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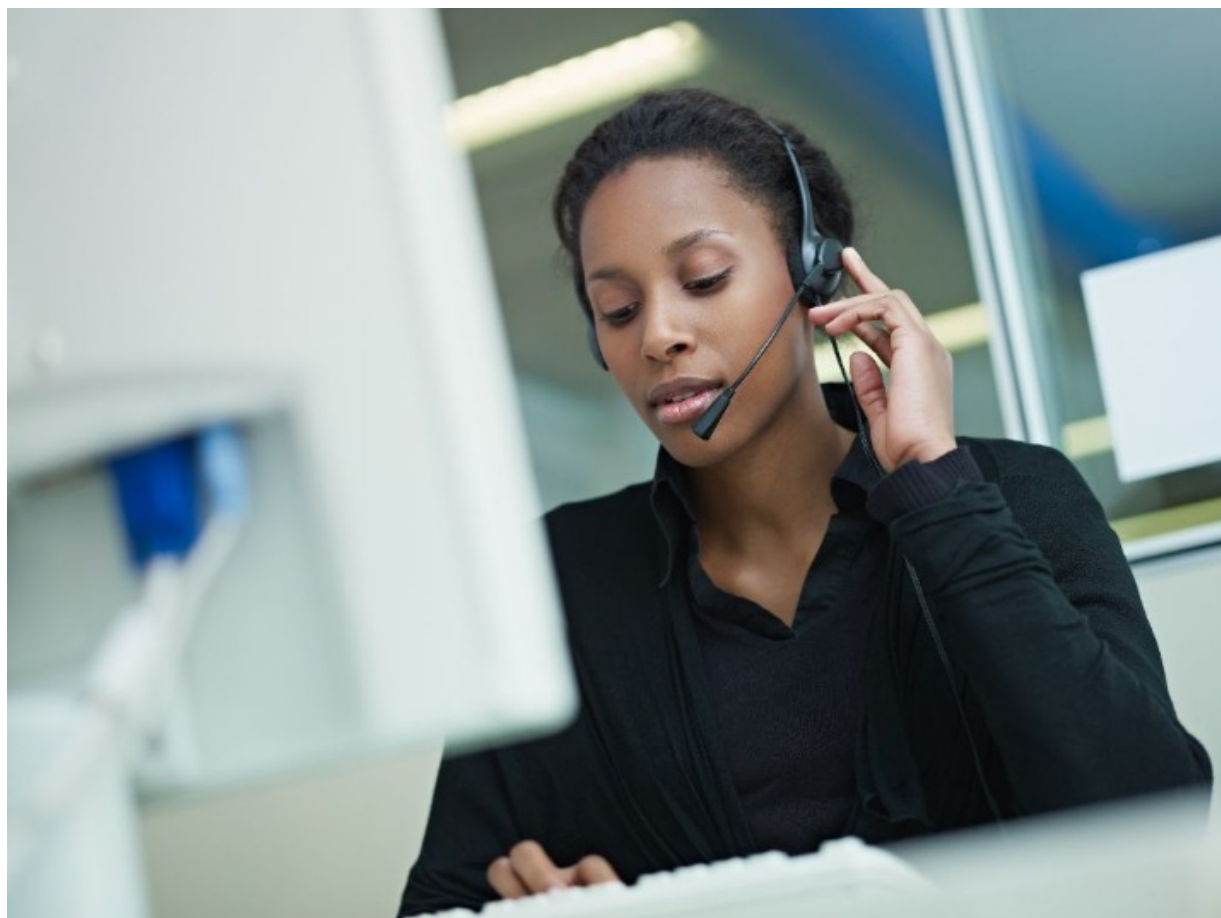


WACOMP Programme Highlights

Issue #4

Regional Component

ITC trade obstacles tool empowers small businesses to report trade barriers in West Africa



Following the implementation of ITC's Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanism (TOAM) in [Niger](#), over 60 obstacles have been reported since October this year using the tool. The TOAM expedites trade facilitation initiatives by informing institutions about trade obstacles being faced by small enterprises at an intrinsic level.

Businesses in Niger are facing great challenges in terms of trade transparency and overall lack of information on administrative procedures. Recently, some users of the TOAM reported issues in executing their business activities as they did not have a certificate of origin for their products that was neither viable to use all over the country nor accessible within 24 hours.

“The mechanism helped our institution realise the need to give access to documentation all over the country. We realise the difficulties SMEs are facing countrywide, not just in the bigger cities of Niger and therefore it helps not to discriminate without knowing,” said Abdoul Kader Ali Yacouba National Focal Point of the TOAM, at the Chamber of Commerce of Niger.

