



Transforming Trade,  
Changing Lives



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# Transforming Trade, Changing Lives



Visiting ITC beneficiary companies in Viet Nam, 2022 ■ Group photo at Africa Industrialization Week 2022, Niger ■ “Forging Multistakeholder Partnerships for Radical Climate Action,” World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2023, Davos ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton and Afreximbank President Benedict Oramah discuss report on African-Caribbean trade, 2023 ■ Discussing women’s economic empowerment, WTO’s 12<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference ©WTO

## **The International Trade Centre at 60 years**

### **Talkin' Bout a Revolution**

Eighty years ago, the Bretton Woods Conference sought to chart a shared path for international economic governance, after two world wars in less than half a century had laid bare the need for a new paradigm. The event led to what we now know as the World Bank Group and the International Monetary Fund, while making clear that an international institution governing global trade was both wanted and needed. A few years later, in October 1947, 23 contracting parties signed the Final Act of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

By 1964, the GATT had expanded to include nearly 60 countries. It was then evident that a rules-based trading system should entail more than just tariff ceilings and tariff cuts, as shown by the Kennedy Round's expansion to cover topics such as dumping. Nonetheless, while the global rules of trade were emerging, the practice of trade was often hampered by limited information about trade and market trends: exporters, despite their best efforts, were operating in the dark. That recognition led to the establishment of what is now the International Trade Centre in May 1964.

Throughout the ITC's 60-year history, we have sought to respond to the realities that people on the ground face in trade, operating on one central premise: to help developing countries reap trade's benefits to the fullest, through practical, export-focused interventions. Along the way, we crystallized our focus around the drivers of the global economy: micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), while showing that economic growth must go hand in hand with environmental sustainability, social inclusion, and intergenerational equity.

But there is more to do. Trade has helped tackle global poverty, and developing economies are increasingly capturing a greater share of global exports, but this remains a harder proposition for least developed countries, small island developing states, landlocked developing states, small and vulnerable economies, countries in armed conflict or at risk of lapsing or relapsing into conflict, and sub-Saharan Africa. Too many countries still concentrate their exports on a handful of commodity sectors, while value addition, economic diversification, and economic integration remain very challenging to put into practice. The past few years, with the unending stream of crises from COVID-19 to conflicts to climate change-induced disasters, have also shown how quickly decades of hard-won progress can be undone.



Marking ITC's 60th anniversary in May 2024 ■ Visit from UN Deputy Secretary-General Amina J. Mohammed at Geneva headquarters ■ World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2023, Davos ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton with Txai Suruí, Brazilian indigenous, environmental activist, at COP28 in Dubai ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton at Intra African Trade Fair 2021, South Africa ■ Visiting women entrepreneurs at Dadaab refugee complex, Kenya

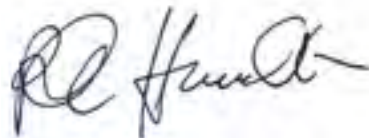
These are major challenges, but what ITC has learned over 60 years in operation is that we must, together, transform trade if we are to change lives for the better. This new publication provides a visual journey through that history. It demonstrates that a revolution in how we think about trade isn't just on some distant horizon, but is already underway, as shown through the lessons that have emerged from ITC's work putting small businesses first.

We've learned what makes interventions work: for instance, we know that "helicopter" technical assistance is a recipe for failure. Local institutions, including governments, business support organizations, and the private sector, must be in the drivers' seat if we are to see change that lasts, and that means that they need the capacity to design and deliver that change. Development partners and international agencies have an important role to play, but these efforts must be coordinated and reflect local realities and priorities.

We've seen why human capital and other forms of soft infrastructure matter, as that is where the real growth potential lies. We've experienced how partnerships, including between public and private actors, allow for developing the most effective interventions, drawing on our collective strengths. We've learned why finance, a major challenge for small businesses, and even more so for those led by women, youth, and vulnerable populations, must become more affordable and easier to access and use. We've understood that one of the biggest challenges developing countries face involves capacity constraints, and that's where we need to channel more of our efforts.

The trading system's postwar paradigm was a start in the right direction, albeit an imperfect one. Now, we need a new paradigm fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It's not enough to look at environmental sustainability, digital connectivity, social inclusion, regional integration, or economic growth in their own individual corners: we must work holistically if we are to chart a better future for trade-led development. We also cannot risk letting these ideas remain solely "talk" among politicians and pundits, technocrats and practitioners: we must translate these ideas into concrete action.

We've come a long way, but the journey isn't over: in many ways, it's just beginning. In 1988, the award-winning singer Tracy Chapman first sang "Talkin' Bout a Revolution," calling for those people who had long been relegated to the sidelines to rise up and rightly take their place on the centre stage. That's what we need today: a revolutionary approach to trade-led development, one that's locally-led, locally-owned, and has in its sights a better, fairer, and more sustainable future not just for the current generation, but for those yet to come. We hope you join us in making that revolution possible.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "P. Coke-Hamilton". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "P" and "C".

Pamela Coke-Hamilton  
ITC Executive Director

# 1964-2024

1960

Entering the scene  
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1964-1971  
**Herbert L. Jacobson**  
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1970

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**Victor E. Santiapillai**  
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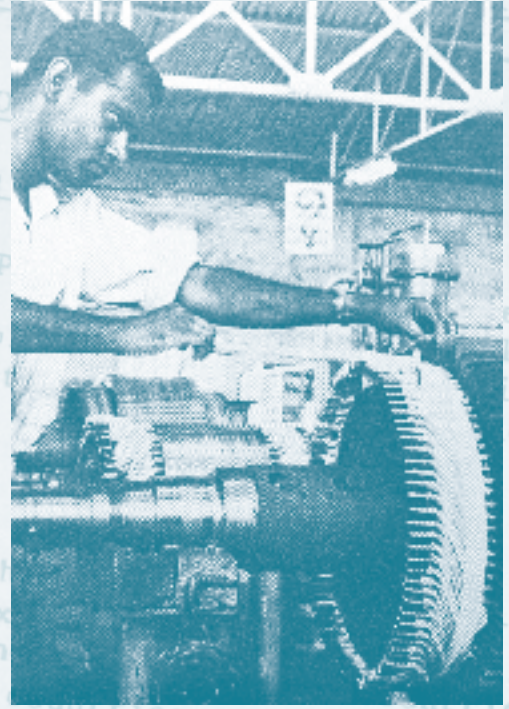


2020-present

**Pamela Coke-Hamilton**  
Jamaica



1. Proposal by the Brazilian Representative to the GATT Council that  
an International Trade Information Centre be established in Geneva  
26 Oct. 1962)



Citrus industry, Israel, 1966 © Israeli Citrus By-products ■ Factory worker, India, 1965 © Ministry of Commerce of India ■ Women working in rice field, Thailand, 1965 © UN

A blue-tinted photograph of a man in a workshop, focused on working with a power tool on a piece of machinery. The background shows other industrial equipment and a person working in the distance.

# 1960s

## Entering the scene

In 1962, the delegation of Brazil to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) proposed in document COM.III/93 the establishment of an “International Trade Information Centre.”

The rationale, Brazil said, was that least developed countries lacked “the financial resources to enable them to maintain the type of extensive trade information and trade commissioner services which the industrialized countries, particularly the more important trading countries, normally have.” The trade information service could serve all countries, given the expenses involved in collating such information individually.

Following two years of preparatory work, the GATT International Trade Centre opened its doors on May 1, 1964, seven months before the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) was formed. It was also the same year that the Kennedy Round of negotiations under the GATT began, with the goal of agreeing tariff reductions among its Contracting Parties and ultimately adopting new texts on anti-dumping and development.

In those years, many of the agencies that would later shape the international landscape were still being established or were some years away. The United Nations Development Programme was founded in November 1965, while UN agencies on environment, climate change, women, biodiversity, and intellectual property rights were among those still to follow.

