and gaps in monitoring marginalized groups or specific dimensions of the interventions.

2.6 Sustainability

59. Sustainability - i.e., the extent to which net benefits are likely to continue after the end of an intervention - is key for the longer-term success of projects. Assessing sustainability allows evaluation to determine if an intervention's benefits will last financially, economically, socially, and environmentally.

60. Some interventions (*NES, SheTrades, PUEDE in Colombia*) demonstrated that ITC contributes positively to strengthening the country's trade capacity and its sustainability, especially through knowledge transfer, policy influence, public-private networks, and implementation mechanisms. In this respect, creating and/or

RQ 6.1.1: Long term effects on inclusivity, sustainability and prosperity.

nurturing spaces for discussion and advocacy was considered positive to support long-term inclusivity efforts to build more sustainable and prosperous trade dynamics. This was highlighted in *SheTrades,* which has successfully linked its global advocacy work on gender equality and trade with on-the-ground support for individual WEs/WOBs, including through ITC participation in the WTO Informal Working Group on Trade and Gender.

| RQ 6.2.1: Sustainability of results achieved. | 61. The evaluations provide clear evidence that ITC interventions have worked towards the sustainability of improved practices, particularly through the empowerment of individuals |

and organizations. Capacity building was identified as one of the most important **enabling factors for sustainability**, especially when the partnership with national organizations provides the opportunity to directly put into practice the new knowledge and skills acquired by the trained stakeholders. For example, despite the challenges faced by the project, *ARISE+ in Myanmar* managed to increasingly build the capacity of private sector associations, which was rated in the evaluation as opening "good institutional sustainability prospects." The same applies to *ARISE+ in Laos*, whose successes were achieved either directly through capacity-building actions or indirectly through working with leading organizations to implement specific activities.[33] Consequently, the *GRASP in Pakistan,* and *Accession to WTO in Uzbekistan* ROM reviews emphasized that policy changes that support the integration of capacity-building training courses and initiatives into existing institutions or systems, increase the likelihood of their sustainability.

62. Sustainability is further increased when capacity building is linked to complementary enabling factors. The evaluation of *PUEDE in Colombia* highlighted the remarkable legacy of the project, which can be seen in the "adoption of good agricultural practices, certification processes, technical assistance, training, and even investments in infrastructure at both the farm and community levels."[34] Indeed, the achievements made in certification were not only linked to increased income but also to the expansion of markets, increased productivity, and protection of the environment. This combination of results was considered by the evaluation as the building blocks for sustainability.

63. **Hindering factors for sustainability** were mainly associated with coordination problems within ITC interventions, such as *WACOMP in ECOWAS*, where the lack of coordination between regional and national activities was cited as a potential limitation to sustainability. Also with the need to better take into account the capacities of beneficiary countries and to better tailor ITC support to them. The sustainability review of *NES* stressed the need for a more holistic approach to capacity building at the national level, which could benefit from closer coordination of ITC in-country interventions, noting that enhancing the implementability of ITC-supported export strategies, would "require a systematic and sustained focus on (country) capacity, i.e., organizational, institutional, and systemic, and readiness for dealing with external shocks.

64. Most of the portfolio for this AESR is composed by Midterm evaluations and reviews, which reports do mention in most cases that exit strategies will be designed during the second phase of the project cycle (Iran, SAAVI in Iraq, GRASP in Pakistan). Other evaluations also identified

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[33] This message is further strengthened in *Value Chains in Iran, SAAVI in Iraq, and ARISE+ in Thailand* reviews, which emphasize the role of capacity building efforts and knowledge dissemination on the likelihood of sustainability through the empowerment of individuals and organizations.

[34] The importance of the investment component is also emphasized in *TIP in Nepal* as a critical factor to sustain project results and was further highlighted in the *ARISE+* projects evaluation: "the shift towards value addition (…) requires capital investment for processing towards a marketable value-added final product."

in at least four projects (MENATEX, ARISE+ in Malaysia, ARISE+ in Myanmar, TIP in Nepal) that exit planning or sustainability strategies are indeed not designed from the start of interventions, and consider that this generates an absence of practical measures in place to make sure that the benefits of interventions are sustained over time.

RQ 6.2.2: Evidence of sustained (multi-year) engagement with partners for local follow up of results.

65.   Evidence of the **effects on the sustainability of ITC's multi-year engagement** with its partners was found in the *TIP in Nepal* evaluation. Interestingly, the project has managed to consolidate the links initiated by ITC through previous initiatives that had started in 2013,[35] as a nexus for the entire Chyangra pashmina value chain (between pashmina farmers, the fiber collection centre, and a fiber processing unit). This good understanding between the different actors in the pashmina value chain, achieved through trainings and network connections, was assessed as a key factor in the likelihood that the results will be sustained over time.

66. Paradoxically, despite the high sustainability potential found in 2022 evaluations, the assessment of **local ownership** was rather mixed. Several evaluations (*ARISE+ in Malaysia, SheTrades, MENATEX*) provide examples of weak country ownership. This was

RQ 6.3.1: Country ownership of results achieved.

mainly due to the difficulty in disseminating information to promote beneficiary ownership and commitment both during the life of the project and beyond. On the contrary, *PUEDE in Colombia* proved to be very effective and innovative in ensuring sustainability through local ownership. In particular, through "Technical Sustainability Units" which were created in farmers' organizations, consisting of groups of producers trained in improved agronomic crop management "who provide their services (…) to other producers in exchange for a previously agreed remuneration."

RQ 6.7.1: ITC's comparative advantages to respond to client needs are consolidated and recognized.

67.   **ITC's value proposition was generally recognized** as it demonstrated results that were aligned with the needs of its clients. However, the consolidation of its comparative advantages appeared to be highly contextual. Two examples include the *NES* that highlighted "ITC's approach does contribute to better capacity, and likely increases the probability of better sustainability (…)." However, it also acknowledged that the increasingly critical, complex, and rapid changes that countries face put extreme pressure on the development of export trade development and on countries' capacities to sustain it. It is therefore crucial to build self-sustaining service delivery models from the outset. *PUEDE in Colombia* has proven successful in strengthening value chains in a region highly affected by insecurity. Its success was based on two main pillars: an endogenous and demand-driven approach. The endogenous approach fostered the farmers' will and commitment to the project and its ultimate success. The demand-driven approach was facilitated sales and exports as well as income generation for the farmers. This model distinguished the project

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[35]See Final evaluation of the Pashmina Enhancement and trade Support Project, 2018.

and made it uniquely successful. This was recognized and appreciated by the funder (EU) and also strengthened the reputation of the ITC mission.

68. However, looking at internal **ITC value chains**, there was no evidence that the project brought about any form of innovation or institutional strengthening of ITC's capacity to deliver on its mission, intellectual leadership, organizational capacities, or service orientation to small enterprises. The project missed the opportunity to document and share its experiences, lessons learned, and specialties in key areas such as results orientation, market orientation and implementation in conflict zones. For this reason, the evaluation recommended that the know-how gained specifically from *Colombia PUEDE* be transferred to a wider ITC level. This would pave the way for continuity and consolidation of the comparative advantage that ITC has demonstrated through, for example, *PUEDE in Colombia*.

2.7 Assessing progress made on the Strategic Plan 2022-25 implementation

69. The table below provides an assessment of progress made for the implementation of the ITC Strategic Plan 2022-2025, as per the following color code:

▲ Well on track for achieving expected results of the Strategic Plan 2022-25, with effective risk management.

■ On track for achieving expected results of the Strategic Plan 2022-25, with indications of moderate effectiveness of risk management in some areas.

▼ Risks of not achieving expected results of the Strategic Plan 2022-25 not been addressed to date.

■ No assessment possible due to lack of data

Table 4: Progress made on the level of achievement of ITC Strategic Plan 2022-25

Strategic Plan Objectives	Overall assessment 2022	2023	Narrative assessment
A) Vision, mission, and principles	▲	▲	- All projects conform to ITC core mandate and strategic priorities, including its vision, mission, and principles. - Projects are likely to contribute to building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies.
B) Matrix approach (core services & impact areas) / framework for MSMEs	■	■	- Support for green issues integrated into most projects. - Generally good performance of results achieved at outputs level. - Some evidence found for successful in-house collaboration, and opportunities detected to better coordinate ITC in-country interventions. - Sustainability/exit strategies still tend to be an afterthought in project design.
C) Responding to the country's needs	■	■	- Rather good alignment with, and adaptation to clients' needs although some challenges found with private sector consultations. - Evidence of customized and modular solutions to tailor interventions depending on countries' situations. - Examples of close involvement on the ground boosting the success of interventions. - Opportunities to better synchronize ITC in-country interventions.
D) Engaging with the WTO and the UN / Partnering for purpose	■	■	- Within the sample of reports reviewed, projects provide consistent support to the work of WTO. - Successful instances of collaboration with UN agencies were found, though some reports point out the absence of UN collaboration.

			- Projects successfully implemented technical partnerships to deliver support e.g., with access to knowledge and supplementary competencies. - In some instances, synergies with co-implementing agency of the same project were not fully harnessed.
E) Leading the global conversation	🟧	🟧	- Efforts made on advocacy for trade development. - Examples of innovative tools to produce content and reach audiences are provided, with grassroots engagement proven to be particularly effective. - Some projects constitute instances of thought leadership.
F) Purpose-driven identity, including cross-cutting objectives	🟧	🟧	- Projects are overall considered making efforts to provide disaggregated gender-related disaggregated data. - Integration of cross-cutting dimensions in project implementation is still generally considered an area that could be strengthened.
G) Organizational strengths / Value proposition	🟧	🟧	- Inclusive, participatory, and comprehensive approaches used in some cases have been a key factor for the success of interventions. - Projects overall present opportunities to improve linkages between expected long-term objectives and intervention strategies. - Opportunity to improve monitoring and evaluation culture at organizational level still prevails, while several examples demonstrate that evaluative learning could be better integrated into decision processes.
H) Resource mobilization	⬛	⬛	*No assessment. The information contained in the evaluation reports and reviews does not allow for the formulation of solid findings.*

70. The overall assessment of progress made on implementing ITC's Strategic Plan 2022-2025 remains unchanged for this 2023 AESR. Most of the strengths and weaknesses identified in the 2022 AESR are also outlined in the evaluation reports scoped for the 2023 AESR. More specifically, the narrative assessment and overall appraisal for categories A, B, D, F, and H have not changed.

71. There were some minor changes in opportunities to better synchronize ITC in-country interventions (category C) and efforts made on advocacy for trade development (category E). These are highlighted in the 2023 AESR; however, the overall balance of strengths and weaknesses remains the same, hence the overall assessment for both categories is the same.

72. The narrative assessment of organizational strengths and value proposition (category G) has changed more significantly, with only the opportunity to improve the monitoring and evaluation culture at the organizational level. However, as the balance of strengths and weaknesses is maintained, the overall assessment has also not been affected.

3. Conclusions and lessons

73. Looking at the findings organized according to the methodological framework (see Annex 3) the clearest findings continue to come from the OEDC/DAC evaluation criteria of "relevance", "coherence" and "efficiency." This may be due to the fact that the portfolio of evaluations in 2022 consists mainly of midterm evaluations and reviews (15 out of 18 reports), where the statements regarding "impact" and "sustainability" are limited because the evaluated projects are not yet mature.

74. The number of evaluations analysed this year is lower than in previous years (18 reports compared to 26 in 2022) and the assessment of performance is also more heterogeneous, with some projects performing well in some areas and others not at all. The reduced number and higher heterogeneity of the portfolio implies that, depending on questions and topics, it is not always possible to provide an average appraisal, nor to determine to which degree the observations can be generalized into conclusions and subject to new recommendations.

75. Nevertheless, as far as the emerging patterns are concerned, they are largely consistent with those of previous years. The reports contain a number of converging findings that confirm the themes raised in the conclusions of previous years, such as the need to improve work on sustainability aspects, to strengthen synergies with complementary measures, and the encouragement to continue working on the RBM system. For this reason, conclusions in this year AESR lead to lessons learned that come and complement previous AESR recommendations rather than new recommendations. This implies that these lessons should not be subject to a management response but should be considered when implementing the related previous AESR recommendations and when reporting on their implementation.

Conclusion 1: Work on cross-cutting issues

76. In line with the increased focus on sustainable development introduced by the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, the project portfolios integrated cross-cutting dimensions into the design with the clear intention of building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. However, the scope appeared to be uneven, with gender aspects generally emphasized more than other cross-cutting dimensions; the AESR notes that this an area in which ITC started working earlier than on other cross-cutting issues.

