

MANAGEMENT RESPONSE AND IMPLEMENTATION FOLLOW-UP

Final Evaluation of the Netherlands Trust fund (NTF) Phase IV – Export Sector Competitiveness Programme

Management Response, Action Plan, Results, and Means of Verification

Date of submission of final evaluation report: April 2022	
Responsible chief:	Rob Skidmore, Chief, Sector and Enterprise Competitiveness
Responsible director:	Anders Aeroe, Director, Division of Enterprises and Institutions
Head IEU:	Miguel Jiménez Pont, ITC Independent Evaluation Unit
Date of finalization of management response: June 2022	

Recommendation No. 1: Consider for future NTF programme iterations, a longer programme lifecycle of five or even six years, to allow for a full participatory design phase before programme activities begin. An agreement could be signed to finalize the design phase during the first year. The programme document could be finalized and approved at the end of this period, at which time proper implementation would begin.

This recommendation is important, given the importance of assessing needs and priorities through background research as well as extensive consultation to support the relevance (as well as coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability) of programming.

Assigned to: NTF V Steering Committee

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:

Accepted:

Partially accepted:

Rejected:

We accept the recommendation, although it cannot fully be applied to NTF V programme, which has already been approved before the recommendations had been issued by the ET. Its duration and the related inception phase were already set in July 2021. As a result, we cannot fully comply with the recommendation.

Nevertheless, NTF V includes a six-month inception phase, with in-depth needs assessments across the four levels of intervention: policy – BSOs – MSMEs – Market partners. The inception phase is followed by the baseline data collection, which allows us to collect additional information on specific support needs.

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
1.1 Assess needs and priorities through background research as well as extensive consultation to support the relevance (as well as coherence, effectiveness, and sustainability) of programming	Extensive needs assessments documented in the NTF V project documents	NTF V project team	Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, CBI	30/2/2022	Assumption: that all stakeholders take the time to contribute and review project plan drafts

Recommendation No. 2: Specifically in terms of the already started NTF V Programme, ensure that by December 2022, ITC programme and project managers and their partners have achieved the following:

- Map out other, external projects and programmes with which it could coordinate activities with the same beneficiaries or capitalize on complementarity;
- Establish official project management structures and teaming arrangements within ITC, as well as identifying and mobilizing internal ITC services (e.g., SheTrades and AIM for Results) to mobilize useful collaboration and synergy in an organized and timely fashion, through financed service delivery; and
- Conduct in-depth gender, human rights, and environmental analysis, with results clearly presented in evidenced documentation (e.g., strategies) and used to inform the design of programme and project results, indicators, baseline (or midline), targets, and activities.

Assigned to: NTF V Programme Coordinator

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:

Accepted:

Partially accepted:

Rejected:

The monthly programme implementation updates to the SG includes a section on Partnerships. The section documents interactions with other development partners, both from the private and public sector.

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
2.1 Map out other, external projects and programmes with which it could coordinate activities with the same beneficiaries or capitalize on complementarity	The mapping is part of each project plan. Key partners	Project managers	Project team	31/12/2022	Partners share information about all external projects and programmes

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
2.2 Establish official project management structures and teaming arrangements within ITC, as well as identifying and mobilizing internal ITC services (e.g., SheTrades and AIM for Results) to mobilize useful collaboration and synergy in an organized and timely fashion, through financed service delivery	Each project includes a project team, which is documented on the portal, including colleagues contributing in an ad-hoc manner and formally engaged in the project. The NTF V programme team consists of all project team members funded through the programme in a continuous manner. The involvement of internal teams such as SheTrades and AIM for Results is documented through NTF V Teaming Arrangements.	Project managers	Project team	31/12/2022	Colleagues are available in due time to contribute to the project implementation
2.3 Conduct in-depth gender, human rights, and environmental analysis, with results clearly presented in evidenced documentation (e.g., strategies) and used to inform the design of programme and project results, indicators, baseline (or midline), targets, and activities.	The retro-active analysis will be undertaken under the guidance of the IEU team and the ITC focal points for gender, social responsibility, and green growth.	Project managers	M&E Expert	31/12/2022	Guidance provided by IEU ensures alignment with ITC standards.