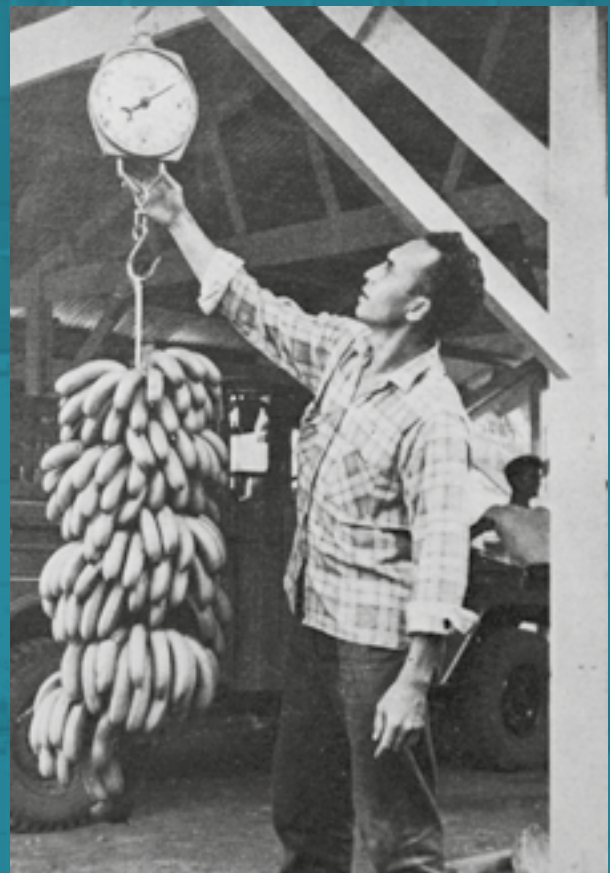
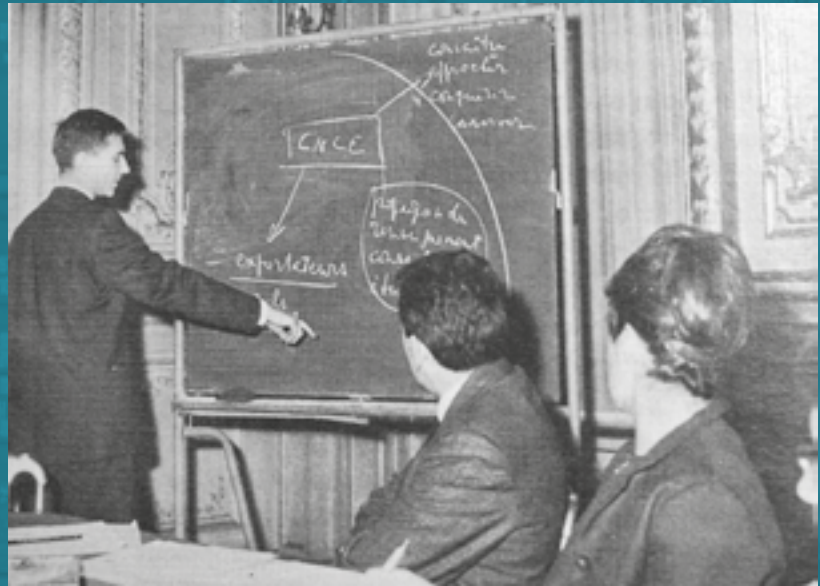


# 1964

## **The early days**

On May 1, 1964, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade formally created the GATT International Trade Centre. Housed at the Villa le Bocage and opening with just four staff and a modest budget, its work would focus on providing exporters with trade information and support on trade promotion.

Its initial remit included crafting manuals on how to promote exports effectively and providing related training, along with answering queries and analyzing trade and development-related trends. Its founding executive director was Herbert L. Jacobson, who served in the post from 1964-1971.



Herbert L. Jacobson, ITC, Executive Director 1964-1971 ■ Training of specialized foreign trade personnel, cooperation between Centre National du Commerce Extérieur and the GATT, 1965 © CNCE ■ Ceylon (Sri Lanka) exporting to Burma (Myanmar), 1964 © UN ■ Weighing bananas in Samoa © Government of Western Samoa



# 1964

## **International Trade Forum begins publication**

On December 15, 1964, ITC publishes the first trilingual issue of International Trade Forum, printing 10,000 copies of what became a quarterly publication that continues to this day.

Now known as Trade Forum, it was originally billed as a “meeting place for people interested in promoting trade, in particular the exports of developing countries, and a medium for the exchange of ideas and information between buyers and sellers.”





*ITC export promotion training for 250 trade officials from developing countries. Above, participants of ITC's Trade Commissioner Course, Geneva, Switzerland, 1968*

# 1966

## **Expanding its remit**

In 1966, the International Trade Centre received its first trust fund contribution, paving the way for the organization to build out its work to include technical assistance, in addition to its existing work on providing trade information and market intelligence.





Agricultural products from Togo, 1965 © Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Togo ■ Modern port equipment speeds exports, Nicaragua, 1968 © UN ■ Packing chemicals, Hungary, 1968 © Hungarian Embassy



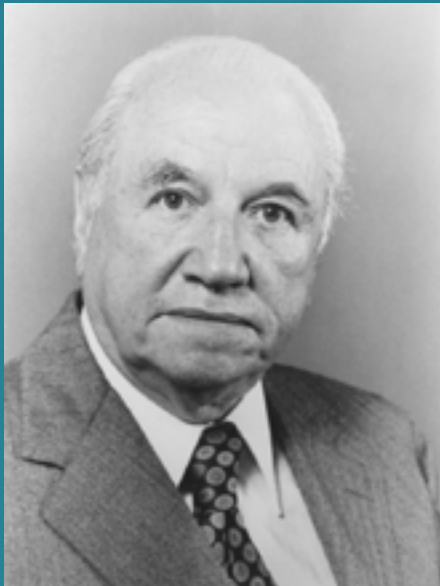
# 1968

## **A new structure for a new age**

In 1968, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which was formed in December 1964, officially became ITC's second parent agency alongside the GATT. The decision was formalized the year prior, following an agreement reached between the GATT, then headed by Eric Wyndham White, and the UNCTAD Secretary-General at the time, Raúl Prebisch.

One of the main changes announced in a note by White to GATT Contracting Parties was that while the GATT International Trade Centre would continue its existing activities, it would now also “provide personnel and substantive support for export promotion projects financed under United Nations technical co-operation programmes.”

The agency would henceforth be known as the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT.



Raúl Prebisch, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) ■ Villa le Bocage, 1920  
© Bibliothèque de Genève ■ Kennedy Round meeting, with GATT Director-General Eric Wyndham White, 1967 © WTO



United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, Stockholm, 1972 ©UN ■ Trade show exhibits with facilities for buyers to engage with sellers, 1970 © Government of Israel



# 1970s

## **Trade, export promotion, and environmental stewardship**

As the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT entered its second decade, its reach increasingly extended to cover services beyond trade information and export promotion. For instance, it supported the establishment of trade promotion organizations across over 40 countries in those years, as part of a growing recognition of the wider complexities of trade and the extensive needs of exporters. Its budget grew in tandem, reaching \$20.7 million in 1978, a ten-fold increase from the start of the decade. Meanwhile, the Tokyo Round under the GATT saw Contracting Parties agree further tariff cuts and also include non-tariff barriers in its remit.

Those same years saw a growing international recognition of the linkages between economic growth and environmental sustainability. This was particularly evident at the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm in June 1972, which put the topic of environmental protection front and centre on the international stage and led to the establishment of the United Nations Environment Programme.

During the 1970s, the International Trade Centre saw multiple leadership shifts. After the departure of founding executive director Herbert L. Jacobson of the United States in 1971, the next executive director to take office was Victor E. Santiapillai of Sri Lanka, who served in the post from 1975-1979. He was then succeeded by Padinjarethalakal C. Alexander of India, who was executive director from 1979-1981.



