Making trade work for the 99%

ARANCHE GONZÁLEZ, Executive Director, International Trade Centre

Recent years have seen trade facing headwinds. Scratch beneath the surface of many of the recent headlines and political debates, and you will find trade being blamed for a number of challenges facing countries across the world.

What is particularly surprising is how the players in this dialogue have changed. The voices charging trade as being responsible for rising unemployment and loss of domestic industries are now louder in many parts of the developed country world than in developing countries. Trade is not exempt from criticism but we have to be careful not to scapegoat it for ills that cannot be ascribed to it. After all, many of you reading this Trade Forum on your tablets wouldn’t have been able to do so without both trade in services such as hotel and experience tours and a more democratizing approach to online retail over brick and mortar shops.

The innovations around self-driving cars, robots and automation, the domination of online retail over brick and mortar shops and a more democratizing approach to transportation innovation and changing global demand some people, practices and industries have been left behind.

Trade has its casualties as coupled with technology change, transportation innovation and changing global demand some people, practices and industries have been left behind. And this will continue. The innovations around self-driving cars, robots and automation, the domination of online retail over brick and mortar shops and a more democratizing approach to services such as hotel and experience tourism will continue to transform the job market.

But harnessed correctly there are opportunities. With a more modern approach to education, deliberate skills upgrading and better connecting these skills and services to market demands; individuals and communities can tap into a new paradigm of trade benefits. The truth remains, however, that at this moment too few people, companies and countries – often referred to as the 1% – are benefitting disproportionally from the growth generated by trade. While the remaining 99% still are not benefitting to the extent they could, or should.

The reaction in some quarters has been to look backwards and inwards, retreating into protectionism. True, protectionism might save a factory here and there in the short term, but at the cost of reducing purchasing power and weakening productivity growth by decreasing competition and scale. Rather than protect, trade protectionism can make entire societies poorer than they otherwise would have been.

Part of the answer lies in making trade more sustainable, more inclusive and more people-sensitive.

Trade has proven its worth. It has helped lift millions out of poverty and will continue to play a crucial role in achieving the main goal of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: to end extreme poverty. The cursor has to move to a discussion on making trade more sustainable, more inclusive and more people-sensitive.

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Part of the answer lies in crafting better trade policies. We need to tell a better story of how trade actually underpins many of the things that are good in society today and that we enjoy on a daily basis from phones to tablet, food or medicines. We must ensure we bring more voices into the trade debates especially the micro, small and medium sized enterprises (MSMEs), which are the untapped engines of potential growth, innovation and jobs. By helping them to build their productive capacity and connect them to regional and international value chains we can rebalance the 99:1 divide.

Equally important is to ensure that women and youth are fully included in trade. Numerous research, included that conducted by ITC through its SheTrades initiative, has underlined the benefits for society if women are fully included in the economy on an equal footing to men. It is a no-brainer that if 50% of your population is excluded from the economy, we are all losing out on economic growth.

Addressing barriers to trade at home through clear and transparent policies is also important. For example, ITC research on non-tariff measures has repeatedly demonstrated that many barriers to trade are found at home, and not only in partner countries. Likewise, the recently published SME Competitiveness Outlook 2017 – The Region: A Door to Global Trade tells us that deep trade agreement can help generate value-chain activity and support inclusiveness by helping close the competitiveness gap between small and large companies.

Responsible trade also has to be environmentally sustainable and socially inclusive, rooted in cooperation based on shared rules. Having a more transparent approach to global and regional sustainability standards is one place to start – just look at ITC’s recently launched Sustainability Map.

But an even greater part of the answer lies in more progressive domestic policies. From ensuring greater access to finance for MSMEs to investing in green energy, from education and active labour market policies to infrastructure investments, these flanking policies have a huge part to pay in rebalancing the costs and the benefits of more open markets.

Trade for the 99% will be at the heart of ITC’s 2017 World Export Development Forum (WEDF) taking place in Budapest on 25-26 October. From investment to regional trade and from e-commerce to green growth, the discussions will focus on how we can help more people benefit from inclusive and sustainable trade, and how we can help reset the debate to ensure that trade can work for the 99%.
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News Brief

Deeper and wider trade integration more beneficial for small businesses

Comprehensive trade agreements that provide for deep regional integration are better at connecting small businesses to value chains and ultimately better for building more inclusive growth. According to the International Trade Centre’s report *SME Competitiveness Outlook 2017 – The Region: A Door to Global Trade*, deeper regional integration turns out to be a major success factor in developing multi-country value chains, which in turn raises the competitiveness of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This finding is particularly interesting given the current debate on the utility of expanding the content and depth of trade agreements.

ITC supports Azerbaijan’s SMEs

The three-year ‘Eastern Partnership: Ready to Trade – an EU4Business Initiative’ project marks a new collaboration between the Government of the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Delegation of the European Union to Azerbaijan, and the International Trade Centre (ITC). The initiative aims to connect Azerbaijani small and medium-sized enterprises to global value chains, thereby improving their competitiveness in Azerbaijan and other Eastern Partnership countries. To kick off the project activities, the President of the Azerbaijan Export and Investment Promotion Foundation (AzPromo) and ITC Executive Director Arancha González signed a Memorandum of Understanding in Baku.

Sustainability Map to improve sustainable consumption, production and trade

Sustainability Map, a new online platform enabling businesses around the world to trade more sustainably, was launched at the Trade for Sustainable Development Forum on 27 September. It provides access to a wide range of information related to sustainability initiatives, standards and trends. Businesses, the public sector, consumers and standards-setting organizations can better understand the sustainability standards landscape and connect with business partners through the platform.

Sustainability Map, which consists of four modules, builds on well-established ITC online tools such as Standards Map and SustainabilityXchange while introducing two new and interconnected modules, Sustainability Network and Sustainability Trends.
Nepal unveils National Sector Export Strategies and business survey on non-tariff measures

The Government of Nepal on 13 October launched four National Sector Export Strategies and a report on non-tariff measures (NTM) at a ceremony in Kathmandu. The export strategies – covering the coffee, handmade paper and paper products, large cardamom, and tea sectors – aim to help boost the export capacities of the country, ensure more value addition to these exports and facilitate greater trade in regional and global markets.

