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ITC launches Trade Facilitation Programme to help developing countries implement WTO agreement

(Geneva) The International Trade Centre (ITC) today announced the establishment of its Trade Facilitation Programme that will assist developing countries and their businesses to better understand the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and undertake the necessary steps to effectively implement its provisions. A particular focus of the programme will be on providing support to Least Developed Countries (LDCs), ensuring that their small and medium-sized enterprises have a greater chance of participating in international trade.

Using the model of public-private partnership that has been at the heart of ITC's work for the past 50 years, ITC will bring together actors from the public and private sectors in developing countries to ensure that steps are taken to comply with the Agreement. Efforts will also be undertaken to ensure that the benefits of trade reforms have an impact on the cost and time of doing business in developing countries.

The ITC Trade Facilitation Programme will have four main pillars:

- Support, coordination and strengthening of national trade facilitation committees.

National trade facilitation committees play a key role in the coordination of implementation of the TFA at the national level. Furthermore, functioning trade facilitation committees and consultation mechanisms are an important first step in implementing the Agreement. ITC will ensure that priorities of the private sector are reflected in these Committees. ITC envisages working closely with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development in this area.

- Assisting developing countries to categorize trade facilitation measures taking into account the views and perspectives of private sector.

ITC will assist developing countries, especially LDCs and Landlocked Least Developed Countries, in defining their implementation plans for compliance with the Agreement specifically supporting the following activities:

- (a) Identify and categorize commitments under Categories A, B and C;
 - (b) Schedule implementation timeframes of the specific required measures and assist the national trade facilitation committees to carry out their role;
 - (c) Estimate technical assistance required, in terms of resources and time;
 - (d) Co-ordinate efforts to approach donor community for funding.
- Assisting developing countries to define and build bankable projects under Category C and where appropriate providing direct assistance to implement key elements of the Agreement.
 - Launch a Trade Facilitation Hotline where developing countries and SMEs can contact a dedicated trade facilitation team at ITC with any question or clarification regarding implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. This hotline is accessible through the following email address: helptradefacilitation@intracen.org



The primary aim of ITC's Trade Facilitation Programme is to provide clear and focused technical advice to developing countries and SMEs to benefit from improved trade facilitation. ITC has already assisted over 20 countries in their effort to implement the TFA, including the categorization of their commitments under categories A, B and C. For example, this week ITC has worked with the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA) to help its member states effectively prioritize their needs in line with regional integration priorities. In addition, ITC has received requests from more than 40 countries requesting trade facilitation assistance. ITC will continue to respond to these demands by offering the necessary assistance.

ITC welcomes the joint approach that has been agreed by a number of international organizations to assist developing countries in implementing the TFA. ITC also welcomes and supports today's announcement by the WTO of a Trade Facilitation Facility that will assist WTO Members in preparing and updating needs assessments, assist with identification of possible development partners, share implementation experience and collate and disseminate best practice information.

Trade facilitation is central to the work of ITC since this is critical to ensuring the competitiveness and internationalization of SMEs in developing countries. ITC stands ready to assist WTO members, countries in accession and the global business community in ensuring effective and sustainable implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

ITC is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists small and medium-sized enterprises in developing and transition economies to become more competitive in global markets, thereby contributing to sustainable economic development within the frameworks of the [Aid-for-Trade agenda](#) and the [Millennium Development Goals](#).

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