Recommendation No. 3: *By December 2022, develop official and concrete partnerships with other programmes and projects that work on policy dialogue and institutional strengthening to allow ITC to focus on its particular areas of strength (i.e., working with the private sector) while remaining connected to, and gaining opportunities to inform efforts at policy and institutional level, for better coverage of this segment of the ecosystem.*

With an extended planning phase for NTF V, ITC could take the time to solidify coherence with such external actors, so that implementation, monitoring, and reporting considerations can be assessed and decided upon.

Assigned to: NTF V Programme Coordinator

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:	Building partnerships around policy-level work in all NTF V projects has been a particular area of attention since the beginning of the inception phase. In Ethiopia for instance, both Agribusiness and Tech teams work with the Agricultural Transformation Institute (ATI) to define the right approach to the design of an Agritech Strategy for the country, where partners such as the World Bank are likely to take a lead role.
Accepted: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Partially accepted: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Rejected: <input type="checkbox"/>	

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
3.1 Develop official and concrete partnerships with other programmes and projects that work on policy dialogue and institutional strengthening to allow ITC to focus on its particular areas of strength (i.e., working with the private sector) while remaining connected to, and gaining opportunities to inform efforts at policy and institutional level, for better coverage of this segment of the ecosystem	Clearly defined partnerships in each project to work on improved policies for systemic change.	Project managers	As per country	31/12/2022	Other external programmes are willing to engage with the NTF V teams

Recommendation No. 4: *By December 2022, develop, ideally through an inclusive and collaborative process, a full ToC at programme level, which clearly sets out expected change pathways and illustrates how each project contributes.*

Risks and assumptions should also be assessed both at programme and project levels, and specific analysis of political risks should draw on historical information. Indeed, critical conditions for the realization of outcomes should be laid out, and detailed and continuously reviewed mitigation strategies should be determined.

Linked results statements and indicators should be fully explained and established before the programme proceeds from inception to full implementation to ensure shared understanding and ownership of expectations amongst all relevant stakeholders.

Assigned to: NTF V Programme Coordinator

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is: Accepted: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Partially accepted: <input type="checkbox"/> Rejected: <input type="checkbox"/>	Risk management is an essential pillar of ITC’s project management methodology. A dedicated section under each project on the project portal and requires quarterly updates from each project team. The recommendation on an integrated approach to ToC will also be followed up on by each project team, together with the coordination of the programme.
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Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
4.1 Develop, ideally through an inclusive and collaborative process, a full ToC at programme level, which clearly sets out expected change pathways and illustrates how each project contributes	The entire programme team will work on the action with the support of an external M&E expert to ensure full alignment and ownership	Programme coordinator	Entire NTF V team	31/12/2022	Availability of all team members during a period of several days

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
4.2 Assess risks and assumptions both at programme and project levels	Risk ledger at the level of each project on the portal. A separate programme risk ledger will be designed with the support of an external expert	Programme coordinator	Entire NTF V team	31/12/2022	Programme-level risks can be identified as the programme is only the sum of its parts
4.3 Fully explain results statements and indicators before the programme proceeds from inception to full implementation to ensure shared understanding and ownership of expectations amongst all relevant stakeholders.	Detailed glossary, which will be included in the Yearly Reports, starting with the 2021 report.	Programme coordinator	Programme M&E expert	31/03/2022	Glossary will be reviewed and approved by the SG

Recommendation No. 5:

5.a) More time and resources should be invested in the development of robust, useful, and user-friendly RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme and project management, monitoring and reporting, and adaptive management. This would be based on the more extensive design to be achieved at the end of the inception phase (January 2022), as suggested in Recommendation 1.

Baseline data should be used to set realistic yet ambitious targets and both baseline and targets should be available before programme and project implementation starts. Setting targets based on clear baselines – that draw on comprehensive needs assessment and situational analysis during the inception phase, and through ongoing bilateral discussions with local stakeholders – is fundamental to avoid misunderstanding and disappointment based on unwarranted expectations. Reliable data available from NTF IV should be used to set baselines whenever possible.

5.b). Simple programme and project level reporting tools should be systematically designed and used at every stage of the reporting cycle, including baseline data and monitoring data compared to targets. Monitoring data should be presented at both project and programme levels, as well as for programme management, and the links between indicators at the two levels should be clearly explained so that data aggregation can be traced back by external readers. SDG reporting requirements should also be made clear.