77. Performance within each cross-cutting issue also varied, for example, from no gender strategy to systematic and comprehensive efforts to promote GEEW. At the same time, monitoring and reporting information on the work done by projects on cross-cutting issues is still limited.

78. This raises the question of the multiplicity of cross-cutting issues. For example, while the portfolio shows a particular focus on women, prioritization on other cross cutting issues such as Leave No One Behind (LNOB) is not yet to show significant consolidation, perhaps due to the focus of these coming later than gender. This seems to confirm the challenge for projects to comprehensively cover cross-cutting issues and the need for a stronger focus on environmental sustainability, which was already highlighted in the 2022 AESR.

79. At the same time, there was positive evidence of the impact and sustainability of results achieved on cross-cutting issues, as achievements obtained on some issues had reinforcing effects on others. For example, the work done at the environmental level to improve farmers' agricultural practices had positive effects on productivity and income (green growth) and social and health aspects of their lives (social responsibility). This virtuous cycle between interconnected cross-cutting issues and the combination of sustainable development results were assessed as the building blocks for the impact and the sustainability of results.

➔ *Lessons learned 1: Continue to prioritize cross-cutting issues.*

80. It is important to prioritize which cross-cutting issues will be addressed and why, as well as what are expected results for these, in view of supporting the production of meaningful monitoring and reporting information, including from implementing partners.

    This lesson is addressed to the recently created ITC Division (DSIT) fully dedicated to sustainable and inclusive trade. It can be taken into account within the implementation of the moonshots on "Green", "Youth" and "Gender" that were elaborated for 2022-25 with annual action plans. The lesson also links to the previous AESR 2021 recommendation 2 to develop a clear, organization-wide understanding of internal value chains (see Annex 5 page 54).

Conclusion II: Partnerships to support ITC hybrid delivery model.

81. Several projects demonstrated how ITC's technical assistance to trade and sustainable development adds value to a complex group of various stakeholders with different challenges and capacities. The quality of partnerships is crucial, as ITC's hybrid delivery model implies that partners' participation in projects is instrumental to ensuring their impact and sustainability.

82. Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) played a positive role in ensuring effective technical partnerships, especially as they helped clarify the terms and responsibilities of all parties involved, including the provision of reporting information (effectiveness). The same applies to the governing frameworks of the projects, as they ensured that the projects were embedded in the official structures of the government and paved the way for the complementary role of the partners (coherence). The importance of establishing formal agreements with countries' partner institutions was emphasized to ensure mutual accountability and transparency at the project governance level (steering committees). Formality in partnerships also facilitated the provision of in-kind and financial contributions from project implementing partners as wells as beneficiaries (efficiency).

83. The importance of establishing structured partnerships was also confirmed by the project self-evaluations, in form of PCRs. About 30% of the PCRs that submitted in 2022, highlighted the importance of engaging partners and coordinating between all partners from an early stage in the project. (See Annex 2)

➔ *Lessons learned 2: Formality and quality of partnerships.*

84. Formal / contractual instruments between ITC and its partners are crucial to ensuring mutual accountability, predictability, and transparency, thus, helping to improve partner

commitment to projects. These are helpful instruments to recall work priorities including on cross-cutting issues, and for delineating roles and responsibilities of implementing partners in delivering activities, and in monitoring and reporting on results.

As the development of these instruments require knowledge of partners' capacities, needs and their specific situation, and as several ITC Divisions, including administration, are involved in the creation of contractual instruments with implementing partners, this lesson is conveyed to the ITC Steering Mechanism[36] for its consideration and possible recommendations to senior management to mainstream good practices within the ITC.

Conclusion III: Continue making projects even more responsive to vulnerable beneficiaries' needs.

85. Aligning projects with client needs proved to be a general strength of ITC, ensuring the high relevance of projects. As in previous years, the evaluation reports highlighted the organizational strengths of "expertise" and "agility" as all interventions adopted a modular approach to tailor their services to the needs of clients and partners.

86. The evaluation of the *Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization (PUEDE) in Colombia* project described how, in meeting the needs of grassroots producers and vulnerable communities, the use of inclusion processes and deliberative communication was effective in ensuring the participation and ownership of community members. Shared decision-making on project priorities paved the way for enhancing the capacities, opportunities, and ultimately the dignity of the stakeholders and rights holders involved, including the most vulnerable (impact).

87. In other projects, this AESR confirms the positive trend that internal, in-house needs assessment tools for BSOs, such as CUBED, are being used more systematically. However, it is not always clear to what extent projects conduct the same type of needs assessments for the other categories of ITC clients, especially for grassroots MSMEs and informal workers.

88. Several evaluations noted that the integration of MSME needs into the project approach could be improved, particularly informal MSMEs. The importance of conducting studies, diagnostics, and consultations on MSME needs was highlighted to enable better-tailored and more inclusive support for MSMEs and ultimately enhance the impact and sustainability of project results.

89. Here again, a notable proportion of ITC project managers seem to acknowledge the importance of conducting a pre-market study or an assessment at an early stage of the project to integrate MSMEs' needs in a more targeted manner (see examples in Annex 2).

➔ *Lessons learned 3: Specific needs assessment tools for grassroot MSMEs.*

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[36] The Steering Mechanism on the Lessons Learned from the Implementation of the Strategic Plan is an ITC consultative group that has been established in 2023. It will act as a structure for learning and knowledge management purposes on the lessons learned provided by evaluations on the Strategic Plan implementation as well as on improving the performance and results of ITC in delivering trade-related technical assistance.

90. It is important from the inception stage, to improve strategic assessments and consultations, especially with grassroot MSMEs and informal workers, to better identify their needs along the supported value chains.

    This lesson is related to the AESR 2022 recommendation 2 to make projects more responsive to beneficiaries' needs through an enhanced in-house toolbox assigned to SPPG (see Annex 5 page 51). It should be part of the ongoing development of a compendium of needs assessment tools that will enable projects to further respond to beneficiaries' needs, identify, adapt, and integrate assessment tools that have been successfully developed by ITC projects to identify MSME needs.

Conclusion IV: Synergies within the UN family.

91. In alignment with the reform agenda of the UN, which emphasizes the need for collaboration with UNCTs and the community of development partners present at the local level, the ITC reports having become an official signatory of the UNSDCFs for more than 30 countries (see Annex 6, page 59) however based on the reports analysed by this AESR, the intensity of in-country collaboration and partnerships with other UN entities still varied by project and appeared to remain limited and ad hoc, rather than strategically prioritized.

92. At the same time, the AESR notes that the opportunity to reinforce synergies with UNCTs depends on country context (mix of UN agencies present at country level, organizational capacities of concerned UNCT, etc.), and that work to reinforce synergies with other UN agencies might be subject to related contingencies.

➜ *Lessons learned 4: Continue optimizing collaboration with UN agencies at the country level.*

93. This suggests that the recommendation for the implementation of a corporate strategy to strengthen engagement with the UNSDCF remains valid – and should be built on a clear assessment of opportunities on the ground.

    This lesson is linked to the AESR 2020 recommendation 6 assigned to DCP (see Annex 5, page 58). The roll-out of the ITC's Country Engagement Strategy should pave the way for more systematic identification and use of opportunities for joint implementation with other UN agencies at the country level.

Conclusion V: Results Based Management.

94. Logframes and related documentation generally did not explain sufficiently clearly how the inputs and outputs would lead to achieving the medium- and long-term results. As conveyed in last year's AESR, logframes are overall based on M&E requirements set by the funder at the design stage for accountability and compliance purposes (e.g., through the funder's logframe template). Also, a gap was highlighted in relation to baseline assessment, which was generally not available to support tracking and reporting against logframe indicators.

95. Consequently, current M&E practices mainly focus on what can be counted (i.e., mostly tracking inputs and outputs) and hence, fail at capturing both intended and unintended direct effects of interventions. Effective development interventions are more complex than simple

inputs-process-outputs-outcomes-impacts results chains. For example, emergent processes and outcomes may be more valuable than planned ones, which makes systems thinking and complexity-informed approaches important when planning complex programmes.

96. In terms of managing complex projects, there is room for improvement for M&E systems tracking the quality and appropriateness of project activities or taking stakeholder feedback into account, and ultimately to support course correction. As a result, the existing reporting frameworks did not allow for capturing the full extent of the results achieved, which in some cases even led to underestimating the impact of the projects.

Lesson learned 5: Continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools.

97. The 2022 AESR recommendation to continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools is still valid. This is particularly the case for large projects, which combine a complex set of interlinked project components, for which RBM tools should allow for tracking and reporting on emergent processes and results.

This lesson is related to the AESR 2022 recommendation 4 to continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools assigned to SPPG (see Annex 5, page 53). It should be reflected in the checklist to support the preparation of M&E plan at inception stage -especially for large projects, to help project manager in reflecting on M&E needs and support adequate planning on specific roles and responsibilities, tools, resources, etc. from the early stages of project design.

Annex 1: Documents covered by AESR Year

I. Independent evaluations

- Evaluation of the ITC SheTrades Initiative
- Final evaluation of the project Colombia PUEDE: Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization
- Midterm Evaluation of Improving the international competitiveness of the textile and clothing sector (MENATEX) in the MENA region (Management response still missing)

II. Self-evaluations

- Midterm Self-Evaluation of the project "ARISE Plus Malaysia" + management response
- Midterm Review of the "ARISE Plus Myanmar" project

III. Funder-led evaluations

- Midterm Evaluation EU-EAC MARKUP
- Lao PDR: ASEAN Regional Integration Support (Laos-ARISE Plus) Midterm Evaluation
- Midterm Evaluation of the EU-Nepal Trade and Investment Programme (TIP)

IV. Developmental evaluation review

- A Proposal for Large ITC Projects to Establish Good M&E Practices before Closure of Inception Phase

V. Sustainability review

- Sustainability Review of the ITC programme 'Trade Development Strategies', Results and lessons after project completion

VI. Funder-led Results Oriented Monitoring (ROMs) Reviews

- ECOWAS: West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP)
- Caribbean: Development of value-added products and intra-regional trade to enhance livelihoods from coconuts II
- Colombia PUEDE: Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization
- Iran: Trade-Related Technical Assistance, Capacity Building, and Value Chain Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Trade-Led Growth
- Iraq: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy (SAAVI)
- Pakistan: Growth for rural advancement and sustainable progress (GRASP)
- République Centrafricaine: Programme d'appui à la promotion de l'entreprenariat en milieu urbain et rural (PAPEUR)
- Thailand: Trade-Related Assistance (ARISE+ Thailand)
- Uzbekistan: Facilitating the Process of Accession to the WTO

VII.   Project Completion Reports (PCRs) completed in 2022

- SheTrades: Empowering Women in the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)
- Global: Support for Innovative Methods and Tools (understanding NTMs and accessing e-Commerce)
- Pacific: Entrepreneurship Ecosystem Network Analysis and Mapping to guide entrepreneurship support under UNCDF's Pacific Digital Economy Programme
- Central America: Linking women business enterprises (WBEs) with the global gifts and home decoration market
- SheTrades Zambia
- Afghanistan: Ethical Lifestyle Initiative for the Economic Reintegration of Returnees and Internally displaced people
- Eastern Partnership: Ready to Trade - an EU4Business Initiative
- Trade in services
- Fast Tracking Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa - Phase 1
- Non-tariff measures programme (W1)
- Sustainable Investments into Africa (SIA)
- Lebanon: Export Competitiveness of SMEs in the IT and Nuts sectors (AfTIAS)
- Trade competitiveness: Piloting artificial intelligence to automate the analysis of trade-related policies and projects
- Saudi Arabia: Development of dates sector in Medina region (AfTIAS)
- E-solutions
- DRC: Adding value to bamboo, plastic waste and lifestyle goods for sustainable livelihoods
- Alliances for Action Service Centre (Core Network)
- SME Competitiveness Survey and Outlook
- RESI High Skills
- Value Added to Trade
- Supporting Indian trade and investment for Africa (SITA)
- SheTrades
- GreenToCompete (G2C)
- Export strategy design and management
- Global: A pilot approach to enhancing capacity of cooperatives for sustainable coop-to-coop trade
- ITC's contribution to the AfCFTA
- Trade Facilitation
- Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) - Database
- Support Trade Negotiations
- Bolivia: Supporting trade capacities of SMEs
- I 4 IMPACT (AIM): Improving institutional performance for SME internationalization
- SheTrades Gambia
- Youth & Trade: Entrepreneurship and Employability
- Burkina Faso et Mali: Création d'emplois équitables et développement durable de microentreprises dans les chaines de valeur liées au secteur du « lifestyle »

- State of Palestine: Enhancing self-employment of refugees and youth in Gaza through digital channels
- Alliances for Action: Coffee Guide
- Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) worldwide and rules of origin
- SheTrades Rwanda
- The Gambia: PBF, Strengthening Sustainable and Holistic Reintegration of Returnees
- Lesotho: Empowerment of public and private stakeholders on the implementation of NES Roadmap
- SheTrades Commonwealth Programme
- Chile: Enabling policymakers to evaluate new trade agreements
- The Gambia: Strengthening community coping mechanisms to mitigate risks of conflicts and reduce climate-related tensions
- Tunisia: E-Commerce for Women Entrepreneurs
- Lebanon - E-Commerce for Women Entrepreneurs
- Tajikistan: Enabling market access for agricultural products through improved food safety system (STDF)
- The Gambia - Building resilience of vulnerable communities
- Textile and Apparel Network for Africa (TANA)
- Haiti: Feasibility study exports of mango, horticulture and cereals
- Fibre, Clothing, Textiles: Developing a more resilient and fairer post COVID-19 value chain governance structure for T+C
- Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD)

Annex 2: Project Completion Reports (PCR) submitted in 2022

In 2022, IEU continued offering its support to project teams, through trainings, digital development, and management monitoring. Upon request and as part of its advisory services, the IEU assisted in PCR preparation for quality purposes, and to pave the way for a common understanding of project performance and improvements to be introduced in future interventions.