The report on NTMs, based on a large-scale survey of over 500 Nepalese enterprises, clearly sets out the challenges faced by Nepalese exporters’ on non-tariff measures and identifies necessary actions to overcome these constraints.

The sector export strategies will serve as a blueprint for the Government, the private sector and the country’s development partners to help the country’s small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) improve their competitiveness, move up the value change and ensure more inclusive trade that contributes to better quality jobs in Nepal.

The launch in Kathmandu came after a series of multi-stakeholder consultations led by the Ministry of Commerce in collaboration with the Trade Export Promotion Centre of Nepal. Throughout the process, the International Trade Centre has provided technical and expert support.

UN, World Bank announce initiative to ramp up finance for climate action

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres and World Bank Group President Jim Yong Kim announced plans to accelerate the flow of finance for climate action through a new platform dedicated to identifying and facilitating transformational investments in developing countries. The new Invest4Climate platform is designed to bring together national governments, financial institutions, private sector investors, philanthropies and multilateral banks to support transformational climate action in line with the Paris Agreement.

Global unemployment passes 200 million, labour agency reports

More than 200 million people are out of work around the world, an increase of 3.4 million since last year, a new report by the International Labour Organization says.

Private-sector enterprises accounted for the bulk of global employment in 2016, the report says. They employed 2.8 billion individuals, representing 87% of total employment. The private sector, which also covers medium-sized firms, accounts for up to 70% of all jobs in some Arab states and well over half in parts of sub-Saharan Africa. However, the ILO report reveals that these companies are struggling to grow.

The latest data from more than 130 countries shows that small and medium business had faster job growth than larger firms before the global financial slump in 2008.

From 2009 however, job creation in the small and medium sector was simply ‘absent’, according to the ILO report, which calls for government intervention to reverse the trend.
The drive for ethical fashion boosts employment, raises standards

MARYJO CARTIER, Adviser, International Trade Centre

European Union support translates into African production gains

Can fashion help change people’s lives? At the International Trade Centre (ITC), we think so. Since it was launched in 2009, the ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative (EFI) has provided opportunities for artisans across the developing world, including Ghana, Haiti and Kenya, connecting them to some of the world’s leading fashion houses.

Earlier this year the EFI teamed up with the European Commission to use fashion as way of creating jobs in Burkina Faso and Mali. The project, ‘Job Creation and Sustainable Development of Micro-Enterprises through the Management of Ethical Fashion, Lifestyle and Interior Design Supply chains in Burkina Faso and Mali’, is part of a wider international effort to create economic opportunities in developing countries and to address the root causes of migration from Africa to Europe and elsewhere.

Supported by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa, the four-year project aims to spur the creation of dignified jobs and support the sustainable development of micro-enterprises in the ethical fashion and design supply chains in the artisanal cotton and textile sectors in Burkina Faso and Mali. As the leading cotton-producing countries in Africa, Burkina Faso and Mali benefit from a strong textile tradition – a labour-intensive industry that carries strong potential for job creation.

In both countries the EFI is working to organize artisan workshops to produce handwoven textiles for the international fashion and interior market. Major improvements to production have already been implemented: the introduction of large looms to produce wide-width fabrics and the improvement of quality control procedures to ensure textiles reach the quality standards demanded by international buyers.

2. Bogolan production.
3. A bogolan textile factory in Mali.
5. An artisan works in an atelier in Burkina Faso.
6. Textile being woven by hand in Burkina Faso.
7. Ready Bogolan fabrics on display.
Innovation is now widely recognized as a central driver of economic growth, prosperity and development. The GII aims to provide countries with a snapshot of their innovation ecosystem, helping them to identify weaknesses and strengths.

Three nations have garnered the lion’s share of attention, leaving the rest struggling to forge identities.

In Latin America, as elsewhere, formulating effective innovation policies could serve as a potential antidote to regional and global economic and political uncertainties. Although the region’s overall scores increased 2% over last year’s numbers, countries in the region are still working towards meet their innovation potential.
Although Latin American and Caribbean countries are increasingly investing in research and development and innovation inputs, they do not necessarily translate them into innovation outputs.

Out of 127 countries ranked, Chile came in 48th, Costa Rica 53rd and Mexico 58th. Switzerland topped the list of the world’s most innovative economies, followed by Sweden and the Netherlands.

None of the region’s countries outperform relative to their level of development (as India and Vietnam did, for example) and the largest countries in the region have not seen improvements in their rankings.

The region lags in terms of both inputs that catalyze innovation, including increases in investment, science and technology graduates, availability of credit markets and the like. It also trails in innovation outcomes, such as patent applications filed and scientific articles published.

Chile, ranked 46th most innovative country in the world, remains the number one economy in Latin America, as it has for the past four years. However, it fell two positions in the overall rankings since 2016.

Its improvements in 2017 lie mainly in its knowledge and technology outputs, particularly in the number of new firms created, where it ranks 14th in the world with eight new company registrations per thousand population in 2014. This puts Chile in the good company of countries like Bulgaria (8.9 per 1,000) and Iceland (9.5 per 1,000).

Chile is 10th in the world for foreign direct investment (FDI) net outflows, the amount invested that Chilean residents make in foreign countries; it represented 5% of GDP in the 2013-2015 period, putting Chile’s FDI output above that of countries like Canada and Norway.

The high-income South American nation also outpaces economies such as Finland and the United States of America in tertiary education enrolments, with 88.6% of its population in 2015. This is the highest score in Latin America, followed by Uruguay (38th) and Colombia (47th).

STRONG CONTENDERS

Costa Rica is the second-most innovative economy in Latin America and 53rd worldwide, falling eight positions from its 2016 level. This is the seventh year that the small Central American country has ranked among the region’s three best-performing economies.