United Nations Headquarters, New York © UN

# 1970s

## A central position within the UN system

In 1973, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) named the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT as the focal point within the United Nations system for technical assistance and cooperation activities in trade and export promotion. This is a critical mandate, one which remains to this day. Throughout this decade, ITC's focus evolved to target developing country governments and exporters more directly, while building a greater in-country presence and putting in place country needs assessments.



Preparing handicrafts for export: Senegalese woman weaves a basket, 1972 © ILO ■ Preparing handicrafts for export: molding figurines in India, 1972 © ILO ■ Panel discussion as part of an ITC training seminar for senior-level export promotion officials from developing countries, Geneva, 1974



*Several participants in the export management development seminar that ITC developed for India, 1975 © ITC*

# 1970s

## **Expanding its geographic reach**

In its early years, ITC offered training programmes based in Geneva, where its headquarters are, focused on trade promotion. Participants included Europe-based trade representatives from developing countries. Over time, these trainings began to take place at the country level, such as this export management development seminar for India in 1975.





Participants in an ITC workshop visit the Irish Export Board's publication offices, 1976 © Lensmen ■ Technical staff helping industry improve processing and apply new research findings, 1975 © International Wool Secretariat



CEPEX Exporter's House in Tunis, Tunisia © CEPEX

# 1973

## Supporting the business ecosystem

The ITC helped set up Tunisia's national trade promotion organization, the Centre de Promotion des Exportations (CEPEX), in 1973, setting the stage for a longer tradition of ITC supporting the establishment of trade promotion organizations (TPOs) and trade-related government agencies in developing economies. Mincomex, Colombia's then-ministry of foreign trade, was also set up with ITC support in the early 1990s before merging with other ministries to form the current ministry of commerce, industry, and tourism.

Today, ITC works with business support organizations around the world, from TPOs to chambers of commerce, as they engage with small businesses in their communities.



ITC coaching session for Trade Export and Promotion Agency staff on trade information management and service production, 2013, Saint Lucia ■ Benchmarking platform for business support organizations ■ Performance Improvement Roadmap training workshop under “AIM for Results” project, 2014, Sri Lanka ■ ITC staff deliver a benchmarking meeting in Barbados, 2013 ■ Supporting African export promotion agencies under the MOPSE programme (management opérationnel des programmes de soutien à l’exportation), 2018, Cotonou, Benin



# late 1970s

## **Faster technologies, better data**

In the late 1970s, ITC developed Market News Service so that producers could receive market prices and conditions in real-time via telex. Starting in East Africa, the service grew quickly to cover more than 50 products, representing more than US\$2 billion in exports from developing countries around the world.

This is one of the earliest examples of ITC's global public goods, now online and covering multiple facets of international trade. More recent examples of these global public goods including the Global Trade Helpdesk, Trade Map, Export Potential Map, Market Access Map, and Sustainability Map.



Market News Service (MNS), 1994 ■ ITC office with equipment for market research, 1994 ■ Global Trade Helpdesk, 2024



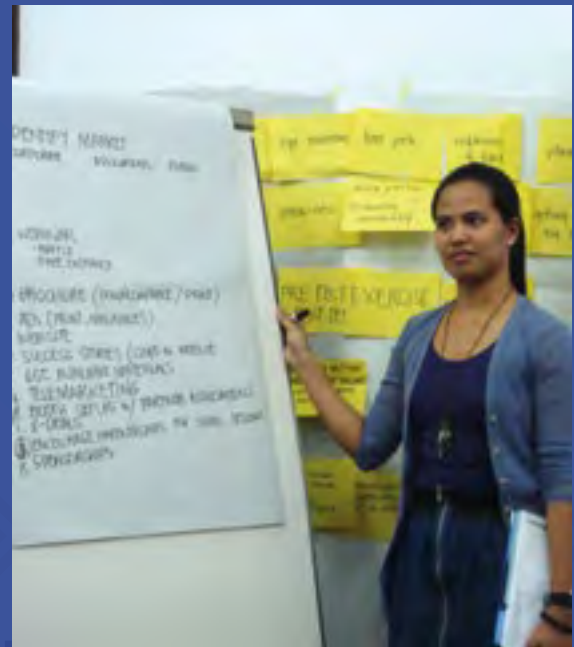
*In-company training in the techniques of quality control, 1980 © ILO*

# 1979

## Eyes turn to supply chain management

ITC kicked off its first supply chain management programme in 1979, targeting import operations. This work later led to the launch of a Modular Learning System in Supply Chain Management in the early 2000s, whose “training of trainers” focus led to 120 licensed training institutions.

It earned the International Organization for Standardization’s ISO 9001:2008 quality management standard in 2012, and separately ITC put in place a diploma-level programme for small businesses and other professionals, delivered in over 40 countries.



Modular Learning System in Supply Chain Management (MLS-SCM) training of trainers, Senegal, 2011 ■ MLS-SCM training of trainers, Philippines, 2011 ■ MLS-SCM Regional Roundtable for Africa, Kenya, 2010



Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, 1985 © UN Photo ■ Sarah Jones, actress and UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, performs at the 30th anniversary event for the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) © UN Photo/Eskinder Debebe ■ Cover of the Brundtland Report: Our Common Future, 1987





# 1980s

## **Sustainable development comes to the forefront**

As the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT's work on trade-led development entered the 1980s, the importance of including those who had long been unable to experience trade's full benefits became increasingly urgent.

This came at a time when the global conversation on the rights of women and girls was seeing historic advances, particularly with the entry into force of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) in 1981. In the International Trade Centre's own work, one of its major milestones during these years was its support of the 1985 Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, which has several paragraphs on the gender-differentiated impacts of trade policy and practice.

Another sea change in the realm of international policy was the release of Our Common Future, otherwise known as the Brundtland Report, by the Brundtland Commission in 1987. The text features a definition of sustainable development that continues to inform current policy conversations: that "Humanity has the ability to make development sustainable to ensure that it meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." It also foregrounds the importance of reshaping the global economy in this vein.

This same mindset informed the International Trade Centre's own projects throughout the decade, a period that also saw the organization celebrate its 25th anniversary in 1989 under the leadership of then-Executive Director Göran Engblom, who served in the post from 1981-1992.



*ITC building in 1981, Geneva, Switzerland*

# 1981

## **A new home for a new chapter**

In 1981, ITC moved into new headquarters in Geneva on Rue de Montbrillant, where it remains to this day. By this stage, it had already grown to over 150 staff and over 500 consultants. While its home is in Switzerland, ITC has also progressively grown its presence in the countries where it delivers its interventions.



Villa le Bocage, Prégny, Switzerland © notre-histoire.ch ■ ITC building in 1995, Geneva, Switzerland ■ Centre William Rappard, then-home of the International Labor Organization, now headquarters for the WTO, 1937 © Bibliothèque de Genève ■ UN building opening in Geneva, 1958 © UN



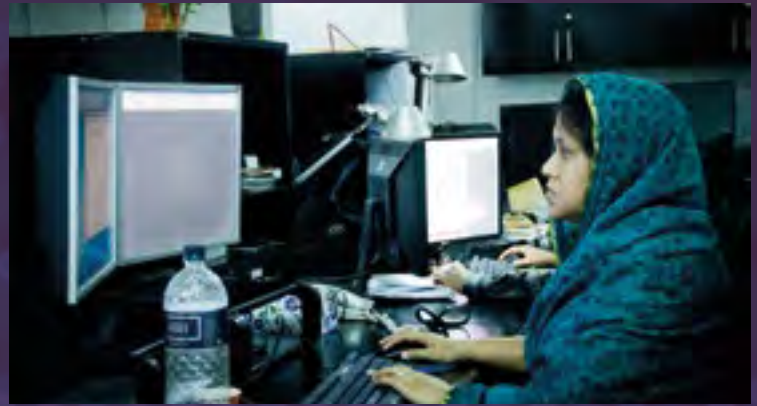
*"Positioning Bangladesh in Global IT Arena," Bangladesh Outsourcing Conference, 2012*

# 1982

## **Services trade comes to the fore**

Over time, services trade became an increasingly prominent part of ITC's offering, integrated into country programmes throughout the 1980s. In 1982, ITC undertook its first programme on export promotion of engineering consulting services. Eventually this was followed by technical assistance programmes across different sectors, including the establishment of an ITC ServiceExportNetwork that countries could join.