All of the projects complied with the submission of their PCRs within the mandated 6-month period after project completion. A total of 51 Project completion reports were completed, submitted, and approved by Chiefs and Directors. The projects that completed their PCRs in 2022 were projects that mostly started in 2018 and ended in 2021.

PCR reports by Division / Section
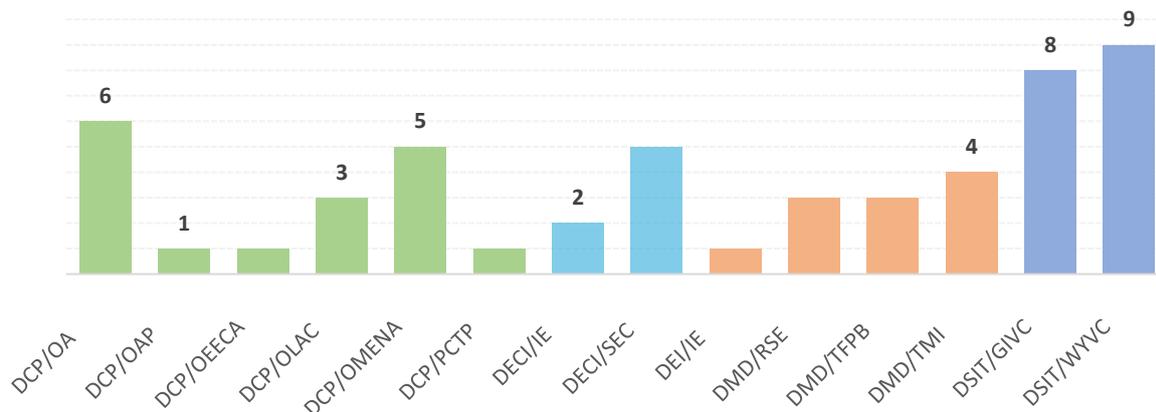
PCR Reports by Budget
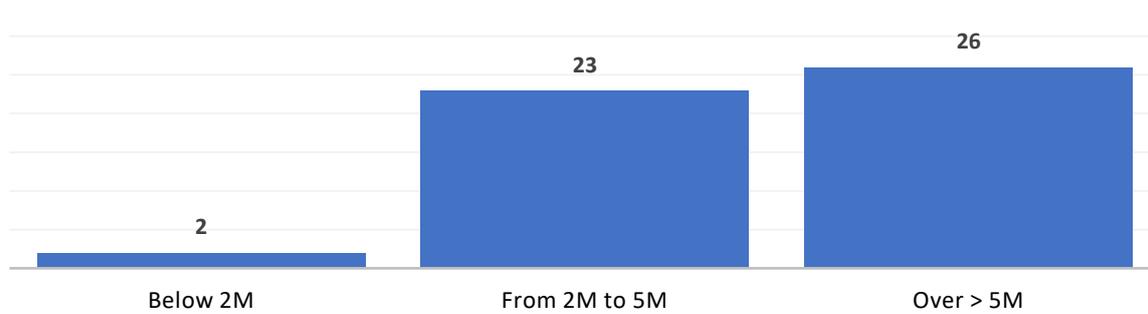
PCR Quality and compliance

Three factors contributed to PCR quality improvement:

- Digital development was introduced to Project Managers to accelerate and facilitate the PCRs completion and submission process online.
- A regular management monitoring process was set up to track the submission of PCRs in due time.
- In addition, the IEU conducted detailed PCR training to benefit the project teams from the new technical developments and ensure the quality and compliance of PCRs.

Recommendations from PCRs

Over **90 recommendations** were reported by the project managers in the PCRs. The recommendations were grouped into **5 main categories** based on the emerging themes related to beneficiary/partners alignment; additional activities, internal coordination, and development; early planning, market study, and assessment; budget and resources; and project duration.

Recommendations by emerging themes

Theme	%
Benefeciaries / partners collaboration	30%
Additional activities / internal coordination / digital development	26%
Planning / market study / early assessment	24%
Budget / ressources / staff	11%
Project duration / time frame	9%
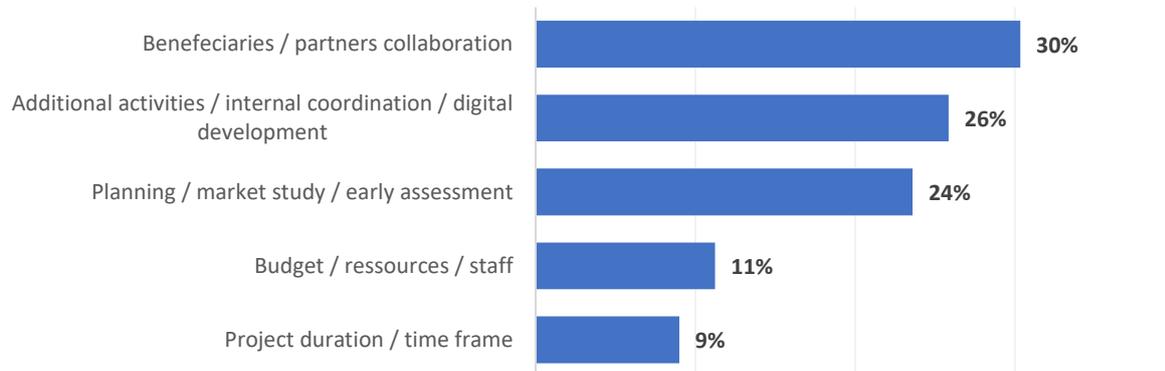
Beneficiary/partners alignment

A total of **27 projects (30%)** strongly highlighted the need for early coordination and engagement between all partners, this is including funders, beneficiaries, BSOs, Institutions, public/private sector partners, producers, buyers, Cooperatives, National experts, Government partners, and UN agencies.

Example Project - ITC's contribution to the AfCFTA, *there is a need for bringing all the stakeholders together in **an early stage of the project** and set up a plan of collaboration and alignment in advance to enable the projects to achieve their results in an effective way.*

Additional activities, internal coordination, and digital development

A high number of recommendations (26%) related to the need for additional training, coaching activities, and digital development, for example, project SheTrades Rwanda's future projects should focus on running capacity-building programmes related to access to finance (including financial management), packaging and quality to comply with market-access requirements and (digital) marketing. Some other projects recommended the replication of successful trainings in similar interventions. 'Bolivia: Supporting trade capacities of SMEs'. In addition, some projects recommended more digital platforms and development of the current platforms, such as *the ecomConnect Platform and related tools, need for annual data updates, developments, maintenance, and more digitalization*.

Example Project - Alliances for Action: Coffee Guide '*A better knowledge management platform needs to be secured for the second phase of the project as well as for similar interventions*.

Early planning, market study, and assessment.

A total of 24% of the recommendations were about better and PRIOR planning of all activities in an early stage before the project implementation, for example, some projects strongly recommended the pre-market study or assessment in the country of the intervention in advance, 'SheTrades Rwanda' *the mapping and diagnostic assessments conducted early on in*

the implementation process of the project have proven to be instrumental in boosting the project's effectiveness to respond to WoBs' expressed needs and sustaining the alignment with project objectives.

Project RESI high skills *'It is necessary to liaise and coordinate with relevant political actors from the beginning. Identifying influential gatekeepers in the community will also have significant impacts on the programme.*

Budget and resources.

Besides the recommendations for extra activities and development for future interventions, 11% of the recommendations were related to more financial resources and skilled staff, for example from SheTrades Zambia:

'*Whilst the project was extremely successful in leveraging in-kind contributions and optimizing conversion from inputs to outputs, the limited budget of the project posed an impediment. Hence, additional funds are required.*

Projects highlighted the need as well for well-trained and skilled staff 'Burkina Faso-Mali-lifestyle project' mentioned *'The business model of the EFI works well for youth and women in the so-called informal economy. To be fully leveraged, it needs well-trained staff with solid competencies in business management.*

ITC's contribution to the AfCFTA *'there was a need to identify fully skilled consultants to support ITC's delivery under the AfCFTA. The identification of a pool of experts has helped ITC to fast track implementation of agreed activities'*

Timeframe and project duration.

Few project managers (9%) mentioned the lack of time to finalize the total activities of the projects, for example, project 'Sustainable Investments into Africa (SIA)' Longer duration for project implementation It is recommended that future. ITC projects signed with GIZ or other donors are of a minimum length of 2 years to allow for a minimum of 3 months to set up the project. Other project managers recommended extending the timeframe of the project to maximize the intervention impact.

One of the important comments related to the timeframe for the refugee communities is the recommendations from the RESI project It is necessary to plan in buffer times when working in displacement settings. Everything takes longer - communicating with humanitarian actors, arranging travel and security, liaising with different political institutions, etc. A timeline of longer than a year is necessary to truly have time to take someone from operating in a refugee camp to operating in a competitive market, whether online or physically.

Examples of recommendations emerging from 2022 PCRs

	Beneficiaries and partners Collaboration and engagement	Extra activities / digital/internal collaboration	PRIOR planning, market study, assessment	Budget/resources	Project timeframe/ duration
WOMAN/YOUTH	**SheTrades** close collaboration with the **government Missions** and Ministry focal points is crucial to the SheTrades Outlook data collection activity. Is very important to invest time in **identifying the beneficiaries** (i.e., women producers, traders, associations, and cooperatives) and segregate them based on the level of business maturity to ensure proper and effective delivery of results.	**SheTrades Rwanda** future projects should focus on running capacity-building programmes related to **access to finance** (including financial management), packaging and quality to comply with market-access requirements and (digital) marketing. **SheTrades Commonwealth Programme** Pathways such as SheTrades Hubs, with contributions from **partners in country**, provide very significant multiplier effects.	**Kenya: Supporting refugees to trade through digital agents model** it is necessary to address the challenges in delivering products through **earlier detailed planning** of the step-by-step delivery process and understanding of the distribution network logistics.	**Burkina Faso-Mali-Lifestyle** The business model of the EFI works well for **youth and women** in the so-called informal economy. To be fully leveraged, it needs **well trained staff** with solid competences in business management. **SheTrades Zambia** Additional resources are also required **for M&E** and results assessment since qualitative evaluations are time-consuming.	**Central America women** The formalization of cooperation agreements (Grant MOUs and procurement contracts) took significantly longer than expected due to lengthy and cumbersome administrative procedures. Signing cooperation agreements with private-sector institutions was more efficient than with public institutions
GREEN/SUSTAINABLE	**GreenToCompete hubs** The investment of more time in a collaborative design process alongside **the host institutions** would further enhance ownership by the host institutions. This should include a definition of what the hub represents for the host.	**GreenToCompete hubs** Where a project is working with a network of institutions, the development of a **share and learn knowledge platform**, on which experience and expertise can be exchanged, would speed up the learning process and may decrease ITC's management time	**Sustainable Investments into Africa (SIA)** Active and regular **dialogue with the donor**. The benefit from an active and regular dialogue with the donor allowed ITC to react to crises of the project in a very timely manner	**T4SD** Sustainability: It is recommended to continue support for the **development of the database** as a Global Public Good in the coming years	**Alliances for Action: Coffee Guide** Recommend more realistic share of resources to **network management** and coordination of actors and logistics, especially for the Coffee Network, which is a central component of the second phase.
REFUGEES	**Kenya: Supporting refugees to trade through digital agents' model.** The project confirmed the importance of **cross-sector and public-private collaboration** regarding energy access and last mile distribution **in refugee**	**Kenya: Supporting refugees to trade through digital agents' model.** **Access to finance** challenges, it was not possible to identify alternative approaches with a financial institution to provide	**Kenya: Supporting refugees to trade through digital agents' model.** When expanding, a thorough **market assessment** and review of potential partners should be completed to avoid	**State of Palestine: Enhancing self-employment of refugees and youth in Gaza through digital channels:** it is crucial to support the cost of transportation and food during the training as the	**RESI** It is necessary to plan in buffer times when working in **displacement settings**. Everything takes longer - communicating with humanitarian actors, arranging travel and