Its strengths lie primarily in business sophistication and creative outputs. Costa Rica is first in the world in cultural and creative-services exports like advertising, market research and public-opinion polling services. It ranks fifth in the number of researchers in the business enterprise sector.

In the exports of services based on information and communication technologies (ICT), Costa Rica also ranks top worldwide, tied with India, Ireland and Israel. Its ICT services exports represented 14.6% of its total trade in 2015.

Most of Costa Rica’s weaknesses are on the innovation inputs side. The Central American country graduates a relatively low number of science and engineering students (91st worldwide) and is outside the top 100 in developing industrial designs by origin (103rd).

Mexico has also done relatively well in innovation this past year, rising three spots to become the 58th most innovative economy worldwide.

It ranks seventh among 62 middle-income economies in the quality of innovation, a group that includes China, India and Brazil. In this indicator Mexico performs above average in the quality of its domestic universities and the international impact of its local publications.

Not only did Mexico’s gross domestic expenditure in research and development (GERD) and its business-enterprise expenditures in research and development (BERD) not decline during the 2008-2009 world financial crisis, they’ve actually intensified since 2010.

GERD represented 0.55% of GDP in 2015, 34% higher than the 2008 levels. BERD was also 22% higher in 2015 relative to crisis-era levels.

Mexico, projected to become the world’s 16th-largest economy this year, shows itself to be an active contributor to global value chains, including in high-tech sectors. Imports like aerospace equipment and scientific instruments, among others, represented 18.4% of total Mexican trade in 2015.

Among Mexico’s main weaknesses is political stability and safety. In this indicator it ranked 104th out of 127 countries. Gender is also a point for improvement: only 8.2% of employed Mexican women had advanced degrees. By comparison, 21.1% of working French women and 15.9% of working Chilean women did.

BRAZIL: ‘A’ FOR EFFORT

Brazil remains an important innovation actor in Latin America. This year, it came in 69th in the world and seventh in the Latin American region, though ceding ground to Panama and Uruguay. It has kept the same position as in 2016 and improved one position relative to 2015, when it was ranked 70th.

Brazil made large gains in human capital and research, improving in expenditures in education. The average score of the top three Brazilian universities at the QS university ranking in 2016 ranks 24th worldwide, above countries including Austria and Italy.

Marked improvements in the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) scores over 2003-12 were also registered, though tertiary education remains a bottleneck to innovation. Only 12% of all higher education students study science and engineering, putting Brazil 96th of 102 nations ranked.

UNLEASHING POTENTIAL

This year’s results show that although Latin American and Caribbean countries are increasingly investing in research and development (R&D) and innovation inputs, they do not necessarily translate them into innovation outputs like patents, scientific publications, quality certificates, high-tech products, trademarks and the like.

This in turn is hampering the efficiency of the region’s innovation systems. With nearly 650 million people and a combined GDP of US$ 5.2 trillion, Latin America and the Caribbean has the potential to become a greater source of global intellectual production and high-tech manufactured products, among other possible areas for growth.

To unleash their shared power, the GII results reveal that countries in the region must emphasize enabling environments conducive to creativity domestically and as well as cooperate more in R&D and innovation at the regional level.

1. Santiago de Chile, the capital of Latin America’s most innovative country.
The link between trade and labour: is it working?

BILLY MELO ARAUJO, Lecturer in European Union and International Economic Law, Queen’s University Belfast

Economic accords can generate worker benefits, moral outcomes

The intersection between trade and labour is a topic that has attracted much attention over the past 12 months. From Brexit to the presidential election in the United States, politicians have sought to exploit the notion that trade – and in particular trade liberalization – produces negative effects on labour standards and conditions.

Of course, trade liberalization produces winners and losers. A number of national industries have suffered as a result of increased global competition. There are also concerns that as global mobility in goods, services and capital increases, low labour standards in exporting countries may undermine higher labour standards in importing countries, eventually leading to a race to the bottom.

In reality, empirical evidence supporting the race-to-the-bottom theory remains, at best, ambiguous. There is no clear evidence that low labour costs significantly enhance export performance or foreign investment. Such costs tend not to be decisive factors in foreign direct investment decisions compared to issues such as labour productivity and political stability.

Rich, developed economies argue, despite evidence to the contrary, that promoting labour standards through trade addresses concerns over a race to the bottom.

The narrative, however, is strong. The idea that trade liberalization negatively affects employment standards in domestic markets holds a particular resonance with the public and it is no surprise that politicians keep coming back to it. It is no surprise either that the interaction between trade agreements and
The idea that trade liberalization negatively affects employment standards in domestic markets holds a particular resonance with the public and it’s no surprise that politicians keep coming back to it.

labour has occupied trade negotiators, policy analysts and academics alike for the better part of the last 30 years.

ECONOMICS AND MORALS
The central issue here is whether trade agreements can or should be used to improve labour rights and social conditions globally. Those in favour – mostly rich, developed economies – argue, despite evidence to the contrary, that promoting labour standards through trade addresses concerns over a race to the bottom. Their theory goes that companies are more likely to move activities to countries where labour costs are low, something that leads to job losses at home and the temptation to reduce labour standards in order to keep such jobs.

Equally, some argue there is a moral duty to use trade agreements to improve the plight of workers abroad. However, this has historically been rejected by a significant number of developing countries which have also bought into the notion that low labour standards can provide a competitive advantage in trade. They view links drawn between trade and labour as protectionist mechanisms designed to remove one of the few advantages held by developing countries in global markets.

Attempts to introduce labour standards within the rules of the World Trade Organization have thus consistently been rejected. However, links between trade and labour have been implemented in bilateral and regional trade agreements pursued by major economies such as the European Union (EU) and the United States.

Both seek to justify labour provisions by putting forward values-based arguments. The United States says the protection of worker rights in free-trade agreements (FTAs) is a core value, while the EU says such provisions are a key component of its values-based agenda.