Today, ITC provides support ranging from building capacity on services trade, both for small businesses and business support organizations, to aiding developing country negotiators as they craft positions on services provisions and chapters in trade agreements. Its 2022 edition of its SME Competitiveness Outlook had connected services as its theme, reflecting how services sectors are evolving with the digital economy and increasingly global value chains.



IT training, Senegal, Netherlands Trust Fund (NTF) IV ■ IT sector in Bangladesh, NTF II ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton launching SMECO 2022 ■ IT sector in Uganda, NTF IV ■ Tourism in Myanmar ■ Launch of SMECO 2022 at WTO headquarters, Geneva, Switzerland



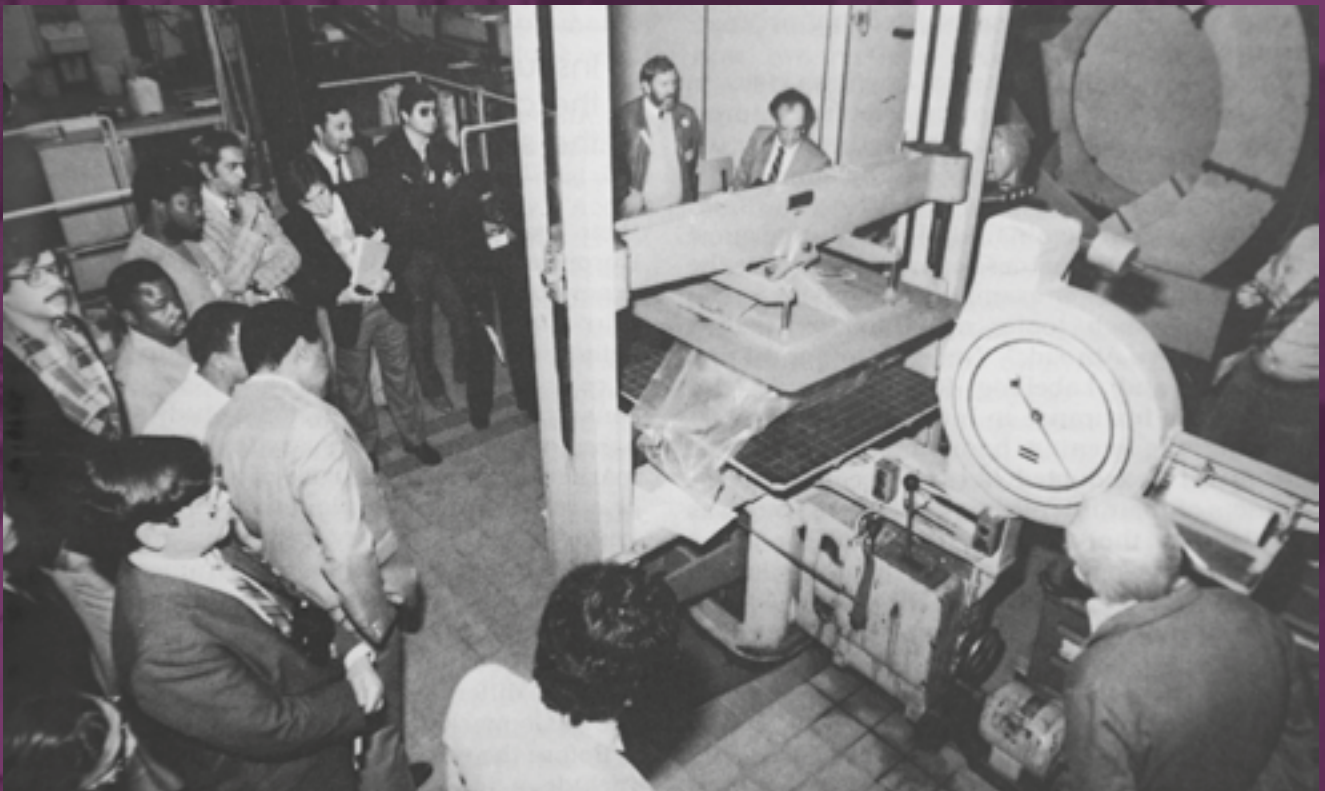
Export training materials, including packs, kits, games, case studies, and readings, 1982 ©Photo-Inter

# 1983

## Trade promotion focus leads to new status

The UN Development Programme granted executing agency status to ITC in 1983, in recognition of its trade promotion activities, following the recommendation of ITC's governing body, the Joint Advisory Group.

COMMODITY	INTERNATIONAL BASIS	COMMODITY PRICES		
		IN US DOLLARS PWT		
		SPOT PRICES		
		12MKT AGO	4MKT AGO	AS OF
SUGAR RAW	CIF LONDON	709-8	526-4	9-4-81
SUGAR WHITE	FOB EUR. PORTS	762-6	592-2	47-1-2
SOYABEAN OIL	CHICAGO MKT	545-5	510-2	487-1
PALM OIL	CIF NE PORTS	587-3	627-3	553-4
RAPESEED OIL	DUTCH FOB	538-7	470-2	600-2
CASTOR OIL	EX-TANK ROTT.	1070-0	980-0	885-0
RUBBER	FOB SINGAPORE	1400-7	1270-7	1187-7
COFFEE	ICO PRICE	2751-5	2630-6	2650-7
RICE	FOB BANGKOK	465-0	500-0	517-0
FOREIGN EXCH.	US DLX PER PD	2-388	2-193	2-282
	RS PER US DLX	7-83	8-21	8-18
REUTERS COMMODITY INDEX		1727-5	1724-3	1684
		UPDATED BY 9.4.81		



Daily displays of commodity prices, 1981 © ITC ■ The heart of ITC's communications network, where the head office is connected by telex, 1981 © ITC ■ Participants in a packaging and marketing seminar visit an applied research organization, 1986 © Rijnmond



*Jute furnishing fabrics*

# 1980s

## **Export development projects in the spotlight**

Throughout the 1980s, ITC increasingly implemented several export development projects focused on agriculture, with one of the most lauded examples being its work promoting and supporting the jute sector.

This work, taking place in countries like India and Bangladesh, foregrounded the value of jute for providing environmentally sustainable options for textiles, handicrafts, and fashion accessories, among other products, along with being used in sectors from automobiles to furniture. This was one of several ITC projects in those years that were already foregrounding the importance of environmental sustainability in production and trade.





Dyed jute yarn ■ Furniture made from jute composite ■ Various uses of jute in practice © Jute Manufacturers Development Council, India ■ Jute carpets for selling in local and international markets © Travancore Mats & Matting Co. India



ITC Executive Director J. Denis Bélisle visiting a Brazilian school, reflecting on Berimbau project's work to support sustainable community development ■ United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (Rio Earth Summit) in Brazil, 1992 © UN Photo/Michos Tzovaras ■ ITC Executive Director J. Denis Bélisle and Supachai Panitchpakdi (WTO Director-General 2002-2005) ■ Signing of the Marrakesh Agreement in Morocco, April 1994 © WTO

# 1990s

## Shifts in global governance

Two of the most significant shifts in global governance took place in the early 1990s, both of which informed the direction of the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/GATT's work. One of these was the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of negotiations under the GATT in 1994, leading to the establishment of the World Trade Organization from January 1, 1995, and the notable move to enshrine the objective of sustainable development in the preamble of its founding document, the Marrakesh Agreement.