The TOAM in Niger was also used to follow up on [an extensive nationwide survey conducted in 2019](#) to gather data on business perspectives in relation to trade regulations and procedures. Competent institutions in the country will be able to track the obstacles reported through the survey on the TOAM website and address each of them at an individual level, engaging directly with small businesses.

Elsewhere in Benin, business owners are using the TOAM to spotlight trade inconsistencies during export processes with Togo. The export of pipes from Benin to Togo is one that should run seamlessly between neighbouring countries that are part of the ECOWAS Trade Liberalisation Scheme. Benin exported 32 Tonnes of pipes to Togo in 2019 ^[1] as its biggest trading country for this product, with exporting companies benefitting from the preferential tariff as laid out in the agreement.

However, an economic agent reported an obstacle experienced at the customs border post of Hillacondji, Benin. According to the customs officer, neither the agent’s product nor their company were part of the preferential tariff list.

Once ITC’s national focal point Mr Yessoufou Razack from the National Chamber of Commerce of Benin revised the reported obstacle, the country’s customs office had yet to update the list of identified companies. This was confirmed by reviewing the list developed to identify these companies available on the ECOWAS platform. To ensure swift action was taken, Razack ensured to raise the issue in his upcoming meeting with the national institutions of Benin and ECOWAS representatives.

[1] [Trade Map - Commerce entre le Bénin et le Togo en 2019](#)

Business Support Organizations learn to circumvent credit challenges



In its continued efforts to support the business climate in West Africa, ITC coordinated a 3-day virtual training on Financial Sources for SMEs. The training was organised with a selected group of Business Support Organisations (BSO). The online training brought together over 30 participants from the ECOWAS region and provided detailed information on key sectors as potential sources for funding.

The session's panellists included experts from financial institutions and investment agencies in the private sector. The training presented approaches for SMEs to take advantage of digital tools and support their businesses during these uncertain times.

“Evidence suggests that heavy government involvement in the form of interest rate caps or public-owned banks have been more of a drag than a stimulus to

financial markets deepening and SME credit development. They should allow fintech to grow. In our view, governments and regulators should view innovations/fintech positively and not stifle it, but rather support it and work with key players to bring it into mainstream at the right time,” said Simon Gupta, Head Business Development DFI/IFI at [responsAbility Investments AG](#).

Also contributing towards the training session were Nizami Namazov from deal sourcing firm [Opportunity Network](#) and Alain Nkurikiye Founder and CEO of the construction technology solutions firm [Wajenzi](#).

The workshop was held as part of an ongoing training a training of trainers series for SME development agencies to provide better support to SMEs in West Africa on how to access financial sources. The trainees will continue to review credit and equity financing as well as mentorship and training. Earlier in the year, the training focused on developing incentives to encourage members to pay for agency services as well as specific interventions to help SMEs adapt to the conditions brought about by COVID-19.

The need for SMEs to ensure sustainability was also underscored with panellists noting the need for environmental, social and governmental criteria to be considered and integrated into their business investment decisions. Trainees were also urged to capitalize on diaspora investments and crowd funding as potential seed capital.

Trade Statisticians specialize expertise in use of ECOWAS Trade Information System (ECOTIS)



After successfully installing a customized version of its [Trade Map](#) tool on the [ECOWAS Trade Information System \(ECOTIS\)](#) website, ITC has held several advanced trade data management workshops in the region to ensure the sustainability and ownership of the action. This has built a network of 20 ECOWAS statisticians from across the region that will contribute to improve the quality of ECOWAS trade flow data and ensure the use and maintenance of the ECOTIS Trade Map website. Between November and December this year, statisticians took part in two online workshops using a free software programme based on R programming (TradeOI) developed by ITC to learn trade data processing.

Previously, in October 2020, ITC also organized online training sessions for 40 trade officials across West Africa, to ensure continued use of the platform. The group of trainees were selected based on their direct experience with advising exporting companies. The trainings focused on identifying export performance indicators and information on international demand giving businesses the opportunity to increase or diversify exports.

The ECOTIS Trade Map will serve as a key resource for business owners in West Africa seeking to identify potential business partners in the region and beyond and will help familiarise trade statisticians with online trade intelligence and data quality control procedures.

Next steps in ITC's engagement to scale up the ECOWAS trade intelligence will

include developing a market price information portal and a fully automated solution for private sector members to keep them informed on latest market news in the value chains selected by the programme as well as share personalized intelligence with subscribing companies.

Federation of West African Employers' Association deliberate over Strategic Operational Plan



To begin the implementation process of its Performance Improvement Roadmap (PIRM), the Federation of West African Employers' Association (FWAEA/FOPAO) held a series of virtual working sessions to review the FWAEA strategy in November this year. The strategy outlines annual activity plans, implementation schedules as well as a breakdown of responsibilities and quantifiable objectives.