ENFORCEMENT
The agreements negotiated by the EU and the United States follow a fairly similar approach. Both use these deals to require countries to comply with core International Labour Organization (ILO) standards. That stops those countries – for example, Colombia, Peru and South Korea – from amending or failing to enforce domestic labour standards to gain a competitive advantage in trade or investment.

So, do these agreements end up improving labour rights and conditions in the territories of their trade partners? Well, the United States has had some success getting its trading partners to undertake significant domestic labour law reforms prior to the entry into force of FTAs of the United States.

The FTA between the United States and Colombia is a good example. The former decided not to ratify the agreement until it was satisfied that Colombia had adopted a number of reforms, from improvements to enforcement of labour laws to the protection of trade union officials and the criminalization of anti-union acts.

A signed FTA with the biggest economy in the world is effective bait, but the post-ratification record of these FTAs is far less impressive. The US Government Accountability Office shows that the implementation of labour standards requirements included in the country’s FTAs has been deficient. This is in part due to the lack of enforcement – only one arbitration ruling has been delivered in relation to a labour violation under a United States FTA. But there has also been a lack of funds and resources allocated to monitoring.

At least US agreements allow it to impose trade sanctions. Under EU FTAs, labour provisions are exempt from dispute settlement: hard enforcement mechanisms are not available if the trading partner decides not to comply.

That might explain why the impact of EU FTAs on labour standards has been arguably even more limited. The EU has had to rely on monitoring and friendly cooperation to make sure trading partners comply with any labour provisions.

The available evidence suggests the impact has been limited because of inefficient monitoring and engagement from the EU with the relevant authorities and civil society organizations on the ground.

The criticisms have stung. The EU has recently put forward proposals to improve effectiveness, but the impression that emerges right now is of a disconnect between rhetoric and action. Both the EU and the United States have sought to package FTAs as tools to promote labour standards and protect workers. Yet both have failed to develop the capacity to make it work.

This article previously appeared on The Conversation and the World Economic Forum’s Agenda blog.

1. The idea that trade liberalisation negatively affects employment standards in domestic markets is one that holds a particular resonance with the public.
2. Do EU and US trade agreements improve working conditions in partner countries?
Trade for the 99% through inclusion and sustainability

JARLE HETLAND, Editor, International Trade Forum, and MATTHEW WILSON, Chief of Staff, International Trade Centre

Why ITC programmes have become game-changers for small business

The case for trade as an enabler of growth, job creation and poverty reduction is well documented. Between 2000 and 2015 trade played a significant role in helping the world halve the number of people living in extreme poverty as set out in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) – the successors to the MDGs – recognize the role of trade as a component in achieving the ambitious, new target of eliminating extreme poverty by 2030.

Though that’s a big challenge, it is achievable with global political will and responsibility, and a true partnership approach. Trade is a tool to achieve growth but it is trade plus smart domestic policies plus support for multilateralism that is a stronger recipe for more inclusive and sustainable growth.

ITC has been a pioneer in requiring that all its programmes reflect the impact they will have on creating economic opportunities for women.

At the International Trade Centre (ITC), green, sustainable and inclusive trade is at the heart of what we do. At the core of this is the support for micro, small and
also developed specific tools and projects targeting this demographic group.

In The Gambia, the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP!), is focused on creating more jobs for young people. Funded by the European Union Trust Fund for Africa, the project is bringing together local authorities, organizations and companies in an effort to create jobs and stem irregular migration. It is about creating opportunities for youth – often by youth – at home.

In the sustainability field, ITC worked with Peru to help improve the market position and exports of biodiversity-based products such as sacha inchi, a seed, which in turn improved the living conditions of farmers and harvesters. Helping farmers increase exports and incomes can be done in concert with climate-smart and green technology and by helping them adopt standards that improve quality and reduce waste.

These are just some examples of what ITC does to ensure more sustainability and more inclusiveness in trade. The programmes are part of a larger movement to make trade more inclusive. Supporting and investing in greener and more inclusive approaches at the firm level will have a multiplier effect on economies, societies and the environment.

Connecting viable enterprises to regional and international value chains means more jobs are created and more income is generated. In short, only by ensuring equal opportunities for the 99% to fully participate in trade will we achieve the main objective of the Sustainable Development Goals: eliminating extreme poverty by 2030. ☺
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Bold policies needed to ensure real inclusiveness

PÉTER SZIJJÁRTÓ, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary

Hungary remains committed to achieving real economic growth at home and abroad

During recent times our world has faced significant economic challenges and security risks. When Hungary introduced bold economic policy reforms a few years ago it was subjected to strong criticism from domestic political opposition and various international institutions, as well as from public figures and representatives of foreign governments. The objective of these policy reforms was to make the Hungarian economy resistant to future crises.

In an effort to create the financial stability necessary for economic growth and to promote competitiveness, the government adopted three new foreign policy aims: to expand and diversify exports; to strengthen the position of Hungarian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in foreign markets; and to attract more foreign direct investment into Hungary. New foreign policy measures prioritizing economic diplomacy and country promotion were also introduced to bolster Hungary’s economic interests.

The Government of Hungary remains committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure that societies can prosper in a healthy and sustainable manner.

Economic growth will be achieved only if foreign policy is flexible enough to confront and overcome crises as they arise. With this in mind, Hungary made its economy open to countries in developing
Digitalization has become an increasingly important component of economic competitiveness and plays an integral part in the realization of the Industry 4.0 vision.

regions. To stimulate stronger economic relationships with these countries and to enable Hungarian companies to expand into foreign markets, the government launched the ‘Opening to the East’ strategy targeting Asian markets and the post-Soviet countries in 2010; and, in 2015, the ‘Opening to the South’ strategy, which focuses on African and Latin-American markets. These strategies are expected to deliver positive economic outcomes by facilitating exports and inbound investment.