The other shift resulted from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, which was also known as the Rio Earth Summit given its location in the Brazilian city. It saw the opening for signature of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Convention on Biological Diversity, along with a call from governments to craft what later became the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification.

In terms of governance, the International Trade Centre's Executive Director for most of the 1980s, Göran Engblom of Sweden, left the organization in 1992, after which the agency spent two years without an executive director until J. Denis Bélisle of Canada took office in 1994.



1992



2002



2012



2021

# 1990s

## From a coffee guide to a full-fledged network

In 1992, ITC published “Coffee — An Exporter’s Guide,” an in-depth overview of the coffee industry and trade. Since its first iteration, made possible with support from Switzerland, it is now in its fourth edition. Now known as the “Coffee Guide,” it remains one of ITC’s most popular publications. The most recent edition was published in 2021 and put together by over 70 coffee sector experts, a process that led to the establishment of the Coffee Guide Network.

ITC’s work in the coffee sector continues to evolve in response to recent trends and conditions, with more recent developments including work funded by the Netherlands Trust Fund V to help enable a “digital transformation” within the Ethiopian coffee value chain and the launch of the Centre for Circular Economy in Coffee alongside various partners in late 2023, among various other examples.



ITC's Surendra Kotecha meeting with coffee producers ■ Producers sorting coffee cherries @carleyserwat ■ Coffee cherry picking, Nepal Trade and Investment Programme, 2022 ■ Sensory and cupping skills training, ARISE Plus Lao PDR ■ Young farmer raising coffee plants at Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union, Ethiopia © ITC/Meklit Merasha ■ Young entrepreneur showcasing her products at Sustainable Trade for Myanmar MSMEs, 2023



*World Trade Promotion Organizations Conference and Awards in Paris, France, 2018*

# 1990s

## **Fostering a network of trade promotion organizations**

In 1996, the first Trade Promotion Organizations (TPO) Network World Conference and Awards took place in Colombia. Now a biennial event, ITC has been a co-host since the 2002 edition in China. The event now attracts hundreds of attendees from TPOs, business associations, governments, and others working in the field of export promotion, and is part of ITC's extensive efforts alongside partners to support TPOs around the world, including through facilitating the establishment of regional TPO networks, workshops, and more.



World Trade Promotion Organizations Conference and Awards (WTPO) winners in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2014 ■ WTPO in Marrakesh, Morocco, 2016 ■ Gala dinner at WTPO in Marrakesh, Morocco, 2016 ■ Visiting the Ghana Innovation Hub, WTPO, 2022 ■ WTPO awards in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2014 ■ WTPO awards in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2014



*Wood workshop with an ITC expert, Mezimbite Forest Centre, Mozambique, 2005*

# 1996

## **Larger projects, wider impact**

In 1996, ITC kicked off what was then its largest project to date: the Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme (JITAP), a \$28 million initiative working with 16 countries across the African continent for ten years. Its remit included support in WTO negotiations and export-related advice.

This helped set the stage for a greater focus on large projects in subsequent decades, and a growing shift towards providing developing country policymakers with technical assistance and capacity building support in trade-related negotiations.





JITAP meeting, WTO Ministerial Conference, Hong Kong, 2005 ©WTO ■ Work in Sierra Leone with 13000 farmers in ginger production, 2004 ■ Buyers-sellers meeting, Chamonix, France, 2006 ■ Private sector workshop on trade facilitation, Monrovia, Liberia, 2017

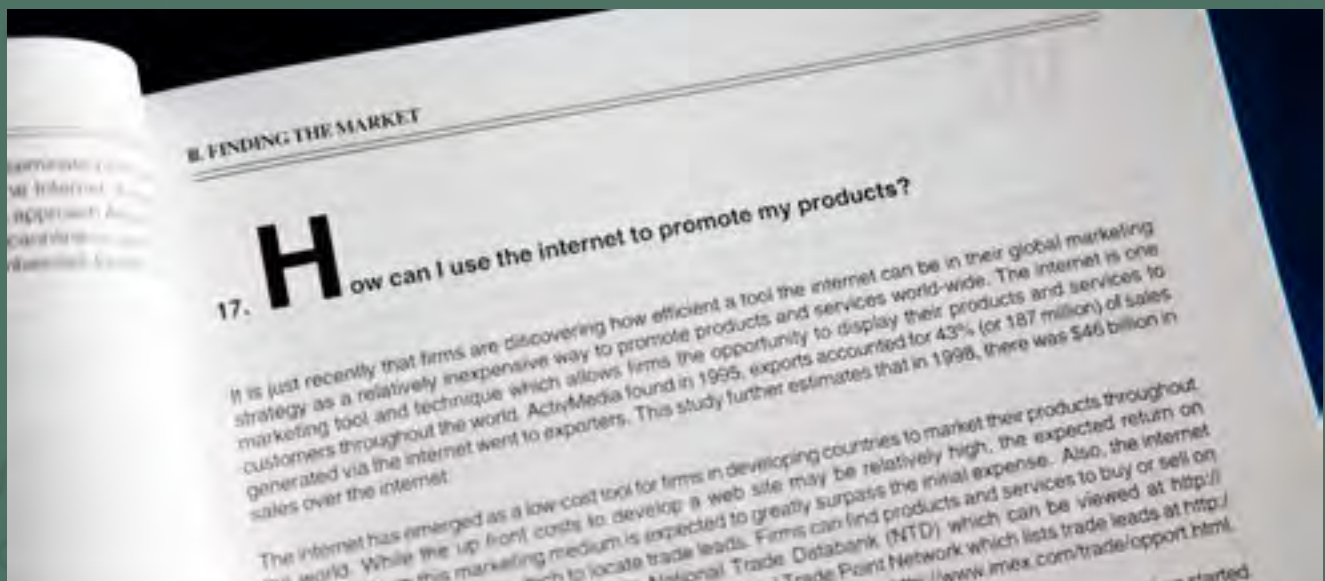
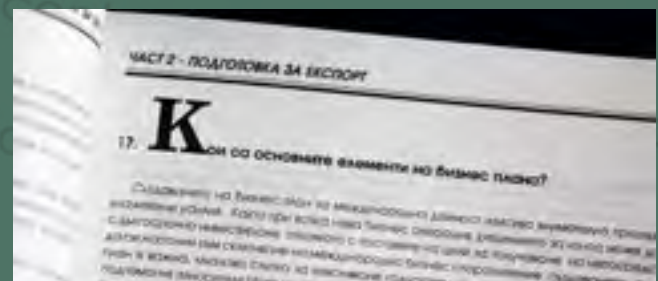
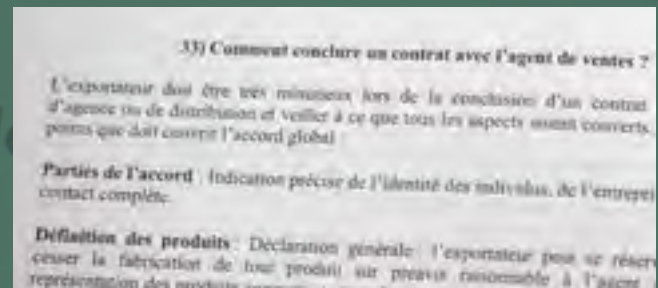
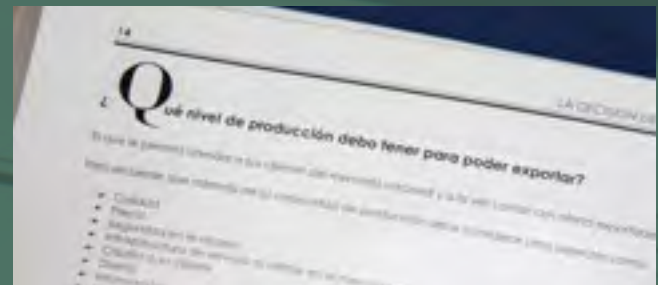
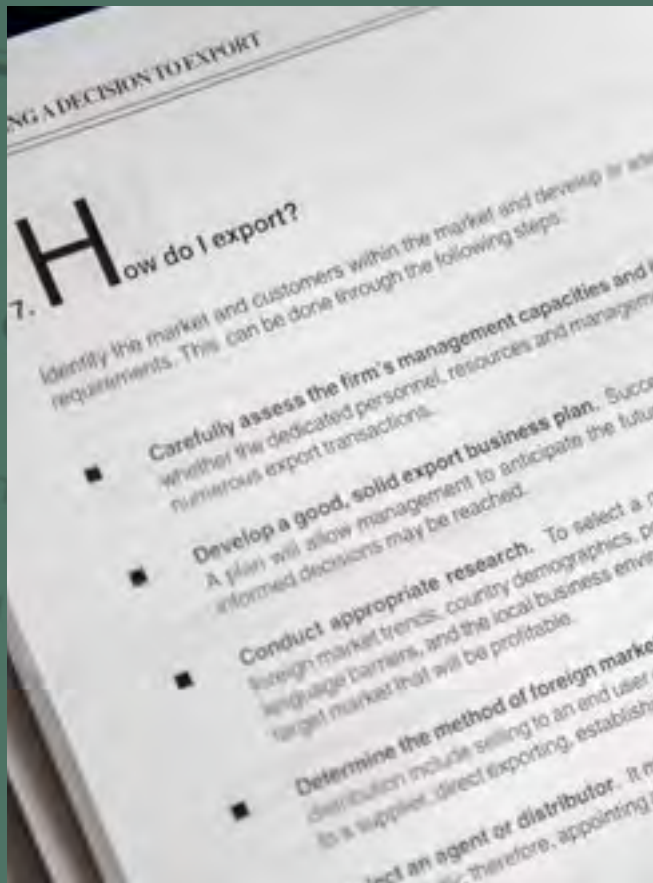