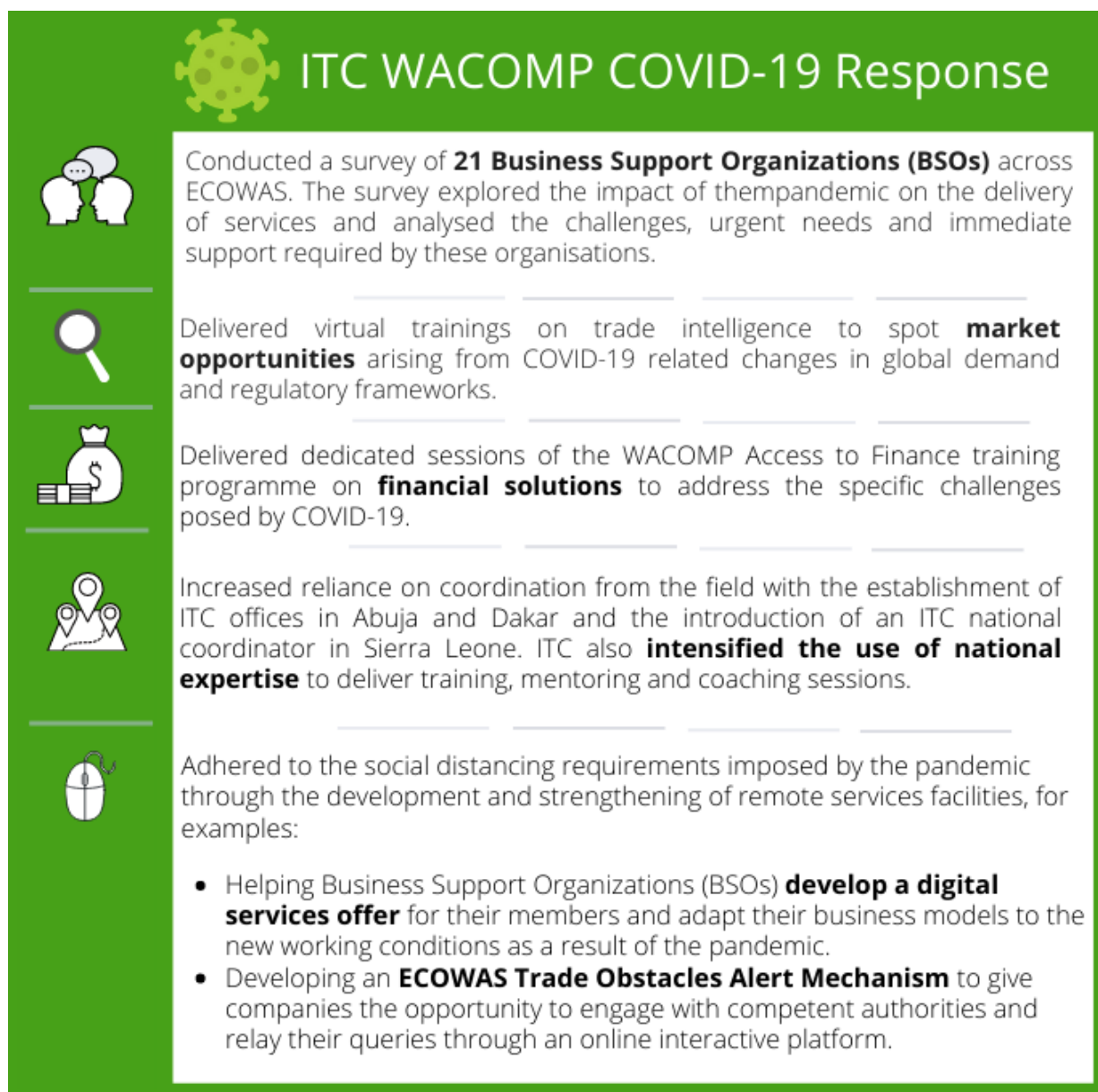
The PIRM indicates organisational weaknesses to be addressed by specific actions. These weaknesses were identified during a Benchmarking Assessment carried out last year, with the aim of enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of FWAEA.

During the virtual session, representatives from FWAEA's leadership, secretariat and organisation members broadly outlined the strategic and development plans as well as the organisations actions for the first year. Representatives also

defined the organisational structure and began defining a business model as part of the strategic development plan objectives.






Thereafter, the organisation held its Annual General meeting virtually, where ITC presented the proposed priorities for the strategy. In the spirit of collaboration, ITC expressed appreciation, reiterating its commitment and continuous support as FWAEA strengthens its service delivery across the West African region. The president of the FWAEA annual general meeting also extended his gratitude towards ITC and the ECOWAS Commission for their continued support.