Hungary has an export-driven and open economy, which is largely dependent on changes of global demand and on its external economic relations. Consequently, the three previously listed foreign policy aims were accompanied by structural and institutional modifications to ensure improved performance by the Hungarian economy. As a result, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade has become a lead agency responsible for overseeing the work of all institutions dealing with economic diplomacy. These institutions include the Hungarian National Trading House (the agency responsible for trade development); the Hungarian Investment and Promotion Agency (the agency responsible for investment promotion); Eximbank (the financial institution responsible for export financing and insurance); and the institution of Joint Economic Committees, which helps drive Hungary’s foreign economic objectives. The strategic partnership agreements are also an important contributor to the aims.

To strengthen Hungary’s position in overseas markets, the Hungarian Government increased the number of trade commissioners, whose main task is to actively assist export-ready Hungarian companies to expand their businesses into external markets. To achieve this, the commissioners help companies to identify new markets for their products and services and to search for potential business partners and customers. They also undertake market research and market visits and arrange business meetings with local industry and government.

TRADE-LED GROWTH
The Government of Hungary places great importance on the role of SMEs in contributing to trade-led growth and job creation. Hungary’s Economic Development and Innovation Operational Programme enables more SMEs to connect with international markets. The programme is supported by the European Regional Development Fund, which grants financial support to eligible Hungarian SMEs proposing to develop products and services for export.

To further encourage foreign direct investment in Hungary, the government proposes policy measures that will develop the capabilities necessary to position Hungary as a production hub with a highly skilled workforce – and as a centre of innovation – within the European Union (EU). The purpose of the proposed Research and Development (R&D) support programme, for example, is to assist large enterprises located in Hungary to undertake R&D activities and therefore to encourage the development of R&D competence centres in the country.

Digitalization has become an increasingly important component of economic competitiveness and plays an integral part in the realization of the Industry 4.0 vision, Hungary’s roadmap for industrial development. Recognizing the importance of digital capabilities, Hungary implemented the Digital Success Programme, which is built on four pillars: digital infrastructure; digital community and economy; digital state; and digital skills. In developing a complete national digital environment by 2020, Hungary will be well placed to attract investment.

CRISIS RESPONSE
Beginning in 2015, and in response to crises occurring in the Middle East, Central Asia and Africa, the EU faced a large influx of migrants and refugees. These people included asylum-seekers, but also economic migrants and some hostile agents, including Islamic State militants disguised as migrants or refugees. Hungary responded with a range of measures, including improved border security, to ensure the sustainability of the asylum system. To communicate these measures in a coherent manner, the government created the Hungary Helps Programme.

It is important to note that besides the trade programmes and initiatives, international development cooperation continues to play a significant part in the foreign policy of Hungary. Political stability is a prerequisite for sustained economic development and trade relations. Given their geographical proximity, the stability of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe is important for Hungary as well as for the whole of Europe. Consequently, countries within these regions continue to remain the priority area of the Hungarian aid programme.

Other areas where Hungary will consider development assistance include sub-Saharan Africa, the Horn of Africa and the less developed countries in Asia. The Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Jordan, Serbia and Sri Lanka were the biggest recipients of Hungarian official development assistance in 2016. The Government of Hungary remains committed to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development to ensure that societies can prosper in a healthy and sustainable manner.

BUILDING TRADE TIES
It is an honour to be the first country within the Central and Eastern Europe region to host the World Export Development Forum. With its central theme of ‘Trade – a Force for Good: Include, Innovate, Integrate,’ the 2017 Forum serves to connect SMEs with the global economy while also promoting Hungary as a hub of creativity and innovative trade practices.

The event is an excellent opportunity for Hungary to showcase its strengths, capabilities and potential. With its high-level intergovernmental and business-to-business meetings, the forum will contribute to achieving Hungary’s international trade objectives and will further strengthen trade and business connections with Asia, Africa and Latin America. 1

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How the European Union joins trade dynamism with sustainable development

SANDRA GALLINA, Chief Negotiator for Mercosur and Director for Sustainable Development, European Commission

Embedding a multilateral approach is pivotal to the EU’s ethos on trade and sustainable development

The European Union (EU) is at the vanguard of marrying the values of sustainable development with the economic engine of trade. Through the incorporation of comprehensive commitments on environmental and labour provisions in all its bilateral trade agreements, the EU aims to build free and fair trading relationships. This is a reflection of EU determination to strengthen and uphold the international community’s journey that began with the Millennium Development Goals and the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio +20) and has culminated with the United Nations 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Mapping across the trade and sustainable development provisions in all recent EU trade agreements to the SDGs, we can see they are mutually reinforcing. Provisions on the protection of labour rights directly support Goal 8 on decent work, while the provisions on environmental protection support Goal 12. Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) can contribute to gender equality under Goal 5. Provisions on the protection of labour rights directly support Goal 8 on decent work, while the provisions on environmental protection support Goal 12.

The EU remains a staunch defender of trade openness as a means to boost economic growth and catalyse job creation.
Trade policy and trade agreements are not an end in themselves; they establish the legislative infrastructure which can facilitate international businesses to buy and sell, to source, manufacture and market the products that generate revenue, growth and employment.

pertaining to the circular economy, Goal 13 regarding climate action, Goal 14 on oceans and Goal 15 on land respectively.

This comprehensive contribution of EU trade policy to the SDGs goes far beyond the expectation in the 2030 Agenda that international trade would act as a means of implementation (Goal 17); put simply, as a tool for domestic revenue generation through which countries can increase their incomes to meet their other commitments to the SDGs. Indeed, during the 2030 Agenda negotiations the EU unsuccessfully proposed that all countries commit to including trade and sustainable development provisions in their trade agreements.

However, all of these actions have been included in the EU’s implementation plan for the 2030 Agenda and are outlined in the 2015 communication ‘Next Steps for a Sustainable European Future.’ Furthermore, in the New European Consensus on Development, adopted jointly by EU member states, the European Parliament and the European Commission in June at the European Development Days, the EU sets out its actions on how it will support partner countries to implement their commitments under the 2030 Agenda. This includes providing development assistance and aid for trade with a special focus on actions to implement the sustainable development provisions of our trade agreements.