# 1990s

## Unveiling trade secrets, meeting country needs

One of the most popular publications from ITC in the 1990s was “Trade Secrets: The Export Answer Book for SMEs,” setting out 100 questions and answers on the practicalities of exporting for individual economies.

Editions of the answer book specific to individual country needs were circulated in 50 economies in 10 languages, and feedback from readers such as Mexico’s Bancomext indicated that the publication helped them answer 7 out of 10 of the thousands of questions they received from small businesses on a monthly basis.



Sample of questions within different language editions of the Trade Secrets books



Cambodian weaver under the Integrated Framework programme supported by the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), 2004 ■ Women sort and prepare ginger for export in Sierra Leone, 2007 ■ Agri-business training in Liberia ■ ITC Executive Director Patricia Francis at ITC's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration

# 2000s

## **A new millennium, a new approach to trade-led development**

The adoption of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals helped inform much of ITC's work in the early twenty-first century, along with the inception of the WTO-led Aid for Trade Initiative in the wake of the organization's Hong Kong Ministerial Conference in 2005.

The founding of the Enhanced Integrated Framework multi-donor partnership that same decade reinforced the particular challenges and needs of least developed countries in the trading system, and the EIF has become a critical partner for ITC's work. At a global scale, the 2008-2009 financial crisis took a heavy toll on international trade flows, while making clear the importance of exports in enabling a strong recovery.

Amid these developments, ITC adapted its own approach to ensure its offering to developing country economies and their small businesses was more cohesive, spanning policy advice to supporting strong business ecosystems to building small business competitiveness. The rapid changes underway in the digital economy have also increasingly shaped ITC's offering, both in how it supports small businesses and in how ITC crafts its core services.

In terms of ITC's leadership, longstanding Executive Director J. Denis Bélisle of Canada departed in 2006, after which the organization welcomed its first woman in the post: Patricia R. Francis of Jamaica, who served from 2006 until 2013.



*Participants attending a session on export strategy at first Executive Forum, 1999*

# 2000s

## **Towards a holistic approach to trade-led development**

From the early 2000s onward, helping governments craft export strategies became a growing part of ITC's remit. Along with several regional and sectoral strategies, ITC supported the development of over two dozen national strategies from 2003-2013.

This work became the driving force of the annual Executive Forum, first held in 1999, which focused on these strategies at national and regional levels. The Executive Forum is now known as the World Export Development Forum, ITC's flagship event.



Kyrgyzstan National Export Strategy documents on specific value chains, 2013 ■ National Export Strategy roadmap on fruit and vegetables, Ukraine, 2016 ■ Myanmar National Export Strategy documents on specific value chains, 2015 ■ Executive Forum 2000, Montreux, Switzerland ■ World Export Development Forum, Chongqing, China, 2010 ■ Executive Forum, Berlin, Germany, 2006



*Training on Standards Map, Geneva, Switzerland, 2012*

# 2000s

## **Global public goods fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

ITC's trade and market intelligence tools entered a new chapter in the early 2000s, with the launch of Trade Map, Market Access Map, Investment Map, and Standards Map. Meanwhile, its flagship publication, Trade Forum, launched its online version in 2000. Today, Trade Forum is now published exclusively online.





*Iraqi delegation during training on Market Access Map, Geneva, Switzerland, 2015 ■ Training on Standards Map, Geneva, Switzerland, 2012  
■ Customized training course on Standards Map as part of the Zimbabwe Agricultural Competitiveness Programme, Harare, Zimbabwe, 2009 ■ Training on Market Analysis Tools, Gabon, 2009 ■ Training on Market Analysis Tools, Geneva, Switzerland, 2013*



*Ceremony for Timor-Leste's WTO accession at Thirteenth WTO Ministerial Conference, February 2024 © WTO*

# 2000s

## **Supporting WTO accession for least developed countries**

When the WTO opened its doors on January 1, 1995, 30 least developed countries acceded to the organization. In the years since, ITC has increasingly played a role supporting other least developed countries undertaking WTO accession negotiations, working with Comoros, Ethiopia, Iraq, Liberia, Yemen, Samoa, and Timor-Leste, to name some examples. From advisory missions to trainings to research, ITC has been helping acceding governments craft and undertake the necessary domestic reforms for accession, while navigating the negotiating process.



Workshops for representatives of Uzbekistan's Ministry of Investment and Foreign Trade on WTO accession ■ Accession of Liberia to the WTO, 2016 © WTO ■ Accession negotiations on financial services, Tajikistan, 2012 ■ Consultation on export strategy with Djomart Otorbaev, First Deputy Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan, 2012 ■ Second regional dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Greater Horn of Africa, Djibouti, 2018



*SheTrades participants*

# 2009

## **Towards more inclusive trade**

Following increasing attention to gender in ITC's projects and in its advice for countries developing their export strategies, ITC launched a full-fledged programme on Women and Trade in 2009, which later became the SheTrades Initiative. The SheTrades Initiative is now active in countries around the world, aiming to ensure women have the right conditions and support they need to engage in trade. Its work includes co-hosting 18 SheTrades Hubs with local institutions, undertaking in-country projects, working directly with policymakers, and much more.



Women Vendors Exhibition and Forum (WVEF), China, 2011 ■ Business to business meetings at SheTrades Global, Liverpool, United Kingdom, 2018 ■ Interactive area, WVEF 2017, Istanbul, Türkiye ■ Presidential Conversation, International Forum on Women in Business, Kenya, 2015 ■ Pitch contest at SheTrades Global, Liverpool, United Kingdom, 2018



*Ethical Fashion Initiative, Ndomo Atelier, Mali ©ITC/Coralie Rabadan*

# 2009

## **Walking the talk through ethical fashion**

In 2009, ITC launched what is now known as the Ethical Fashion Initiative, a programme working with entrepreneurs, artisans, designers, and global leaders in the creative industries. Today, the initiative is active in Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Mali, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uganda, and Uzbekistan, and involves a network of social enterprises working to help small businesses become incorporated into the supply chains of luxury fashion brands.