	settlements, as partners on the ground can facilitate access to market information, on-ground logistics such as warehousing, and physical presence on ground, etc.	access to loans at that stage of the project	working with products that are saturated in the market.	cost of commuting over 4-5 months can be high and difficult for beneficiaries to cover.	security, liaising with different political institutions, etc.
DIGITAL	<u>Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) worldwide and rules of origin</u> the **tariff dismantling database** should be integrated and disseminated through a web application as Market Access Map on a mass-scale, MSME-friendly fashion (quick information display, visualizations for decision-making). It will allow easily SMEs and policy makers to better understand new tariff policy in the framework of preferential agreements.	<u>SMECO</u> Involve **DCP country officers** in the project since the beginning to ensure smooth communications with the national government. <u>Alliances for Action: Coffee Guide</u> A better **knowledge management platform** needs to be secured for the second phase of the project as well as for similar interventions.	<u>Afghanistan: Ethical Lifestyle</u> Develop and implement a **crisis management strategy** for high-risk countries (all ITC) Engage with civil society actors who can extend the reach of project activities	<u>Middle East and North Africa: E-commerce Acceleration Programme</u> Increase the budget of the project in order to cover the extra activities: Implement **additional e-commerce activities** to strengthen project results and impact	<u>Project: Middle East and North Africa: E-commerce</u> Extend the duration of the **training and coaching phase** from 5 to 7 months. Completing the e-commerce program in 5 months has been a challenge for SMEs and e-commerce experts.
TRADE	<u>Trade facilitation</u> Importance of building local ownership of reforms by both **public and private representatives**. Ensuring operationalization support from implementation to piloting and monitoring of reforms. <u>ITC's contribution to the AfCFTA</u> The main lesson learned is the need to **bring together all stakeholders** and have them be part of the discussions on the AfCFTA negotiation and implementation at country level.	<u>Value Added to Trade</u> Set up a good **monitoring and reporting** system to continuously keep track of the implementation of the activities and record results in a systematic manner.	<u>SheTrades Rwanda Project Programming and Planning</u>: Design more agile, holistic, and multi-pronged project activities that take account of any existing or impending uncertainties as well as build resilience that anticipates contingencies.	<u>Pacific: entrepreneurship Ecosystem Network Analysis</u> Include additional budget to implement (short-term) recommendations in order to analyse additional impact of the report.	<u>Eastern Partnership: Ready to Trade</u> **Project flexibility** is important to adjust to the rapidly changing operating environment. Administrative procedures shall be simplified and delegated to the field to the possible extent.

Annex 3: Methodological framework

Strategic Plan Objectives							
Vision, mission, and principles (1)	**Modular and customized approach (core services & impact areas) for MSMEs (2)**	**Responding to country needs (3)**	**Engaging with the WTO and the UN / Partnering for purpose (4)**	**Leading the global conversation (5)**	**Purpose-driven identity, including cross-cutting objectives (6)**	**Organizational strengths / Value proposition (7)**	**Resource mobilization (8)**
Conformity of projects with ITC's vision, mission and principles. (1.1.1.)	Design focusses on MSME competitiveness as the leverage to generate systemic change (SDGs). (1.2.1.) Design is client-focused. (1.2.2.) Design integrates modular and customized approach when offering core services. (1.2.3.)	Evidence of country leadership over the partnership for development with ITC. (1.3.1) Use of client focused needs assessments. (1.3.2.) Evidence of country ownership through the alignment and ongoing adaptation to clients'/partner country's situations and needs. (1.3.3.)	Support to countries on WTO-related matters (WTO agreements; accession…) (1.4.1.) Design focusses on the relevance of trade for achieving the SDGs (i.e. creating trade that is sustainable, inclusive and transformative). (1.4.2.)	Communication and outreach on strategic issues and support the thought leadership on trade issues and advocacy (1.5.1.)	Alignment to cross-cutting objectives. (1.6.1.) Alignment to Strategic Plan responses to evaluation to improve ITC performance: (i.e. Sustainable development good practices; Project theories of change; M&E corporate system; Project results sustainability; Project field office performance and coordination; and Engagement in UNSDCF). (1.6.2.)	Alignment to ITC's comparative advantages and extent to which the intervention presents an added value in comparison to other actors (1.7.1)	Consistency with ITC's core mandate and strategic priorities. (1.8.1)

Contribution of ITC's guiding principles and core values to coherence. (2.1.1.)	Scope of intervention in conformity with core services and impact areas. (2.2.1.) Core services' roles and synergies within matrix are identified (design), and further developed (implementation). (2.2.2.)	Evidence of inclusive development partnerships through the alignment to clients'/partner country's own priorities and policies, and systems and processes. (2.3.1.)	Strengths of collaboration and partnerships within UN (engagement with UN Resident Coordinator offices; participation in the UNSDCF and CCA, in joint programming and M&E), as well as with WTO and other partners. (2.4.1.) External coherence and consistency of the intervention with other actors' interventions in the same context, and co-ordination with others. (2.4.2.)	Coherence within ITC between different suppliers of information. (2.5.1.) ITC positioning builds on / supports, the work of stakeholders / partners. (2.5.2.)		Consistency between high-level long-term strategic objectives and their operationalization, including sub-strategies necessary for their achievement (such as the updated resource mobilization strategy). (2.7.1.) Internal coherence and synergies between the intervention and other interventions carried out within ITC (2.7.2.)	Coordination with entities with complementary strengths to coordinate resources for joint objectives and projects. (2.8.1.)
Quality of ITC's trade development interventions in building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. (3.1.1.)	Effectiveness in transforming activities[37] into outputs[38]; Effectiveness in achieving intermediate outcomes[39] (3.2.1) Quality of the projects' logframe / theory of change and of their further development into client-focused results chains. (4.2.2.)	Effective use of hub concept and of hybrid delivery models. (3.3.1.) Contribution of these forms of local presence to effectiveness. (3.3.3.)	Contribution of all types of partnerships to results achieved, in particular, through technical partnerships (e.g. through MoUs, joint delivery initiatives). (3.4.1.)	Evidence of strengthened position as leading source of information in the field of MSME and trade. (3.5.1.) Use of innovative tools to produce content and reach audiences. (3.5.2.) Consolidated ITC status in thought leadership and advocacy on trade and sustainable development issues. (3.5.3.)	Effectiveness in mainstreaming cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, diversity, inclusion, and environmental sustainability. (3.6.1.)	Evidence of strategic nurturing and development of organizational strengths, to enable value proposition. (3.7.1.) Contribution of ITC's organizational strengths to results achieved (e.g. RBM, risk management, M&E, expertise, innovation, internal coordination and cooperation). (3.7.2.)	

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[37] Activities as defined in ITC's results framework: advise, train and coach, inform, and convene.

[38] Outputs as defined in ITC's results framework: improved consensus, increased knowledge and skills, and increased awareness.

[39] According to the ITC's result framework, the wording of intermediate outcomes is the same as that of core services. However, for the purpose of this analysis, we understand intermediate outcomes as the expected results achieved through the provision of the corresponding core services.

	Ratio between inputs and outputs. (4.2.1.) Adequacy of M&E systems used. (4.2.3.) Use monitoring and reporting information for real-time implementation assessment and course correction. (4.2.4.) Use of client-focused baseline assessment to underpin and guide the targeting of project activities. (4.2.5.) Use of project-wide knowledge management system for efficient project management. (4.2.6.)	Evidence of mutual accountability and transparency between the ITC and country partners and clients. (4.3.1.) (Financial or in-kind) contribution from partners/clients. (4.3.2.) Efficient use of operational capacity in the field, notably through work with UN country teams. (4.3.3.)	Contribution of all types of partnerships to efficiency, in particular, through local partnerships (decentralization of project functions; local implementing partners; deepened partnerships with BSOs). (4.4.1.)	Improved functionality, features, and user-friendliness of the tools through integration of modern information technology into production and distribution. (4.5.1.) Use of hybrid events to expand the audience base and increase participation and interaction. (4.5.2.) Quality of approach and metrics used to assess the performance of tools. (4.5.3.)	Performance on purpose-driven identity objectives, (including cross-cutting objectives), tracked, and used through feedback loops for learning, for internal organizational decisions. (4.6.1.) Use of opportunities for digitalization and the reduction of carbon footprint. (4.6.2.)	Poor performance identified, assessed, and addressed. (4.7.1.) Evaluative learning integrated into programmatic and resource allocation decisions. (4.7.2.) Adequacy of human resources. (4.7.3.) Adequacy of internal processes and decision-making processes. (4.7..) Adequacy of connectedness infrastructure. (4.7.5.)	Leveraging of in-country funds. (4.8.1.) Performance in terms of matching to changing funding environment and concerning new funding modalities and approaches. (4.8.2.) Evidence of a qualitative / quantitative deepening in relations with traditional funders and of a diversification to other funders. (4.8.3.)
Contribution to economies that are more inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies. (5.1.1.)	Achievement of outcomes and impacts; non-intended positive or negative effects. (5.2.1.)	ITC strengthens country's situation / ability to meet its national development objectives. (5.3.1.)	ITC's contribution within System-wide trade and sustainable development technical assistance value chains. (5.4.1.)	MSME and trade information supports constituencies to generate positive change. (5.5.1.)	Contribution of ITC performance objectives to the impact achieved. (5.6.1.) Achievement of impact related to cross-cutting objectives. (5.6.2.)	Adequacy of M&E systems for measuring impact. (5.7.1.)	ITC's contribution to growth of resources invested in trade and sustainable development. (5.8.1.)

Long-term effects on inclusivity, sustainability, and prosperity. (6.1.1.)	Sustainability of results achieved (6.2.1.) Evidence of sustained (multi-year) engagement with partners for local follow up of results. (6.2.2.)	Country ownership of results achieved. (6.3.1.)	Contribution of all types of partnerships to sustainability. (6.4.1.)		Contribution of ITC performance objectives to sustainability. (6.6.1.) Sustainability of results related to cross-cutting objectives. (6.6.2.)	ITC's comparative advantages to respond to client needs are consolidated and recognized. (6.7.1.)	Learnings on organizational strengths and value proposition performance are fully embedded into resource mobilization. (6.8.1.) Development of thought leadership, and advocacy fully embedded into resource mobilization. (6.8.2.)

Annex 4: Brief description of evaluation reports and reviews

I.   Independent evaluations

Evaluation of the ITC SheTrades Initiative

SheTrades is an initiative to advance women in trade, address gender disparities in trade, and promote women's participation in international value chains. In the ITC Strategic Plan (2022-2025), SheTrades is described as a comprehensive initiative that brings together the entire range of services offered by ITC from a gender perspective. SheTrades' advocacy work led to the launch of the WTO Joint Declaration on Trade and Women's Economic Empowerment at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires in 2017.

The purpose of the evaluation was to take stock of the SheTrades approach, implementation models, and results achieved at different levels after the first five years of operation (2016-2021). Recent developments in 2022 were also considered. The evaluation was intended to serve to inform the next phase.