TRADE OPENNESS
At the same time, international trade agreements and trade policy are under an increasingly harsh spotlight, with some commentators blaming trade for increased inequality, job insecurity, environmental degradation and more. The EU, however, remains a staunch defender of trade openness as a means to boost economic growth and catalyse job creation. When coupled with strong values on social protection and environmental stewardship, trade can be an enabler of sustainable development.

Still, trade policy and trade agreements are not an end in themselves; they establish the legislative infrastructure which can facilitate international businesses to buy and sell, to source, manufacture and market the products (goods and services) that generate revenue, growth and employment.

Trade agreements establish the rules of the game. We want all players to uphold certain standards with regard to the rights of workers and the protection of the environment. These are not European standards, but those agreed internationally at the International Labour Organization and within multilateral environmental agreements.

Embedding a multilateral approach is pivotal to the EU’s ethos on trade and sustainable development. Its agreements do not seek to ensure that partners can only produce their tradable goods and services with identical conditions to those in Europe. Instead they seek to ensure that a minimum threshold, reflecting shared values, is respected and that this threshold can and should rise over time. As such they act as a springboard for increasing benefits to workers, progressively eliminating environmental degradation and mitigating the contributory factors of climate change.

Another innovative element of the EU’s trade and sustainable development policy is the inclusion of civil-society mechanisms in all its recent trade agreements. By ensuring the involvement of participants with a direct stake – be they representatives of workers, of businesses or of organizations acting in defence of the environment – such mechanisms give oversight and ownership to the very groups who can identify problems and demand solutions on trade and sustainable development related issues.

MULTILATERALISM
The EU seeks to embed multilateralism; to create a lasting, equitable and constructive relationship with its partners; and to involve civil society in the monitoring and implementation of its trade agreements. Combined with the binding provisions on labour protection and environmental protection the EU negotiates, these elements collectively form the basis of a coherent and developmental approach to trade and sustainable development. The work is far from over of course: delivering on sustainable development goes far beyond trade and efforts are needed at multiple levels by all stakeholders.

For the EU it is crucial to work with its partners at all levels to overcome challenges pertaining to sustainable development that inevitably arise in a trading relationship between partners. As such, the EU remains fully committed to the multilateral approach to trade and will continue to play a leading role in maximizing the benefits of trade to ensure inclusive growth and sustainable development for all.

1. EU trade agreements and the Sustainable Development Goals are mutually reinforcing.
2. Trade agreements seek to ensure a minimum threshold on goods imported from partner countries.
The digital disruption of international trade has already begun

DANIELA GODOY, Head of Internationalization at e-Residency, Government of Estonia

Estonia’s e-Residency enables allows e-commerce businesses in developing countries to set up virtual shops in the European Union

Digital disruption is one of the hottest topics in the business community at the moment. From the boardrooms of the world’s largest companies to small co-working hubs filled with small businesses and startups, there’s a growing sense that the internet is changing the world so quickly they must quickly understand how they can take advantage or risk losing their business.

Today no business is unaffected by digital disruption. I recently called a plumber to fix a leaking tap in my kitchen and he told me the biggest challenge he now faced running his company is search-engine optimization. Though his customers may be local, they immediately go online to find a plumber and he has never been trained in how to get his service to appear near the top of search engine results. I only found him because the companies listed before his, which were considerably larger, were unavailable.

Jack Ma, founder of online retailer Alibaba, predicts that a staggering 90% of all business will be online in the next 30 years. That means there are enormous new opportunities emerging, although this digital disruption is creating losers as well as winners.

A significant proportion of the world’s population is presently unable to benefit from e-commerce—often simply because of where they live.
LOWERING BARRIERS

E-commerce has opened new opportunities for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) to conduct business globally by lowering traditional barriers to trade, enabling them to compete in the global market.

However, a significant proportion of the world’s population is presently unable to benefit from e-commerce—often simply because of where they live. The greatest challenges are currently faced by people in developing countries, women and other marginalized groups. Many of them are already financially excluded because services like banking are unavailable or unaffordable to them. The advance of digital technology can sometimes exacerbate this problem, as well as exclude people who don’t have the skills to succeed in the digital era.

A recent International Trade Centre (ITC) survey showed the key obstacles to cross-border trade facing MSMEs are establishing an online business; international e-payment; access to payment service providers; and a robust services sector that supports the growth of e-commerce.

These challenges of digitization in trade are most noticeable in parts of the world where the benefits are most needed. Developing and least developing countries typically have a nascent digital and legal infrastructure and lack the services to support MSMEs that wish to engage in trade. Financial and administrative barriers to establishing and managing a business may be too high, their business may not be trusted online or they may have difficulty accessing necessary tools such as international payment providers.

ESTONIA CODES

Estonia is far ahead of the curve. Children are taught to code from primary school and everyone receives a digital ID card so they can access almost all government services online. This is also why Estonia is one of the best places in the world to start a company: because costs and hassle are low, yet the opportunities to access services and trade online globally are high.

As a result, Estonia is home to a disproportionate number of successful companies despite its small population and few natural resources. Business stalwarts such as communications provider Skype, funds processor TransferWise, software maker Pipedrive and transport firm Taxify all started here.

While Estonia was the first country to declare that internet access is a social right, it is now doing something even more remarkable as the first country to offer e-Residency. Anyone in the world can fill out a simple online form to apply for a digital ID card from the Estonian government and then plug it into their computer to access Estonia’s public services online from anywhere. They can then enjoy the same business advantages as Estonians, such as the ability to create a global company based virtually in the EU with low costs and minimal hassle and then trade online with greater ease and access to more financial services.

E-Residency makes it considerably easier to run a company, but does not override existing international rules such as taxation. So when citizens around the world benefit from e-Residency, so too do their governments.

More than 25,000 people from 139 countries have applied for e-Residency, a third of them from the developing world. One of the key reasons behind this growth is the ability for people to access PayPal and receive money from international customers as a result of being e-residents.