50 weavers taking part in training on a small loom, Benin, 2024 ©ITC/Shawn Newson ■ MIMCO's jewelry collection crafted in Haiti under the Ethical Fashion Initiative, 2016 ■ Production of SDG-themed bags in Kenya, 2022, ©ITC/MagangaMwagogo ■ Ethical Fashion Initiative, Ndomo Atelier, Mali ©ITC/Coralie Rabadan ■ Beading work on keyrings by Satubo group for Armani, Kenya, 2022 ©ITC/MagangaMwagogo



Projection of 17 Sustainable Development Goals at UN headquarters ahead of adoption by UN member states in 2015 ©UN ■ Special report launch, African Export-Import Bank 2019 ■ ITC Executive Director Arancha González meets with António Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, 2018



# 2010s

## **Global goals for sustainability and small business**

The UN Sustainable Development Goals adopted by member states in 2015 set out a comprehensive set of objectives for tackling some of the world's most entrenched challenges, from poverty to hunger to biodiversity loss to climate change.

While trade is referred to directly or indirectly in various SDG targets, it plays a major role in delivering on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development across the board. ITC, in light of this new agenda, has sought to reinforce the role of small businesses in delivering on these goals and targets, and the need for their voices to be at the forefront of any policy conversations that may affect them. The same mindset has applied to ITC's engagement and advocacy in areas such as the green transition, especially following the 2015 adoption of the Paris Agreement on climate change.

In the realm of trade policy-making, two major developments have reshaped the landscape for small businesses. The first was the adoption in 2013 of the WTO's Trade Facilitation Agreement and its subsequent entry into force. The second was the adoption in 2018 of phase 1 of the African Continental Free Trade Area, an accord spanning the full African continent, which has the potential to lead to far greater intra-African trade, economic growth, and other development goals, while moving away from commodity dependence towards value addition.

In terms of ITC's governance, Executive Director Patricia Francis of Jamaica was succeeded in the post in 2013 by Arancha González of Spain, who served until 2020.



*A group of young Gambians playing football. TEKKI FII aims to raise awareness on the economic opportunities available for young people locally. © ITC/Diego Ibarra Sánchez*

# 2010s

## **Preparing future generations for trade**

Supporting young people in starting and growing their businesses, along with engaging in trade, became an increasingly prominent focus of ITC's work over this decade, leading to the establishment of the Youth and Trade programme, interventions in countries ranging from Iraq to The Gambia, and in more recent years the co-hosting of the Ye! Youth Ecopreneurs Awards.

The awards programme is organized with the World Intellectual Property Organization, Sidley Austin, Google Startups for Sustainable Development, and the G20 Global Land Initiative under the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification. In 2024, the Ye! Youth Ecopreneurs Awards was expanded into a full-fledged programme, adding a bootcamp and accelerator phase to support youth-led startups over longer periods.



Trade fair promoting youth entrepreneurship, The Gambia, 2022 ■ Hackathon Agri-Hack built capacity of agri-tech start-ups, Benin, 2023  
■ Ye! Chapters Bootcamp for youth, Tanzania, 2022 ■ Working with youth, women to improve enterprise, trade competitiveness, South Sudan ■ Ye! Youth Ecopreneur Awards: Green pitch competition at WEDF 2023, Mongolia



*SME Trade Academy online courses, 2016*

# 2014

## **SME Trade Academy takes flight**

In 2014, ITC launched the SME Trade Academy, announced by then-Executive Director Arancha González at the World Export Development Forum in Rwanda. The SME Trade Academy offers e-learning for small businesses, trainers, business support organizations, government agencies, international organizations, and academics. Along with digital-only courses, the Academy also offers digital support to in-person workshops.

There are now over 100 online courses that Academy participants can choose from, including diploma programmes. Over 400,000 individuals have signed up to courses that cover topics from the circular economy to blockchain.



Filming of a training for Libyan exporters in Arabic ■ Presentation of SME Trade Academy during 'Journée portes ouvertes pour la Francophonie', 2015 ■ SME Trade Academy homepage, 2024 ■ SME Trade Academy stand at WTO, 2018 ■ Filming of a training



*Accessing the 2023 edition of SMECO as an e-publication*

# 2015

## **Shaping the global conversation on small business competitiveness**

In 2015, ITC launched the first edition of its SME Competitiveness Outlook (SMECO), its flagship research publication on key trends and developments shaping the trade and business prospects of small and medium-sized firms. Published annually, it has since covered topics from the COVID-19 recovery to connected services to how fragility and conflict affect SMEs.



First edition of SMECO, 2015 ■ Marion Jansen, then Chief Economist at ITC, presents SMECO 2015 at WEDF in Qatar ■ Launch of the SMECO 2019 at WTO, Geneva, Switzerland ■ SMECO 2018 ■ SMECO 2023 launch event at the Geneva Graduate Institute, Switzerland



B2B meetings for East African designers under SITA project, India

# 2010s

## **Towards greater regional integration and South-South trade**

As governments in world regions from Africa to South-East Asia to the Caribbean have deepened their efforts at economic integration and greater South-South trade and investment, ITC has been actively working to support this work so that it yields inclusive, sustainable economic growth and trade.

This includes steps ranging from helping countries graduating from LDC status prepare to identifying priority value chains that could yield growth and jobs, especially for MSMEs led by women and youth. In recent years, these efforts have included projects such as the EU-East African Community Market Access Upgrade Programme, now in its second phase; the EU-funded West Africa Competitiveness Programme; several EU-funded ARISE+ projects in South-East Asia; the OneTradeAfrica initiative; and ITC's work with the Afreximbank on supporting greater African-Caribbean trade.





Mohammed Bakari, a spice farmer, carrying cardamom plants to replant, Tanzania ©ITC/Daniel Msirikale ■ Member of Salmed Cocoa/ Coffee Farmers Cooperative, Sierra Leone ■ Pop-up event in Chiang Mai, Thailand, on organic agriculture ■ BabyLove scaled up its vegan coconut ice cream business in Jamaica ■ Several laboratories in Burundi are now accredited under international standards ■ B2B meetings at the PIGA Business Partnership event, China



*First MSME Day event held by ITC, 2017*

# 2010s

## Honouring the drivers of the global economy

In 2017, the United Nations General Assembly established Micro, Small, and Medium-Sized Enterprises Day, to be held every year on June 27. The resolution makes a clear link between the success of MSMEs and the delivery of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. ITC is the champion for MSMEs in the UN system and has played a critical role in celebrations of MSME Day since its inception.



ITC Executive Director Arancha González delivering closing remarks at MSME Day 2019 ■ Freda Ampofo, co-founder of KAEME, a Ghanaian cosmetic brand talks about the impact of investing in MSMEs, 2019 ■ MSME Day 2022 at UN headquarters, New York, USA ■ MSME Day 2018 at ITC, Geneva, Switzerland ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton opens ITC flagship event on MSME Day, 2023



*SheTrades Hub MENA launch, 2018*

# 2010s

## **A new tradition of SheTrades Hubs**

In 2018, ITC launched together with Dubai Exports the first SheTrades Hub, serving the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), with ITC Executive Director Arancha González and His Excellency Sami Al Qamzi, Director General of the Department of Economic Development (DED), kicking off this new chapter.

As of 2024, there are now 18 SheTrades Hubs, serving countries and regions around the world, with the latest one launching in Ghana in March.



Women farmers taking part in SheTrades West Africa project making shea butter products for Guinéenne des terroirs company, Guinea ■ Woman exhibitor at SheTrades Hub Ghana launch, 2024 ■ SheTrades Ghana Hub launch, 2024 ©GEPA ■ Launch of SheTrades Dominican Republic Hub, 2023 ■ E-KIMA Cassava Processing and Packaging Centre, which takes part in SheTrades West Africa, in Liberia



Farhiya and Safiya in a class session in Dadaab, Kenya, 2018 © Chris Muturi/NRC

# 2010s

## Supporting vulnerable communities

With a growing portfolio of work with refugees, host communities, and internally displaced persons, ITC submitted pledges under the Global Compact on Refugees during the 2019 edition of the Global Refugee Forum, and again when the Forum reconvened in 2023.