The evaluation concluded that SheTrades has become a strong brand for ITC on gender and trade through its engagement in international and national policy advocacy and adoption of a holistic, partnership-driven model. The high-profile events and ambitious quantitative targets for getting women to market affected the quality of monitoring in terms of economic empowerment of different groups of women, especially young women and marginalized groups of women producers, workers, and informal traders. Although these groups were not initially targeted (the focus was more on near-export-ready women entrepreneurs), they will become more prominent in the future. SheTrades largely relies on *SheTrades.com* as a main entry point into the 'SheTrades universe' and its various offerings; however, this has not been sufficient if not complemented by other types of support or communication. Uneven results achieved at the time of the evaluation in working with national institutional actors, including those hosting nationally embedded SheTrades hubs, may require a greater focus on the national level in the future, including working with national private sector actors. During the evaluation period, SheTrades was tasked with driving a high-profile agenda on women and trade for ITC, with limited staff and capacity to implement (including limited opportunities for in-house mentoring and cross-project learning within ITC). If properly resourced, and if operational lessons for gender mainstreaming are more systematically captured – moving beyond gender targeting to sector gender transformative approaches – SheTrades could be further utilized as an internal resource for promoting gender equality in ITC programming.

Final evaluation of the project Colombia PUEDE: Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization

ITC Colombia PUEDE was designed to help improve the income of smallholder farmers and their families in conflict-affected areas in the department of Nariño. The project aimed to strengthen the productivity, quality, and competitiveness of three agricultural value chains: Tahiti Lime, cocoa, and coconut, mainly through training, technical assistance, strengthening of producer organizations and associations, investment in infrastructure and donations. The project scope included a population of 2,000 farmers and their families and 20 associations in four municipalities.

The evaluation found that Colombia PUEDE was an impactful MSME development project that achieved its objectives. The project increased small farmers' incomes, improved crop productivity and quality, and opened new markets. It strengthened producers' organizations in the Tahiti lime, cocoa, and coconut sectors, improving commercial infrastructure and administrative capacities.

In an area deeply affected by poverty and insecurity, the project made an evidenced difference in the lives of hundreds of farmers, their families, and their levels of self-esteem. The project activities improved producers' communication, trust and relationship skills with peers, and leadership in their communities. It demonstrated that it is possible to live with dignity within the framework of legality, which in turn contributed to the construction of peace.

The evaluation recommended the launch of a corporate learning process to analyse market-driven endogenous models to support MSME competitiveness with a view to mainstream identified priorities and best practices within ITC. It also suggested that ITC support projects to adopt the Theory of Change methodology at project inception stage. The evaluation recommended that in order to operationalize ITC's strategic objectives, it is necessary to mainstream gender equality and Women's Economic Empowerment practices into ITC's MSME projects.

Start and end date of the programme: 2018 - 2022

Total budget: USD 3,020,000 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Midterm Evaluation of the ITC MENATEX Programme

The MENATEX Programme aims to encourage exports of textiles and clothing from developing countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) to promote employment and income generation throughout the value chain. The programme supports the competitiveness of selected SMEs working in the Textile and Clothing (T&C) sector and provides support to improve the performance of T&C-related BSOs in selected countries.

The midterm evaluation found that the programme was executed in accordance with its intent and partnership agreements. Governance was adequate, with financial compliance being a top priority. Management was based on partnerships with overarching results frameworks. Programme activities were executed task-specifically and comply with basic requirements. Opportunities exist to enhance the programme's value, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability.

The evaluation recommended that the programme strengthen the ToC by articulating results chains and refining its contribution to identified SDGs. Develop a comprehensive document outlining internal and external synergies, fostering coherence in interventions, improving communication, and establishing a monitoring and accountability reporting system. Include an adaptive mechanism to target beneficiaries' needs, improve sustainability issues and country-specific contextual variables, and identify practical ways to prevent potential negative impacts on cross-cutting issues in T&C value chains.

Start and end date of the programme: 2018 and 2023

Total budget: USD 11,440,000 funded by Sida (6,190,000) and SECO (5,250,000)

II.   Self-evaluations

Midterm Self-Evaluation of the project "ARISE Plus Malaysia"

The ARISE+ Malaysia project supports inclusive and sustainable trade growth and poverty reduction in Malaysia, while contributing to economic integration in the ASEAN region. The project aims at aligning with regional (ASEAN) and international commitments, and EU standards: trade policy formulation and implementation; Quality Infrastructure System (including standards, certification and metrology); and sustainable practices in the agri-food sector (agriculture and fisheries). The project is implemented by the ITC, in partnership with the Ministry of International Trade (MITI). It is the only EU-funded cooperation project in Malaysia, with a clear focus on trade.

The evaluation found that the project aligns and supports the national development plans and priorities, as defined in the 12th Malaysian Plan (2021-2025) and in the National Trade Blueprint. It also complements the EU priorities and policies in Malaysia and in the ASEAN region and contributes to the achievement of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025.

After challenges faced with the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions, at midterm, the project was on track and progressing towards achieving its objectives. Capacity building activities across the board were providing direct beneficiaries with increased knowledge on various issues. The evaluation noted, however, a few weaknesses in the logical framework (indicators and means of verification), in results-based monitoring and reporting (links between activities, outcomes and objective), and in knowledge management.

Start and end date of the project: February 2021 to January 2024.

Total budget: USD 3,576,600 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Midterm Review of the "ARISE Plus Myanmar"

The ARISE+ Myanmar Trade-Related Assistance Project aims to contribute to inclusive and sustainable growth by supporting greater connectivity and economic integration between Myanmar and ASEAN, in line with the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Blueprint 2025. Its specific objective is to increase trade diversification and integration, regionally and internationally, with a focus on market-led value chains.

The project participants have greater awareness and better understanding of subjects which they previously had little or no knowledge of. They intend to apply this knowledge for the relevant quality certificates in line with project outputs and EU regulations, with potential to contribute to the achievement of the planned outcomes. The benefits from workshops, courses, events, etc. have undeniably boosted national capacities with the aim of improving compliance with international standards, which in turn has contributed to increased opportunities to export both regionally and to the EU. The participatory approach adopted by the project, together with the focus on developing existing institutions and building capacity to raise awareness on required quality standards for new business opportunities, have contributed to a strong sense of ownership.

The review provided 14 recommendations in order to meet intended outputs and outcomes during the remaining project period, and proposed changes to the project design and implementation, to be addressed by ITC through target amendments and areas for improvement aimed at facilitating impact.

Start and end date of the project: June 2019 – June 2023.

Total budget: USD 8,841,680.00 funded by EU DG-INTPA

III.   Funder-led evaluations and reviews

ASEAN Regional Integration Support (ARISE) Plus Lao PDR Midterm Evaluation

The overall objective of ARISE+ Lao PDR is to promote inclusive economic growth, increased climate change resilience, mitigation of vulnerability and job creation in Lao PDR. The specific objectives are to improve the business environment in targeted sectors with a focus on regional economic integration (ASEAN) and to increase trade and participation in global value chains in the targeted sectors. The project aims to support the regional economic integration of the Lao economy into global production chains through targeted support to public and private sectors, with a particular focus on smallholders and SMEs.

The evaluation found that government trainers were established on multilateral and regional trading agreements, however, there was limited evidence of impact in terms of increase in exports in the coffee and wood processing sectors. In coffee production, most producers preferred to follow their existing practices, which is to export green coffee beans, with no value addition, to regional markets such as Viet Nam. The shift towards value addition and exporting to markets such as the EU is expected to take time, as it requires capital investment. The project emphasized the capacity building of key government agencies and private sector intermediaries, which provide good institutional sustainability prospects. Several policy instruments and guidelines were also developed by the project, with good potential for policy sustainability.

The evaluation recommended strengthening the project gender mainstreaming approach by identifying activities that can support women in reskilling, the establishment of small businesses, such as value addition in agriculture products, and encouraging women to work in male-dominated sectors such as wood processing. Stronger sustainability measures are also required to ensure the project outputs continue to be used after the project ends and outcomes continue to be delivered. The project should explore the provision of capacity-building activities to strengthen the operation and management of Lao Coffee, Processing, and Furniture Associations and the Coffee Producers Cooperative.

Start and end date of the project: November 2018 – December 2023

Total budget: USD 5,447,146 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Midterm Evaluation of the EU-East Africa Community (EAC) Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP)

MARKUP was developed to enhance EAC's capacity to exploit its trade-driven growth potential by addressing both supply-side and market access constraints of some key export-oriented sectors, namely agro-industrial crops (coffee, tea, and cacao) and horticulture; and supporting participation in regional and global value chains – with a particular focus on exports to the EU.

Training and capacity-building activities have contributed to the sustainability of many programmes, including MARKUP, which built sustainability through the development of training manuals, training of trainers, supporting effective participation of the private sector good practice, and supporting evidence-based orientation to standards development by data analysis.

The evaluation recommended that in addition to conducting research studies, and the provision of lab equipment, training should adopt a more holistic approach to tackle building capacity for certification: this has to include aspects such as BDS to companies; up-stream / down-stream coordination for improved institutional delivery (targeted support to and better communication with farmers, associations, and cooperatives).

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

Total budget: USD 16,606,392 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Midterm Evaluation of the EU-Nepal Trade and Investment Programme (TIP)

The programme consists of two components: the trade component implemented by ITC, and the investment component implemented by GIZ. The trade component focuses on increasing trade capacity and export potential in the coffee and pashmina value chains and operates under a delegation agreement with the EU. The investment component aims to improve the investment climate and attract foreign direct investment (FDI) to Nepal.

Both components faced delays caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The evaluation found that while the UN decision-making process caused some delays, ITC made efforts to address this by designating a local financial person for quicker response to changing situations. ITC used in-house experts and outside consultants to deliver activities, providing good value for money with lower fees and management overheads, and the team produced high-quality studies and training. Both ITC and GIZ teams coordinated with Nepalese stakeholders and beneficiaries, housed within the Ministry of Industry, Commerce, and Supplies (MoICS) and the Department of Industry (DoI).

The evaluation found that the ITC component is highly relevant to the needs and priorities of the government and the private sector, and complementary to other development partners' programmes. The programme is effective in delivering the expected results such as building the MoICS and Trade and Export Centre (TEPC) capacities, generating additional income for farmers, assisting the private sector stakeholders in participating in the coffee and pashmina value chains, developing more efficient tools and techniques, providing many training and capacity building initiatives and improving awareness of the stakeholders on trade.

The evaluation provided six recommendations addressed to both ITC and GIZ to be implemented for the remaining period of the programme, to update the logframes of their respective components, prioritize activities, strengthen collaboration, and strengthen cross-cutting issues such as gender and environment. Four recommendations were addressed to the EUD to be implemented after the programme ends should a follow-up project be planned.

Start and end date of the programme: January 2020 - December 2023

Total budget: USD 5,589,659 funded by EU DG-INTPA

IV.   Results Oriented Monitoring (ROM) Midterm Reviews

ECOWAS: West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP)
The project is part of a much wider approach within the West African competitiveness programme (WACOMP). The regional component of WACOMP is being implemented by two UN agencies, with two contracts. It is complemented by the various country-level components being implemented by various other agencies. The overall objective of the regional part of the WACOMP is to ''Strengthen the competitiveness of West Africa through an enhanced level of production, transformation and export capacities of the private sectors in line with the regional and national industrial and SME strategies''.

The review noted positive findings due to the diverse activities, intervention tools, and strategic steering committees. However, the programme lacked coherence between national and regional levels (resulting in weaker process quality and information transfer), and coordination between regional and national activities (affecting sustainability efforts). To achieve gender equality, some indicators could have been gender-disaggregated, but the project's contribution remained unclear.

Recommendations directed to ITC include presenting, when possible, indicators broken down by gender; and if a second phase is to be implemented, include in a gender strategy, with specific quotas guaranteeing the participation of a minimum percentage of women in activities where this policy is relevant and measurable. It was also recommended that the ITC and ECOWAS ensure good ongoing communication with national WACOMP programmes and improve any weak points in communication tools.

Start and end date of the programme: October 2018 – November 2024

Total budget: USD 11,003,149 funded by EU DG-INTPA |
| Caribbean: Development of value-added products and intra-regional trade to enhance livelihoods from coconuts II |
| The overall objective of the project is to enhance the competitiveness of small-scale farmers in coconut value chains through better local, regional, and global market integration and production performance.

The review concluded that the project addressed target groups' needs by improving value chain coordination, accessibility to resilient planting material, and fostering producer investment. ITC brought skills and experience, enhancing value for money and synergies. However, sector coordination was less effective in most countries, and a documented monitoring plan was needed. Online training and local consultants supported country activities, and field activities were progressing well. Quality outputs included improved practices, technical capacities, extension services, market opportunities, and sector coordination. Despite the pandemic, prospects for outcomes are optimistic. National Stakeholder Platforms (NSPs) provide a forum for structured management of the coconut sector. No gender equality strategy or human rights approach was in place. However, coconut waste research and climate-smart agriculture were being developed.