Assigned to: NTF V Managers fulfilling RBM roles

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:

Accepted:

Partially accepted:

Rejected:

NTF has been historically ahead of other programmes at ITC in terms of good RBM practices. NTF IV was for instance the first programme to fully comply with IATI requirements in terms of financial transparency and transparency on logframe level results.

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
5.1 Develop a robust, useful, and user-friendly RBM tools to support more effective and efficient programme and project management, monitoring and reporting, and adaptive management	NTF V RBM tools with a focus on real-time results monitoring and reporting. Alignment of the tools with ITC's project portal	NTF V M&E focal point	IT service provider	31.12.2022	Capacity of all project teams to collect data in a timely fashion

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
5.2 Collect baseline data to set realistic yet ambitious targets (both baseline and targets should be available before programme and project implementation starts).	Baseline data can only be collected once beneficiaries have been selected. This has taken place in Q1 2022. Baseline data is being collected in Q2 2022.	NTF V M&E focal point	All teams	31.12.2022	Beneficiaries share in a timely fashion required baseline data
5.3 Design and use simple programme and project level reporting tools at every stage of the reporting cycle, including baseline data and monitoring data compared to targets.	Tools designed further to exchanges between all members of the teams, in order to ensure a realistic and achievable toolkit	NTF V M&E focal point	All teams	31.12.2022	Tools are adopted by field staff

Recommendation No. 6: Conduct a formative (learning-oriented) midterm evaluation for NTF V, which should be carried out by an external, independent evaluation team and planned well in advance. Such an external midterm evaluation, conducted in close collaboration with stakeholders to promote learning and ownership, will allow to identify any needed course corrections.

Assigned to: NTF V Steering Committee

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:

Accepted:

Partially accepted:

Rejected:

An internal mid-term self-evaluation had been undertaken under NTF IV. This experience will be a useful stepping stone towards an external mid-term evaluation, which has already been approved by the NTF V steering group in February 2022.

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
6.1 Conduct a formative (learning-oriented) midterm evaluation for NTF V, which should be carried out by an external, independent evaluation team and planned well in advance	External mid-term evaluation	Programme coordinator	ITC's Independent Evaluation Unit Programme M&E expert	31/12/2023	Process remains simple enough to be less-time consuming than a final evaluation

Recommendation No. 7: To enable robust demonstration of value for money, establish protocols to generate more detailed financial reporting, linked to detailed budget lines by December 2022. For example, financial data should be available by intermediate outcome and by type of investment (e.g., international or national consultants), at project level as well as aggregated to programme level.

Assigned to: NTF V ITC staff responsible for financial and administrative management of future programmes and projects

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:	Financial data is collected and aggregated by each project team and the programme produces weekly financial reports focused on expenditure per project.
Accepted: <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Partially accepted: <input type="checkbox"/>	
Rejected: <input type="checkbox"/>	

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
7.1 Make financial data available by output and by type of investment (e.g., international or national consultants), at project level as well as aggregated to programme level.	Pivot table with financial data for each project, based on delivery items documented	Project finance focal point	Project manager	31/12/2022	Information is easily accessible through UMOJA

Recommendation No. 8: *It is recommended to build in sustainability mechanisms based on the improved planning achieved by the end of the inception phase (partly through enhanced coherence with complementary actors), identify barriers to and enabling factors for sustainability as they emerge, and work to flexibly address and/or build on these during implementation.*

The low-hanging fruit to implement this recommendation would be to clearly define exit strategies, at programme and project levels, and update them on a regular basis considering the changing circumstances. These mechanisms should be operational before the midterm evaluation suggested in recommendation 6.

Assigned to: NTF V Managers

Management Response and Justification:

The recommendation is:

Accepted:

Partially accepted:

Rejected:

Exit strategies are part of ITC’s standard project management methodology and were already included under NTF IV. The recommendation will allow us to define strategies at an earlier stage, ensuring better embedding at the implementation stage.

Action Plan and Responsibilities:

Actions	Expected result and means of verification	Responsible office or partner	Contributing partner(s)	Implementation deadline	Remarks
8.1 Clearly define exit strategies, at programme and project levels, and update them on a regular basis considering the changing circumstances.	Exit strategy for each project defined ahead of the mid-term evaluation	Project managers	Programme M&E focal point	30/09/2023	Project beneficiaries and partners support the definition of exit strategies