E-TRADE FOR ALL

The e-Residency programme has now joined forces with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other international organizations for the groundbreaking e-Trade For All initiative, which can help unlock global growth by giving more people the power to start an online business.

One of the first examples of e-Trade For All in action is under way for women in Delhi, India. The Indian Institute of Technology Delhi has launched an initiative called Women Entrepreneurship and Empowerment (WEE) supported by the Indian government’s Department of Science and Technology. Participants receive business mentoring locally and also e-Residency from Estonia in order to start their companies.

As e-residents, participants are able to establish companies anywhere with added trust because they have a government-issued digital identity and operate within the European Union (EU) legal framework. They also have access to the EU business environment so they can benefit from the Single Market’s harmonized rules, access to robust financial services (including EU business banking and international payment providers) and access to a wide network of business service providers that offer globally competitive services (such as accounting and virtual offices).

While Estonia has been giving digital ID cards to its citizens and residents for around 15 years, it was only three years ago that Estonia decided to welcome its e-resident population by giving those digital ID cards to people outside the country.

People often think digital disruption is based on advanced new technology, yet it’s happening all the time with technology that has been around us for decades. Digital disruption is really about how technology enables us to think and do things in entirely new ways.

To learn more about Estonia’s e-Residency initiative, please visit e-resident.gov.ee.

1. More than 25,000 people from 139 countries have applied for an Estonian e-Residency.
2. Skype is one of the many digital companies to emerge out of Estonia.
Competing in a world of value chains

EDMUND POKU, Managing Director, Niche Cocoa Industry

There is a saying in Ghana that ‘Ghana is cocoa, and cocoa is Ghana’. Not only is Ghana the second-largest producer of cocoa in the world, but cocoa is an integral part of the nation’s fabric. It is the country’s most important export, accounting for 8% of the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and 30% of export earnings. It also provides employment for approximately 4 million cocoa-farming households, most of which are family-run on plots of less than 1.2 acres and suffer from food and income insecurity.

In the late 19th century, Ghana first started exporting raw cocoa beans to the industrialized world, where it was processed and turned into chocolate. In the 21st century, little has changed. Although some of the biggest international cocoa processing factories in the world are in Ghana, a relatively low amount of value-added processing is done locally. The same is true for refined chocolate, since the majority of chocolate bars in Ghanaian supermarkets are imported.

RISING CONSUMPTION

Meanwhile, the global cocoa value chain is at a critical point. While cocoa demand from industrial nations is stable, demand from developing economies is on the rise as a result of increasing per-capita chocolate consumption. At the same time, harvests are decreasing in producing countries due to...
Niche has shown a long-term dedication to corporate social responsibility (CSR). For example, the company received Fair Trade certification in 2011 and is now implementing a programme to provide chocolate milk to many primary schools in Ghana. This programme introduces low-income children to the taste of chocolate while providing an innovative means of increasing chocolate consumption in the country.

One additional way that Niche would like to combine its long-term growth focus with CSR initiatives is by diversifying into other processed food products such as yam tubers. Yams are a low maintenance cash crop that grows well in shaded areas, so farmers can plant them in the same acreage used for cocoa and bring them to market alongside their cocoa harvests. In this way farmers will be able to increase their income while simultaneously improving their food security as yams are a staple food in Ghana. For its part, Niche aims to use its existing supply chain to take delivery of yam tubers and process them within its existing factory footprint.

MULTI-STAKEHOLDER INITIATIVE
This type of initiative cannot be undertaken by Niche alone. Rather, it would require a concerted effort by a number of different stakeholders. Among these are local farmer cooperatives; the Ghanaian government; support institutions; financial institutions; international buyers; local retailers; and international organizations. Helping to bring these parties together is where the International Trade Centre (ITC) has relevant expertise. Its Alliance for Action (A4A) model allows each entity to advance its individual goals in a way that mutually benefits all others.

A4A is a multi-stakeholder initiative that brings together public and private actors within an agro-processing industry. Its goal is to help small-scale farmers and SMEs increase their competiveness and income and risk diversification by linking them to leading companies which purchase their crop at a fair premium. This, in turn, unlocks the farmers’ earnings potential and helps them capture more value.

For example, in 2015 a group of cocoa value chain stakeholders, including Kuapa Kokoo Farmer Union, Fair Trade, Yam Development Council, and the Government of Ghana collaborated with ITC to form a commercially driven alliance. Partnership and market opportunities were identified with an emphasis on income diversification, women’s empowerment and climate-smart agriculture. A total of US$260,000 in partner contributions was received, which were used to support 250 cocoa farmers purchase yam tuber seedlings. These farmers ultimately achieved a 22% average revenue increase while simultaneously addressing their food security concerns.

Niche was intrigued by A4A’s approach and joined the alliance in 2017. With a major cocoa industry player now aboard, ITC’s yam tuber initiative can be scaled up by the thousands of farmers in Niche’s supply chain who are also a part of Kuapa Kokoo. For its part, Niche is proud to play an even more active role in helping Ghana progress towards a more inclusive, sustainable and competitive cocoa industry.

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1. Ghana is the second largest producer of cocoa in the world.
2. Harvests are decreasing in producing countries due to ageing cocoa plantations and the impacts of pests, disease and climate change.
Harnessing a data-driven circular economy

OCTAVIO TORRES, Director and Co-founder, Valopes

Paul Hawken, an American environmentalist, entrepreneur, author and activist who has dedicated his life to environmental sustainability and changing the relationship between business and the environment, has estimated that nearly 99% of the goods we buy will become waste after six months of use.

This is a dramatic picture of a profound implication to which the current ‘take, make and dispose’ extractive industrial linear model has led us. Nowadays the earth’s natural resources are consumed faster than its regeneration rate, leading us to an ecological debt.

The circular economy as a concept has gained momentum worldwide. It aims to boost a transformation of the current economic production model that has proven unsustainable. This is due to the confluence of several factors, such as the increase in the demand for raw materials, accumulation of waste and the expansion of the population.