It was recommended that the logframe be revised, and ITC develop a monitoring and reporting plan. It was also recommended that the project engage women, youth, and the disabled, establish consolidated country reporting, update road maps, ensure training materials are in Spanish, and update ITC and CARDI websites with Phase II information.

Start and end date of the project: July 2019 – April 2024

Total budget: USD 6,706,200 funded by EU DG-INTPA |

Colombia PUEDE: Peace and unity through productive development and commercialization

The intervention in the Department of Nariño has been recognized as a success story for its consistent strategy of strengthening value chains, focusing on certification models and market access. The results show increased productivity and quality in the three supported chains, resulting in incomes for small producers of over $1,150,000 USD. The intervention addresses issues of inadequate crop management, lack of agricultural knowledge, and limited technical assistance. It contributes to sustainable and inclusive productivity and reincorporates former FARC-EP members within the Peace Funds framework. The intervention has generated positive synergies and complementarities with multiple actors, participating in dialogue tables with national and local authorities.

The implementation mechanisms are adequate, but some bureaucratic and administrative weaknesses have been identified with seed fund grants. The intervention contributes to gender equality and environmental opportunities, with agroecological practices promoting sustainable production models. The proposal of a business unit for managing coconut tow will solve an environmental problem in Colombia and add value to a by-product of the chain. The intervention complies with EU visibility standards and has a good quality communication plan.

The review provided recommended to support the associations benefiting from the "seed funds" to solve bureaucratic problems; focus efforts of the last semester on the consolidation of the Technical Sustainability Units; provide additional qualitative information to complement the quantitative data reported at the level of outcomes and contribution towards gender equality and women's empowerment; systematize the experience and results of the intervention; protect sensitive information; and develop a generational renewal strategy.

Start and end date of the project: December 2018 – December 2022

Total budget: USD 6,706,200 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Iran: Trade-Related Technical Assistance, Capacity Building, and Value Chain Development for Inclusive and Sustainable Trade-Led Growth

The project addresses challenges faced by SMEs and implements activities in collaboration with the Iran Trade Promotion Organization (ITPO) with the aim to increase and diversify trade in goods and services.

The review found the logframe to be well-formulated Logframe, which serves as a monitoring tool. Coordination is ensured through ITC interventions in other countries and the expertise of partners who have worked with SMEs in Iran. The EU added value is significant, strengthening EU-Iran economic, trade, and political relations while operating under US sanctions. However, delays in establishing operational processes, such as visas, national expert recruitment, and payment methods, have hindered efficiency. Tools and materials produced were translated into Farsi to ensure their broad, long-term use. A sustainability strategy was being developed to define the handover of responsibilities and document lessons learned. The inclusion of youth and women was mainstreamed in the design, with principles of a rights-based approach applied. Organic agriculture aimed at increasing environmentally compliant exports was promoted.

Recommendations include conducting follow-up on activities, managing expectations of key stakeholders, establishing a means of sharing outputs among participants, reviewing target values in the Logframe, nominating an ITC representative, hosting a "think tank," and developing a sustainability strategy to identify key priority areas for further support.

Start and end date of the project: December 2018 – December 2023

Total budget: USD 9,097,629 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Iraq: Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-Food Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy (SAAVI)

The projects aims to support the development of competitive agricultural and agribusiness value chains while establishing an enabling trade environment for economic growth and job creation.

The review found that it was well-adapted to the capacities of key stakeholders and secures strong local ownership. The project benefits from the coordination of actions among various development partners and national entities, avoiding duplication and maximizing opportunities for synergistic and complementary actions. The project builds on lessons learned from other development partners in Iraq, and the logframe was of good quality, with just a few shortcomings in the formulation of results statements and indicators.

The management and coordination structures established, and inputs provided supported activities. Delays caused by security issues and the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in slow implementation, however, the implementation rate doubled in early 2022, and the start of activities by the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC) is expected to accelerate the rate further.

Stakeholder consultations in the inception phase reflected an inclusive approach, respecting principles of the Rights-based Approach. Proven capacity building methodologies and market-led strategies contributed to the prospects for long-lasting benefits of the intervention. Gender equality is targeted, but a full gender analysis and strategy were still to be developed. Environmental issues will be addressed through water management systems and climate change agriculture. Potential risks of conflicts and lack of human security are closely monitored.

Recommendations to the ITC include producing a gender analysis, establishing affirmative action parameters to encourage women's participation, engaging a gender expert to strengthen the gender dimension, ensuring access for persons with disabilities, improving the formulation of intervention logic, and starting the elaboration of a comprehensive sustainability/exit strategy.

Start and end date of the project: September 2020 – April 2025

Total budget: USD 26,800,000 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Pakistan: Growth for rural advancement and sustainable progress (GRASP)

The project aims to support gender inclusive income and employment generation, enhanced productivity and profitability of SMEs involved in primary production, service provision and value addition in and around selected clusters of production.

The review found the project was relevant in addressing the identified needs of the planned target groups due to the stakeholder consultations. Delays in finalizing contracts, turnover in government officials, and COVID-19 restrictions were experienced. The project was well represented in provincial level working groups, showing coordination with crucial stakeholders. The most substantial added value of the Intervention is in terms of its policy work due to its scale of impact. The project has a diverse range of outputs across different sectors, and the assumptions and risks are not fully reflective of the realities. The efficiency of implementation is adequate, and outputs delivered to date are of good quality. However, outcomes may not be achieved in full within the timeframe. Work on policy inputs and revised regulatory frameworks will be sustainable as they are enacted within the legal framework. However, ownership of the training materials and the SME database had not been assigned to the respective institutions to ensure their sustainability beyond the end of the Intervention.

Recommendations include revising the logframe, establishing regular coordination meetings at provincial level, administering pre- and post-training evaluation assessments, reviewing the matching grant criteria, developing a contingency plan related to the matching grant component,

reviewing the process for implementing the communication plan, improving the coordination strategy with the EUD, establishing a repository for training materials within beneficiary institutions, and developing an exit strategy.

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

Total budget: USD 54,077,059 funded by EU DG-INTPA

République Centrafricaine: Programme d'appui à la promotion de l'entreprenariat en milieu urbain et rural (PAPEUR)

The project aims to improve and consolidate the productivity of value chains, agropastoral and artisanal sectors by promoting youth employment in urban and rural areas while supporting an environmental framework favourable to the private sector.

The review found the project was aligned with strategic Recovery and Peacebuilding Plan in the Central African Republic (RCPCA), but the technical choices and implementation strategies did not meet the needs of beneficiaries and the context. The monoculture choice weakened populations' resilience and food autonomy, and the action was not based on a technical or financial study justifying operational choices. Existing studies on tractorization in Africa show that the preconditions for success were not met in CAR or within the beneficiary communities. This lack of preliminary analyses caused problems in the implementation of the action.

The project's management was not optimal, with unclear management arrangements between Bangui and Geneva, insufficient management, monitoring, and programming tools, and inexperienced HR. The quality of implementation was low, and the project's sustainability was compromised due to the lack of preconditions for mechanization. The project did not plan to develop conservation agriculture and did not consider the loss of biodiversity, felling of trees, or risks related to soil quality, chemical fertilizers, pesticides, and herbicides. Communication between the project and beneficiaries is unclear, with information given to being open to interpretation and misinformation.

The review recommended that the project join forces with a new partner that can strengthen technical aspects and implementation, offer coaching and follow-up for management, acquire expertise for a feasibility study on mechanization and tractorization, set up a qualified team to operationalize cooperatives, correct warehouse plans, and have a competent team on conservation agriculture measures.

Start and end date of the project: June 2020 – June 2024

Total budget: USD 13,130,000 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Thailand: Trade-Related Assistance (ARISE+ Thailand)

The project aims to support inclusive and sustainable trade growth and poverty reduction in Thailand, while contributing to economic integration in the ASEAN region.

The review found the project to be timely, strategic, and increasingly important, generating knowledge, building capacity, promoting learning, and collaboration in relation to the ASEAN context and the EU-ASEAN partnership. It is coordinated with projects and has strong collaboration with the ARISE+ Regional programme and other ARISE+ implementing partners.

The intervention logic is clear, well-structured, and reflected, and the well-formulated Logframe serves as a monitoring tool. Minor adjustments are needed to address the absence of qualitative indicators and systematic reporting on risks. A robust results-based monitoring system is implemented. The efficiency of implementation was generally adequate, with delays incurred due

to COVID-19 restrictions and time needed for understanding the local context and project stakeholders. The technical team was strengthened by national experts.

The project has good sustainability prospects, with sustainability embedded in the work of Thai partners and government engagement supporting the continuation of benefits after the intervention ends. However, no exit plan has been developed yet. Gender was partially mainstreamed in the implementation, with trade integration for green and inclusive growth and promotion of organic agriculture.

Recommendations to ITC include finalizing ongoing outputs, increasing the number of EU experts, revising the Logframe, including an updated risk analysis, extending the concept of mainstreaming gender in policy making, examining budget reallocations, and developing an exit plan.

Start and end date of the project: November 2020 – October 2023

Total budget: USD 3,395,775 funded by EU DG-INTPA

Uzbekistan: Facilitating the Process of Accession to the WTO

The project aims to improve Uzbekistan's trade environment that is in conformity with the WTO.

The review found the project to be relevant and effective, with a focus on capacity building among various actors and well-adapted to the needs. The EU added value was recognized as significant support in the accession process, and coordination with other national and regional initiatives was ensured. The intervention logic was valid, with well-defined elements and well-formulated indicators, however, targets required revision. A comprehensive monitoring framework was in place. The project faced underspending, with risks of resources not being fully used by the end of the project.

Evidence exists of the project's effectiveness in facilitating the country's accession to the WTO, however, the expected contribution for strengthening the private sector's understanding and involvement in WTO accession and legislative reforms were limited. Training a larger number of specialists is required, and the development of an exit strategy to ensure long-lasting effects. Gender equality was promoted, but the inclusive distribution of the intervention's benefits has not been fulfilled, with limited involvement of women business organizations and the private sector. More specific information on the implications of the WTO accession process for the private sector is needed to prepare for foreign competition when the market opens.

Recommendations include revising the logframe and budget, discussing quarterly workplans, strengthening coordination with other initiatives, implementing gender analysis, including progress towards the outcome in progress reports, expanding the Communication Strategy, raising awareness on WTO provisions, and developing the exit strategy for the intervention.

Start and end date of the project: February 2020 – October 2024

Total budget: USD 5,200,000 funded by EU DG-TRADE

V.   Sustainability review

Sustainability review of the ITC programme 'Trade Development Strategies'

The ITC Trade Development Strategies Programme supports developing economies' design and implements export trade strategies to achieve sustainable economic, social, and environmental impact. This review assessed the sustainability of export trade strategies in Saint Lucia, Burkina Faso, and Sri Lanka.

The review concluded that, overall, ITC support contributed positively to the sustainability of countries' export trade-related policies, mechanisms, and activities. The implementation of strategies remains a significant challenge for countries, and ITC support could be improved. ITC support adds value by strengthening a country's capacity for trade and its sustainability through knowledge transfer, policy influence, public-private networks, and implementation mechanisms. The review considered the significant negative effects on countries' trade capacities of the Covid-19 pandemic, economic downturns, and political instability.

A key lesson from the review is that a country's ability to use fully and sustainably its export strategy requires a systematic and sustained focus on its capacity, e.g., organizational, institutional, and systemic, and readiness for dealing with external shocks.

Recommendations include the need for more effective internal coordination, by ITC, of its activities relative to trade development strategy, for improvements to post-project follow-up, and for building on the success of its recent Trade Strategy Forum as one way of improving coordination and follow-up.

VI.   Developmental Evaluation Review

A Proposal for Large ITC Projects to Establish Good M&E Practices Before Closure of Inception Phase

Issued by IEU, this proposal presented the results of an assessment of M&E approaches, practices, and outcomes of three ITC projects during their transition from inception to early implementation. The investigation applied a Developmental Evaluation Review (DER) framework to gain insight into how M&E decisions were made and M&E adaptations executed, and to provide a profile of M&E outcomes achieved. It was based on a collaboration with projects in Eswatini, Iraq, and South Sudan (the "DER initiative"), during which the initiative also provided technical support to these projects in developing and strengthening M&E systems.