ITC projects in these settings often include a focus on skills building and digital entrepreneurship, and as with ITC's work in fragile settings overall, this work incorporates conflict-sensitivity assessments and close collaboration with humanitarian, development, government, and private sector partners.



Woman refugee in Kenya, making handicrafts ■ ITC Executive Director Arancha González visiting a refugee skills training centre, Nairobi, Kenya, 2016 ■ Members of Wamo Women's Group in Hagadera, Kenya, 2018 © Chris Muturi/NRC ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton visiting women entrepreneurs of the Nyota Farsamo cooperative at the Dadaab refugee complex, Kenya ■ Aden Fatah, freelancing mentor, interacts with online freelancing course graduates, 2018 © Chris Muturi/NRC



Digital training sessions for young Gazan refugees, 2021 ©BTI ■ ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton at High-Level Closing of SIDS4 Private Sector Roundtable, Antigua and Barbuda, 2024 ■ Moroccan textile company adopted safety practices for their employees, 2020 ■ Ghanaian cosmetic company KAEME had to adapt their practices in light of COVID-19, 2020





# 2020s

## **Foregrounding trade-led development in times of crisis**

The most recent years of ITC's history saw a series of international, regional, and local crises that required the agency to become increasingly nimble and efficient in its operations, and to apply a new mindset in a context of fragility.

The most wide-reaching of these crises was the COVID-19 pandemic, with the public health measures, supply chain disruptions, increased prices of energy and key commodities, and other developments levying a particularly harsh toll on small businesses, especially those unable to use digital solutions to remain connected to markets or who were already facing other barriers.

While COVID-19 no longer has the status of a pandemic, its aftermath continues to affect the landscape for MSMEs, and how ITC serves them. The pandemic has reinforced the urgency of achieving the SDGs by the end of the decade, especially given the worsening impacts of climate change, rising hunger numbers, and outbreaks and resumption of conflicts in various parts of the world. These concerns have dominated the international conversation throughout this decade, as seen at agenda-setting events such as the Fourth International Conference on Small Island Developing States in Antigua and Barbuda in 2024.

ITC also saw another leadership shift at the start of the decade, with Arancha González of Spain departing in 2020 and Pamela Coke-Hamilton of Jamaica taking the helm from October of that year onward.



*Palau's climate negotiator and ocean innovation advisor, Ivory Vogt and Rayne Sullivan, discussing sustainable trade and job creation, ITC pavilion, COP27, Sharm el-Sheikh, 2022*

# 2020s

## **Trade as a solution to the climate challenge**

For the first time, ITC attended and presented at the UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26). It has played an active role in climate COPs since, including COP27 in Sharm el-Sheikh and COP28 in Dubai. Since 2022, ITC has brought delegations of small businesses and business support organizations to the UN climate talks so they can share their perspectives with negotiators and the wider climate community.

In 2023, ITC joined with the WTO, UNCTAD, and the International Chamber of Commerce to host the inaugural Trade House Pavilion, while playing a major role in the first-ever trade thematic day under a COP presidency.



ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton delivers statement at COP26 in Glasgow, United Kingdom, 2021 ■ Singer Ellie Goulding and former UK prime minister Theresa May with Pamela Coke-Hamilton at COP26 ■ Michael Marmon-Halm, managing director of Fairafric Ghana, presents his products at ITC pavilion, COP27, in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, 2022 ■ Pamela Coke-Hamilton meeting youth ecopreneurs and business support organizations, COP27 ■ Txai Suruí, Brazilian indigenous and environmental activist, speaking at the session 'It is time for action,' COP28, in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2023



*Cocoa producer and exporter from Sierra Leone, participating in the West Africa Competitiveness Programme (WACOMP)*

# 2021

## **A new era for regional economic integration**

In 2021, ITC launched its One Trade Africa initiative, a wide-ranging programme designed to ensure that women- and youth-led small businesses can engage effectively with the new African Continental Free Trade Area. This programme provides comprehensive support to business support organizations, governments, regional agencies, and MSMEs

Alongside these efforts, ITC and its partners have ramped up regional integration projects, particularly those focused on value addition, diversification, digital connectivity, and inclusion across the continent.



One Trade Africa stand at Intra-African Trade Fair (IATF), Durban, South Africa, 2021 © ITC/ODMedia ■ WACOMP beneficiaries at Food and Beverage Trade Fair, Nigeria, 2023 ■ Launch of EU-EAC Market Access Upgrade Programme (MARKUP II), Arusha, Tanzania, 2023 ■ Field visit at Med Foods, Tanzania ■ Opening Plenary at Intra-African Trade Fair, Durban, South Africa, 2021



**Gender**



**Green**



**Youth**



**Digital**

# 2022

## Shooting for the moon

In 2022 under the leadership of Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton, ITC launched four moonshots on gender, youth, digital connectivity, and the green transition, setting up a major strategic push towards achieving the SDGs through connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade. These moonshots complement the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan.



RUSH & REEZ, a Lebanese brand, uses e-commerce platforms to access new markets ■ Ruth Owino, Managing Director of Brogibro Safaris, participated in trade fairs through the SheTrades Commonwealth programme ■ Kola Studios participated in FastTrack Uganda ■ Vedant Gandhi and Abhishek Chhazed of RecycleX posing with their recycled pavement products, India ■ Woman farmer selecting coffee beans, Vanmai Coffee Cooperative, Lao People's Democratic Republic, 2022



*ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton speaking to an avatar during SME Trade Academy Forum on artificial intelligence*

# 2023

## Entering the age of generative AI

In August 2023, G20 trade and investment ministers adopted the “Jaipur Call for Action for Enhancing MSMEs’ Access to Information,” where they praised the work of the ITC, UNCTAD, and the WTO in establishing the Global Trade Helpdesk and encouraged them to update the portal with emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence.

The Global Trade Helpdesk was launched during the WTO’s Eleventh Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 2017, and serves as a single online platform for MSMEs to learn about what trade can look like for them, from import procedures to regulatory requirements.





ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton speaking at SME Trade Academy Forum on artificial intelligence, Geneva, Switzerland, 2023  
 ■ "Living with the Genie – AI in Content Creation for Small Businesses in Trade" explores how small businesses can use AI tools to more efficiently create content and promote their work while maintaining clients' trust ■ Launch of "Living with the Genie" ■ Speaker panel at SME Trade Academy Forum on artificial intelligence, 2023



*Nadine Mneimneh, a Lebanese fashion designer, is shipping internationally after taking part in the We-Fi project*

# 2024

## Empowering women in the digital economy

The WTO and ITC host a High-Level Event on Women and Trade and SheTrades Summit ahead of the WTO's Thirteenth Ministerial Conference in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates. From policy discussions to an Innovation Festival to spoken word poetry, the event brought together policymakers, women-led businesses, business support organizations, and practitioners for an in-depth look at what a more inclusive trading system could and should entail.

As part of the event, the WTO and ITC launched the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund, with an initial contribution of \$5 million by the Government of the United Arab Emirates, to help women-led businesses adopt digital technologies and engage in the digital economy.



Digital and financial literacy trainings under the SheTrades initiative, Indonesia ■ GSIE Technology, a participant in the NTF V project, Senegal ■ Launch of WTO-ITC Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates, 2024 ■ A new project on digital entrepreneurship in Nigeria will promote the development of e-commerce, especially for agri-food SMEs from disadvantaged communities ■ Women entrepreneurs at WTO-ITC SheTrades Summit, Dubai, United Arab Emirates, 2024



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