Here is a look at this year's programme adjustments due to COVID-19



The infographic features a green background with a white sidebar on the left containing five icons: a virus, two people talking, a magnifying glass, a money bag, and a computer mouse. The main content area is white with a green border and contains five text blocks, each preceded by a horizontal line. The title 'ITC WACOMP COVID-19 Response' is at the top right, next to a virus icon.

ITC WACOMP COVID-19 Response

-  Conducted a survey of **21 Business Support Organizations (BSOs)** across ECOWAS. The survey explored the impact of the pandemic on the delivery of services and analysed the challenges, urgent needs and immediate support required by these organisations.
-  Delivered virtual trainings on trade intelligence to spot **market opportunities** arising from COVID-19 related changes in global demand and regulatory frameworks.
-  Delivered dedicated sessions of the WACOMP Access to Finance training programme on **financial solutions** to address the specific challenges posed by COVID-19.
-  Increased reliance on coordination from the field with the establishment of ITC offices in Abuja and Dakar and the introduction of an ITC national coordinator in Sierra Leone. ITC also **intensified the use of national expertise** to deliver training, mentoring and coaching sessions.
-  Adhered to the social distancing requirements imposed by the pandemic through the development and strengthening of remote services facilities, for examples:
 - Helping Business Support Organizations (BSOs) **develop a digital services offer** for their members and adapt their business models to the new working conditions as a result of the pandemic.
 - Developing an **ECOWAS Trade Obstacles Alert Mechanism** to give companies the opportunity to engage with competent authorities and relay their queries through an online interactive platform.

Also available [here](#)

National Components

Senegal joins forces with EU and ITC to drive competitiveness in mango, onion and ICT sectors



The Ministry of Trade and Small and Medium Enterprises of Senegal, the European Union (EU) and the International Trade Centre (ITC) came together to launch the [West Africa Competitiveness Support Programme \(WACOMP\) Senegal](#) component. The hybrid event brought together representatives committed to accelerating the development of the information and communication technology (ICT), as well as the mango and onion sectors.

WACOMP Senegal will work to operationalize the registration system for cooperative companies in Senegal and streamline access to finance for businesses in the informal sector. Once set up, cooperatives will also benefit from a digitized system as well as procedures emphasizing greater transparency, reliability and traceability of the register.

The programme will also aim to strengthen the competitiveness of the country's

digital ecosystem and ICT sector with greater access to information for small businesses and increasing opportunities to connect with regional value chains.



A look at Sierra Leone's Cassava Sector with ITC expert Mr. Braima James



Can you share a few key achievements from ITC's WACOMP support activities provided to MSMEs in Sierra Leone's cassava value chain?

The International Trade Centre (ITC) has reviewed bottlenecks and challenges in the cassava sub-sector in Sierra Leone. Our activities profiled cassava value chain actors in three districts as well as highlighted technical, organizational and policy assistance areas with opportunities to boost competitive cassava agribusiness.

As a result, a cassava partnership platform has been proposed to promote timely and quality responses needed by value chain actors for establish firm operational linkages that ensure marketing efficiencies.

ITC has proposed facilitating industrial pull for cassava use in feed industries and wheat flour substitution to enable cassava businesses tap into the high income generating potential of the crop.

For higher order interventions, ITC has recommended a Presidential Initiative on Cassava to ensure that mechanisms from cassava production to consumption systems are in place to help increase private sector competitiveness in efforts to commercialize the crop. ITC has also gathered a profile of cassava farmers and marketers in three districts to serve as pilot areas for implementation of field projects.

What are the key intervention opportunities ITC has identified to boost cassava productivity in the country?

ITC has stressed a strong need to invest in scaling out research-for-development (R4D) approaches that are known to strengthen community capacity and trigger positive changes in the cassava sub-sector performance. The investment would be based on probability of synergies through partnership with other agricultural development agencies already on the ground. In the area of capacity devolution, the interventions would focus on:

- providing training and expert advice on management and technical issues focusing on type and capacity of intended production and processing systems
 - promoting economic use of cassava waste by mainstreaming livestock and poultry feed production into cassava processing
 - producing data on key market locations, preferences, opportunities, constraints; stressing standards compliance and improved packaging solutions to increase products' access to new markets building cadres of national expertise with primary responsibility to facilitate experiential learning and informed decision making in cassava production, processing and marketing and finally, producing and disseminating learning materials to help improve skills of end-users; and conducting mass media communications to increase visibility of cassava utilization pathways.
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To learn more about the West Africa Competitiveness Programme visit:

WACOMP ITC



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