The proposal's main technical innovation was to propose the insertion of a project appraisal process specifically related to M&E into the early stages of the project life cycle. By design, this extension would facilitate the embedding of M&E structures and practices during project inception phase. The M&E appraisal process was proposed to apply to all projects that surpass the cost threshold of USD 1 million, (starting at the end of October 2022) affecting approximately 48% of the ongoing ITC project portfolio.

Annex 5: Follow up on the implementation of previous AESRs recommendations

(As of May 2023)

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
1. **Bring green transition to the forefront** When putting into practice the Strategic Plan 2022-25, pay particular attention to ensure that environmental mainstreaming is considered more consistently in each ITC project, and that environmental objectives are expressed explicitly in a larger number of projects.	1.1 In 2022 the 'green' working group was established in ITC, consisting of staff from across all ITC divisions. Under the leadership of the GIVC section, an action plan (the Green Moonshot) reinforcing ITC's contribution to climate objectives was developed. The working group will continue to meet as a steering group for ITC's work in this space, and to develop and implement cross-cutting 'green' corporate initiatives under the framework of the Green Moonshot.	**Status: Implemented** Following the establishment of the Green Working Group (GWG) in 2022, in early 2023 GIVC Trade and Environment team (GWG secretariat) continued engagement with the Working Group members by conducting bilateral consultations. The secretariat presented the concept of the Green Moonshot, as well as W1 Green Trade (C135) contribution to the Moonshot implementation in 2022-23. Cross-section collaboration opportunities were discussed and identified in working together for achieving the Moonshot objectives. The consultations were highly appreciated by colleagues, the aggregated results of the consultations were presented at the 2nd GWG meeting in mid-March 2023. The discussion points were presentation of the Green Moonshot including the results of the GWG bilateral consultations, ITC's external positioning in the environment and trade area, internal coordination to leverage the Moonshot implementation, and initial ideas on the ITC participation in the COP28. 1 The next GWG meetings will further enhance efforts in environmental mainstreaming and will take place on 22 June, 12 September, and 21 November.
	1.2 A climate proofing methodology for large ITC projects is developed, piloted and supported by an online training course. A GIVC focal point will assist developers of large projects to apply the methodology in collaboration with the Project Design Taskforce.	**Status: In progress** GIVC has developed several tools to enable climate proofing at ITC. The challenge now is mainstreaming these into implementation. It will help to avoid causing environmental harm e.g., by promoting water intensive crops or polluting technologies whilst building stakeholder resilience e.g., by improving access to climate smart technologies.

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
		The Climate Change Assessment Tool (CCAT) has been used in UKTP, GRASP and SAAVI projects to identify climate related risks and opportunities within project design. The Climate Change Risk Guide has been developed as a resource for BSOs to mainstream climate into their operations and services offer. The Guide is also available as an online course on the SME Trade Academy To ensure better mainstreaming outcomes, it would be optimal to undertake a systematic review of climate related risks and opportunities (e.g., by using CCAT) in every large project. This is currently not the case and is contingent on funders' willingness to resource this work.
2. Make projects even more responsive to beneficiaries' needs through an enhanced in-house toolbox To increase the adaptability and operational simplicity of ITC needs assessment tools, and their use as project baselines, undertake a conscious and planned effort to further developing the in-house toolbox available. Also provide corporate guidance on how to conduct specific needs assessments for project design, and general needs assessments on trade and MSMEs.	**2.1** Develop a compendium of needs assessment tools, based on a joint template for the description of the tool and inputs from ITC's technical and country programme divisions.	**Status: In progress** ITC is in process of developing an internal Products and Services database, that centralizes and categorizes all tools (including needs assessment methodologies; databases; advisory services…) that ITC's projects use with clients/beneficiaries. This will enhance visibility and use of internally available needs assessment tools (e.g., SME Competitiveness Survey, CUBED Assessment etc.). The Products and Services database will be completed by the beginning of 2024.
	2.2 Determine gaps and inconsistencies, and solutions	**Status: In progress** Gaps and inconsistencies are identified on an ongoing basis, in view of changing client needs and focus areas. Some gaps in tools have already been addressed, for example, through SheTrades Outlook tool or the REMI (refugee-specific) methodologies. In the context of development of Products and Services database, ITC will increase the visibility on the use of different tools.
	3.1 For projects funded by external parties that assign project components to different agencies, ITC	**Status: Implemented**

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
3. Optimize cooperation with co-implementing agencies in multi-partner projects Encourage ITC projects to plan for a systematic regular exchange with co-implementing agencies and for increased collaboration to stimulate a better use of synergies.	developers will seek a clarification of governance and coordination mechanisms between implementing agencies and its documentation in the grant agreement. During the inception phase for large projects, the practical modalities for information exchange, knowledge sharing and decision-taking with co- implementors will be further developed. A documentation of these modalities will become a mandatory part of the inception report.	All project developers are required to provide a clear outline of the modalities of engagement and coordination with other agencies in case of multi-partners implementation. In particular PDTF requires project developers to provide a detailed outline of "who implements what" in project narrative, as well as in the logframe that must show which particular output/outcome falls under ITC responsibility. In addition, project developers are asked to ensure that responsibilities for monitoring results and reporting are clearly established among the implementing agencies. A checklist for projects' inception phase/start up plan is currently being finalised with a view to integrate it into the project development process with a dedicated tab in the ITC project portal. The project plan templates used for all ITC projects require project developers and project managers to describe the modalities of engagement with implementing partners. Project developers are also required to engage with relevant DPS units to ensure that legal, financial and procurement related aspects are properly address at an early stage.
	3.2 In projects funded by UN multi-partner trust funds and implemented by several UN agencies, participate proactively in the design phase. The objective is to develop the project logframe, governance mechanism and workplan jointly, to ensure synergies, regular information exchange and impact-oriented project adaptation in the implementation phase.	**Status: Implemented** In the case of multi-partner trust funds and projects implemented by several UN agencies, ITC strives to play an active role in the co-development of the project and the design phase. Recent examples include a project with the UN Peace Building Fund Multi-Partner trust fund and another project with the Migration Multi-Partner Trust Fund in the Gambia. These projects involved ITC's early engagement with UNDP, IOM, UNICEF, UNESCO. A joint project development on housing & complementary job creation is ongoing in Iraq, together with ILO and UN Habitat. In the case of joint bids with other UN agencies, for example for the EU, a recent example was the successful joint bid by IOM, FAO and ITC in the Philippines, where the modalities of engagement were clearly outlined and agreed between the agencies, and documented

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
		in the bid proposal to the EU. In that case ITC was a "co-applicant" with IOM being the Lead applicant.
4. Continue efforts to strengthen RBM tools Make the RBM tools of ITC projects more robust and consistent e.g., by offering more generic tools that can be adapted to the needs of a particular project. The overall aim should be to provide project managers with the means to select and apply an appropriate RBM approach, suited to the size, intervention area, and other characteristics of their particular project, while ensuring that projects follow a common set of client-focused and purpose-driven RBM principles. This should ensure that RBM is used as a management tool for steering, including continuous adjustment, of projects, and would be particularly important for complex projects.	**4.1** Finalize the ITC Survey Management tool for project managers and roll it out to a larger number of projects for baseline, results monitoring, and follow-up surveys.	**Status: Implemented** Survey Management Tool, including templates and ITC-tailored question bank, is available for internal users: https://surveys.intracen.org/ , with over 160 designed surveys (total for planned, ongoing and completed). In Q1 2023, a mobile application was launched, which allows to collect data offline, facilitating data collection in remote areas.
	4.2 Fully roll out the single-sign-on and Events Application that captures client data and facilitates monitoring and reporting.	**Status: Implemented** Single-sign-on (SSO) is implemented – rolled out, and its interface is undergoing improvements. Events Applications is implemented, and an upgraded version has been launched in Q2 2023.
	4.3 For large projects (>$1m) that are often more complex as they have various interlinked project components, introduce minimum requirements for the definition of project's theories of change, and related data collection, monitoring and results assessment plans and responsibilities that must be established during projects' inception phases.	**Status: In progress** ITC is introducing requirements and models for a Theory of Change for ITC's large projects, as a complement to the existing ITC results framework model based on Results Chain and Logical Framework. A checklist for inception phase requirements is being prepared with the planned creation of a dedicated entry in the project portal as a new tab entitled "Inception Phase / Start up Plan" where project developers and project managers are expected to provide an outline of the project's monitoring and evaluation plan by the end of their inception phase, as well as a confirmation of their projects' logframe and theory of change. Draft minimum requirements for the definition of the project's theory of change and monitoring and results assessment plans (to be implemented for selected large projects) will be prepared by the end of Q4 2023.
	4.4 Provide guidance and templates for project monitoring and reporting in large projects (> $1m).	**Status: In progress** See under 4.3 above

AESR 2022		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
5. Collect and disseminate the VfM experience gained by some ITC projects Conduct an assessment of current VfM practices in ITC projects, draw lessons learned and use this knowledge to provide more structured guidance for future projects on the use of VfM techniques and M&E disciplines.	**5.1** Review projects that have tried to generate systematic VfM information and assess the pros and cons of their approaches.	**Status: Implemented** The review was completed in Q1 2023 and integrated in the report/guidelines on VfM. 18 projects funded by the European Union, FCDO, USAID and KOICA were assessed for VfM elements, including through elements in the Memoranda of Understanding, their logframes/indicators, their ROM reviews and reports to funders.
	5.2 Prepare a guidance note for project managers on feasible VfM approaches for diverse types of ITC projects and present the findings to ITC staff.	**Status: Implemented** The draft report/guidelines with VfM experiences, approaches and recommendations for ITC projects and the accompanying presentation was produced and will be finalized in July 2023.

AESR 2021		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
2. Enhance the capabilities of internal resources to better align them with ITC's growth agenda requirements: (b) During the 2022-2025 period, develop a clear, organization-wide understanding of internal value chains and of how best to combine individual products and services, in which order and context, to achieve specific goals.	**2.2:** • Development of a comprehensive 'blueprint' theory of change for each core area and each impact area and the corresponding internal value chains, with the understanding that the blueprint will be customized to each individual project context in form of project specific results chains. • Directory of products and services	**Status: Implemented (moonshots strategies) - In progress (Directory of products and services)** The 'moonshot' strategies and related initiatives were launched in 2022 in the areas of green economy, gender, digital connectivity and youth. They reflect areas where ITC wants to push the envelope further and reach higher scale impact. They include theories of change developed collaboratively by each moonshot team together with working groups of staff from throughout ITC. The moonshots on "Green", "Digital", "Youth" and "Gender" were further elaborated with action plans for 2023, and presented to all staff in June 2023. The Directory of products and Services is currently being finalised
(c) Promote the values of coordination and collaboration into the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.	**2.3:**	**Status: Implemented** There is an ongoing emphasis on the imperative of coordination and collaboration by the ED and SMC members. In early 2023, MAG discussions on key bottlenecks to coordination and collaboration took place. Concrete

AESR 2021		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
	• MAG discussion on drivers and impediments to coordination and collaboration, setting of concrete objectives and how to implement them. • SMC and Directors' emphasis on productive coordination and collaboration, and setting incentive structures accordingly (project approvals, KPIs in performance appraisals, conflict reviews).	initiatives have been implemented as part of ITC's 'Moving Forward' Action Plan.
3: Enhance continuous learning and accountability for Strategic Plan 2022-2025 implementation (a) Within the annual CCITF report, include an analysis of the lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, ideally through a steering mechanism, incorporating collective feedback from across the organization.	**3.1:** • Steering mechanism established, in form of a group at the mid-management level (MAG or selected Division representatives at Chief level). • Annual review of the implementation plan and implementation by the Steering group, with a documentation of the lessons learned that will be shared with Senior Management and included in the annual CCITF reports.	**Status: Ongoing** Terms of reference for the Steering Mechanism (SM) have been endorsed by the Senior Management Committee in 2023. SM members have been nominated and has started its activities. The analysis of the lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategic Plan through the SM, incorporating collective feedback from across the organization will be inserted into the annual CCITF report (Q1 2024).
(b) Undertake an independent midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.	**3.2:** • Midterm review of the ITC Strategic Plan priorities and implementation as per Implementation Plan, by IEU with a panel of experts • Adjustments in the Implementation Plan, by SMC, if required.	**Status: not started** The Midterm review of the ITC Strategic Plan is to be undertaken in 2023 – 2024.
4: Underscore the Strategic Plan 2022-2025 results-focus (b) Place the responsibility to develop coordinated solutions for the achievements of key high-level or transversal objectives on parts of the organization and request the interested ITC sections to track achievements accordingly.	**4.2:** • Within the overall ITC results framework, validation, or new development of theories of change for each impact area, with corresponding generic internal value chains collaboratively developed by contributing sections • Sub-strategies for selected areas (see recommendation 2)	**Status: Implemented** This recommendation was implemented though the moonshot initiative and the 'moving forward' action plan (see recommendations 2 and 3 above). Furthermore, for the development of ITC Operational plans, operational priorities are determined for each area of the Strategic Plan on an annual basis. Based on the reporting on those 'milestones', by the contributing sections, the CCITF reports then update on the progress made.

AESR 2021		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
	• Reporting on the respective results indicators by the contributing sections	
5: Ensure that the implementation of Strategic Plan 2022-2025 remains client-focused and adjusts to stakeholders' continuously evolving and increasing needs over the next four years (b) Develop transferable general models (or 'blueprints') for "integrated solutions" oriented towards the needs of specific client groups or contexts, which can then still be adapted as the situation requires.	**5.2:** In view of selected specific client groups or contexts, theories of change for interventions that are linked to ITC's core services and impact initiatives. (see above)	**Status: Implemented** Moonshots were developed for Women and Youth. In addition, ITC developed a strategy for refugees, migrants and displaced people.

AESR 2020		
Recommendation	**Action Plan defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
2: Enhance the capacity to utilize theories of change: (a) Develop the ITC Results Framework into a more detailed Theory of Change for the next ITC Strategic Plan and, (b) Increase Project Managers' capacity to utilize the 'Theory of Change' tool to be more results-focused and improve results monitoring and information collection about attributable changes in complex project environments.	**2.2:** Enhance Project Managers' capacity to develop project-level theories of change and use them for monitoring and management.	**Status: Ongoing** ITC is placing an increasing focus on complementing its results framework model based on Results Chain and Logical Framework with the introduction of theories of change for ITC's large projects. A checklist for project developers is being developed for inception phase / start up plan requirements, which will include the preparation of a monitoring and evaluation plan for the project by the end of their inception phase, as well as a confirmation of the projects' logframe and theory of change. Draft minimum requirements for the definition of the project's theory of change and monitoring and results assessment plans (to be implemented for selected large projects) will be prepared by the end of Q4 2023. ITC is consulting with the DCED with a view to secure relevant training from DCED on the formulation of theories of change for large projects.
4: Enhancing project results sustainability: (a) Identify in the project cycle, the potential for replication and scaling-up of the project, and (b) Ensure the development and regular updating of exit strategies during project cycle, and their implementation.	**4.3:** At the design and inception stage, sustainability and scaling aspects to be integrated in the project risk register, followed by regular risk monitoring and reporting during project implementation.	**Status: Ongoing** ITC continues to put emphasis on the sustainability and scaling aspects as well as local ownership during project development and inception. ITC's approach to project design integrates elements such as working with experienced local Business Support Organisations (BSOs), acting as multipliers, ensuring that knowledge and skills are acquired and transmitted at the local level. The development of the "Hub" concept at country-level implemented under various programmes (She Trades, Youth, Green, T4SD) is also a step towards more sustainability and scalability. Incorporating sustainability and scaling aspects in the projects' risk matrix and regular review and reporting during implementation will be reinforced and added as part of the checklist for large projects inception phase or start-up plans. In the context of identifying and updating 'risks to achieve impact objectives', risks and risk mitigation measures addressing sustainability and scaling aspects are reviewed. An update of the risk register in the project portal with additional guidance for project developers is foreseen for Q4 2023.
	4.4: IEU to provide regular briefings to all relevant ITC staff on results of impact sustainability assessments, project evaluations /	**Status: Ongoing**

AESR 2020		
Recommendation	**Action Plan** **defined in the Management Response**	**2023 Reporting**
	AESR / Project Closure Reports in relation to Project Results, and lessons to be learned.	IEU will use a MAG meeting to present the observations IEU had made on PCRs and Sustainability Reviews to get feedback from the MAG members (foreseen in Q4 2023)
6: Implement corporate strategy to engage in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks: (a) Finalize and adopt a corporate strategy to engage more systematically in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks, and (b) Enforce this strategy, including training requirements for ITC Country Officers about how and why to engage in UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks.	**6.2:** Roll-out of the ITC UNSDCF Engagement Strategy	**Status: Implemented / Ongoing** The ITC/DCO/RCO compact has been implemented over 2021 and in 2022. ITC has participated in the development and signed 32 United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Frameworks and has engaged in the ongoing Common Country Analysis process of 24 country teams. ITC's Senior Management regularly meets with Resident Coordinators during country missions, and during RC visits to Geneva. Webinars for RCOs have informed about ITC's and the UN Trade clusters' work, RCs hold briefing meetings with ITC's Country Offices, and ITC databases, tools and methodologies have been made available to RCOs. ITC also participates in DCO working groups and Senior Management is actively engaged in the UNSDG. As to ITC's internal country engagement and communication strategy, elements of it were decided at the ITC Senior management retreat in early 2022 and subsequently implemented. The final draft of the full strategy was finalized in Q1 2023 and is currently reviewed across all ITC sections.

Annex 6: Follow up on the implementation of evaluation recommendations

Implementation Status of Past Recommendations as of 31 March 2023

Since 2013, and in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Norms and Standards[40], and ITC Evaluation Guidelines[41,] the IEU follows up on the implementation status of evaluation recommendations. This process monitors progress made on the recommendations and helps to ensure that they contribute to ITC's organizational effectiveness, learning and accountability.

This follow up addresses independent evaluations carried out by the IEU. It does not include recommendations given in self-evaluations or funder-led evaluations.

As of 31 March 2023, the IEU followed-up on 35 recommendations resulting from the following six independent evaluations conducted by the IEU:

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

Overview of implementation status as of March 2023

Evaluations	Recommendations			Implementation Status			
	Total	Accepted	Partially Accepted	Not Started	Ongoing	Partially Implemented	Implemented
DaO 2019	6	5	1	1	2	--	3
TMI 2021	9	9	--	1	6	--	2
NTF IV 2022	8	8	--	1	2	1	4
MENATEX 2022	7	6	1	--	6	--	1
SheTrades 2023	5	5	--	--	5	--	--
Total	**35**	**33**	**2**	**3**	**21**	**1**	**10**

Of the 35 recommendations, 33 were accepted, and 2 partially. In terms of implementation, all but three of the recommendations had been started, and 21 were ongoing. One recommendation was partially implemented, and 10 were fully implemented. Further details for each evaluation are provided below.

DaO

ITC is an official signatory of the UNSDCFs for more than 30 countries and actively participates in the UN Common Country Analysis (CCA), providing technical support and advice upon request. ITC has

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[40] Standard 1.4 Management response and follow up: The organization should ensure that appropriate mechanisms are in place to ensure that management responds to evaluation recommendations. The mechanisms should outline concrete actions to be undertaken in the management response and in the follow-up to recommendation implementation. Source: United Nations Evaluation Group (2016). *Norms and Standards for Evaluation.* New York: UNEG, p. 17.
[41] International Trade Centre (2018). *ITC Evaluation Guidelines, Second Edition.* Geneva: ITC, p. 46

stepped up its engagement with other UN agencies to collaborate more systemically and strategize for Delivering as One. It is also active in the Inter-Agency Cluster on Trade and Productive Capacity, working closely with UNCTAD and other members of the group.

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

A new draft of the Country Engagement Strategy will be presented to ED and DED in May 2023. Communication with DCP country managers on ITC's engagement in UN reform-related initiatives is ongoing, with an updated version to be presented to stakeholders within ITC for consultation. The action plan includes setting clear roles and responsibilities for all ITC personnel concerned. DCP regional offices manage UNSDCF requirements for countries of ITC interest, ensuring they have a trade/small business pillar to which ITC contributes.

The Country Intelligence Portal is being developed to provide country-related information and serve as an effective monitoring system within ITC. The Open Data Portal offers publicly available data on ITC's activities at the country level.

TMI

TMI continues to improve the market analysis tools and a presentation of the global public goods was provided to senior management, and a new version of the methodology paper is being drafted, however, funding has been secured for 2023 only, meaning that the maintenance and upgrade of some tools is at risk. The TMI Chief and staff reached partners to discuss the visibility of ITC's contribution to transparency in trade and related dissemination of datasets.

A new version of the market analysis tools, and strategy is under preparation, and TMI staff is actively participating in the ITC Partnerships for Purpose working group to contribute to ITC's strategy for better promotion of partnerships. The section looked at users' statistics and survey solutions and is currently piloting a new user's statistics tool (BigQuery) and survey solution (Conjoint Analysis) for the Global Trade Help Desk (GTHD) platform which could then be expanded to other tools. In addition, implementation of the corporate single sign-on is ongoing; technical discussions between ITS and TMI are planned to finalize the decisions. A campaign will be deployed as planned in due time.

NTF IV

NTF V projects have undergone thorough research and consultation to assess needs and priorities, ensuring relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability. These needs and priorities are documented in project plans and validated by SPPG. The Steering Group reviews the relevance of interventions quarterly and every half year at the project level. However, the recommendation to consider a longer programme lifecycle of five or six years was not fully implemented by NTF V due to the programme's set timeframe.

NTF V has been integrated into ITC's Digital Moonshot and has collaborated with other ITC teams, such as the Institutions and Ecosystems team, SheTrades, and the Digital Moonshot. In 2020, a survey on environmental sustainability was conducted with tech start-up beneficiaries in Uganda, Senegal, Ethiopia, Mali, Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Zambia, and Tanzania. The NTF V Agribusiness projects cover human rights analysis and prepare beneficiary companies for EU regulations on Mandatory Human Rights Due Diligence.

Building partnerships is a core aspect of the implementation approach, with partnerships with Dutch NGO BOPINC, Smart Africa, and I4Policy. A Theory of Change was established in the Programme Document, and a Programme-level Results Chain was designed to complement project portal entries. Progress is documented quarterly, and risk management is updated on the projects portal. A glossary is also included in the Annual Reports.

RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme management have been put into place, and baseline data will be adjusted through a change control process. A midterm evaluation is planned for Q3 2023, with the TOR being developed and the budget included in all projects and at the programme level. Expenditures are tracked weekly and defined exit strategies will be developed following the midterm evaluation.

MENATEX

All country-specific exit strategies have been developed and integrated into the annual progress report, and a specific document has been developed explaining the contribution of the programme to SDGs.

GTEX II, including a new ToC, is being drafted and discussed with funders and the SMC, with the Concept Note approved by both funders. The programme document is being revised and updated to ensure ease of understanding of the objectives and initiatives. The Global Textile Academy is fully operational, offering free access to online training materials, webinars, and other resources. The programme has also reviewed its mailing list to ensure it is up-to-date and all beneficiaries and contacts receive the program newsletter.

A standardized evaluation form is being developed for various types of activities organized under the programme, such as trainings, B2B meetings, and trade fair participation. PSC meetings are being redesigned, with a focus on strategic issues of primary importance for the sector.

SheTrades

All of the evaluation recommendations are still ongoing. The SheTrades Moon Shot, approved by SMC in July 2022, focuses on targeting small-scale traders and young women, increasing access to services for more women. SheTrades is mobilizing partners to reach young women and has delivered advocacy events on women in male-dominated sectors. In 2022, ITC successfully implemented a result-driven and coordinated approach to the SheTrades Hubs, with a dedicated team. The organization has strengthened cooperation frameworks, delivered clear benefits, and implemented a strong M&E framework and communication strategy. The organization has also facilitated online and face-to-face peer review activities, providing opportunities for connections and learning.

The Gender Moon Shot contributes to internal learning, and SheTrades is developing new gender-transformative services for women-led businesses and young women, including soft skills and TPOs. These services will strengthen the technical offering from the Women and Trade Programme to W2 projects across ITC. SheTrades is rolling out gender toolkits in various W2 projects, such as agri value chains in Pakistan and South Sudan and trade policy in Nepal.

Priorities for programme management include revising staff needs, delivering trainings through external experts, recruiting in-country experts, creating P2 and P3 level positions, and reviewing tasks for staff towards more technical assignments. More resources are needed for staffing gender mainstreaming work as global public goods and upskilling staff.

62

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The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.