[The circular economy] represents an opportunity for ecosystems and nature in general by reducing and preventing the unsustainable depletion and destruction of natural resources.

Repurposing billions of tons of waste can create jobs, save resources
and its consumption capacity. Architect and industrial analyst Walter Stahel noticed that in the long run the current linear economy was unsustainable. He realized that closing material cycles could be the right way of decoupling growth and prosperity from natural resources consumption and ecosystem degradation.

The importance surrounding this new paradigm is the opportunity it brings to organizations for uplifting their business models into one designed to reduce, reuse, and hopefully remove waste from industrial processes and households, diverting the waste that goes to landfills and oceans. Instead, it would be re-routing them into the right value chain, creating a healthier economy while reducing environmental impacts. A critical objective of the circular economy is to shift the paradigm so that waste is treated as a potential resource that can be reused and recycled to gain maximum value from its original raw material.

EXTENDING LIFE CYCLES

The opportunity behind the circular economy is not only related to the possibility of extending the productive life cycle of materials. It also represents an opportunity for ecosystems and nature in general by reducing and preventing the unsustainable depletion and destruction of natural resources. However, the most interesting opportunity is the exciting economic potential for reinventing a sustainable path for regenerative economic growth. This economic potential considers the natural boundaries of the earth and the challenges ahead of us regarding the population and its expected income growth in the future.

Nature seems to maximize the value of natural resources, where ecosystems have the property of reusing materials without producing waste throughout their cycle. Meanwhile, the story in our present economy (productive and consumption systems) is very different: during 2016 mankind generated some 11.5 billion tons of waste. Most of it has low recovery and recycling rates (only 25%-30 %) while yielding high landfill rates (roughly 70%) (Waste Management & Recycling, UBS, 2017). This volume of waste is expected to double by 2025 and to double again by 2050 (No time to waste, BALM 2013). That information fully represents the type of linear economic paradigm we are trapped in today.

The opportunity of recovering value from waste seems limitless. Of the 11.5 billion tons of waste generated, less than 30% is being recycled. This situation becomes a great opportunity for closing the economic cycle and preventing valuable resources from ending up in landfills and oceans. Moreover, in the emerging world, these low rates of recycling and reuse has shown to be an opportunity for part of the society to improve their life quality.

Recently, more and more families of waste pickers are helping to repurpose waste, not only through collection but also by sorting it and taking an active part in emerging closed-loop business opportunities. Waste is becoming a resource that is lifting people and families out of poverty and providing cheap resources of raw materials for the manufacture of goods. Examples include construction of for socially inclusive housing, with the blocks made completely with diverted plastic waste (Conceptos Plásticos); production of industrial paint for construction made with Styrofoam (Idea-Tec); and manufacture of skateboards made with discarded plastic fishing nets (Buro).

These closed-loop solutions are emerging in South America, where waste pickers are involved as a critical part of the consolidation of new value chains that helps repurpose waste by transforming it into raw material.

To continue strengthening and scaling these types of closed-loop solutions, the way we treat information must be improved. Real-time information on the availability of waste is a key factor for their success. This is and will continue to be the biggest challenge restricting the substantial increase of recycling rates worldwide.

DIVERTING WASTE

Unfortunately, without the right information at the right time about the resource location and quantity available, it will continue to be almost impossible to effectively scale the creation of closed-loop solutions that divert waste and transform it into valuable resources. In consideration of this lack of available information, Valopes has been working for three years to create an agile, robust and user-friendly cloud-based platform. It enables industrial waste generators, waste managers, and hopefully waste pickers to improve the quality of data on the waste they are producing, recovering and landfilling. This generates the potential of creating opportunities for the identification of synergies enabling us to divert waste from landfills.

Having this in mind, the possibility of increased implementation of closed-loop solutions harnessed by the power of data and information will not only improve the net efficiency of the economy by creating new business opportunities, but will also have a direct positive impact on society. This will specifically impact on waste pickers already developing a crucial task in emerging countries where there is a lack of recycling infrastructure and culture. Finally, it will also have a direct positive impact on the environment, where the reuse of resources will help reduce its depletion while preserving natural resources.

1. The circular economy as a concept has gained momentum worldwide.
2. Mauritius is looking to boost its e-commerce competitiveness.

Global Footprint Network 2013
Meet Sona Jobarteh, a master of the West African harp kora, who uses music to inspire young Gambians and create quality jobs at home

SONA JOBARTEH

Sona Jobarteh is traditional and modern, local and global, music-minded and business-minded. Above all, she is Gambian.

‘Anywhere I go, it’s always to represent The Gambia,’ Jobarteh says. ‘I am proud to represent the smallest country in West Africa.’

As a master of the kora – a 21-string West African harp – Jobarteh has become a sort of spokeswoman for her country, travelling the world and performing in countries including Brazil, Ghana, India, the Republic of Korea, Lithuania, Mexico and Switzerland.

Only those born into a West African griot family can take up the kora professionally: Jobarteh’s grandfather is an icon in Gambian cultural and musical history and her cousin is also known for his mastery of the instrument. Unique to Western Africa, griots are historians, storytellers, poets and musicians who have traditionally advised royalty.

The people who are best suited to develop the country are Gambians themselves.
NEW TRADITIONS

While the griot profession is not a male prerogative, ‘women don’t play the kora inside the griot tradition,’ Jobarteh says. ‘It’s a male tradition, and it has been for 700 years. To take it professionally, there are really very few women who do so and in The Gambia there are none – besides me.’

‘We struggled to promote our culture outside of the Gambia, so the fact that there is a person doing such a thing is only taken as a positive thing.’

For her country as a whole, promoting a new image is also a priority. The Gambia is undergoing changes and re-emerging on the global scene after 22 years of authoritarian rule. President Adama Barrow was elected in December 2016, opening the way to social, economic and cultural development.

‘Trade is the driver of inclusive growth and prosperity,’ said Vice President Fatoumata Tambajang during the Aid for Trade Global Review 2017 at the World Trade Organization in July. ‘Women are excited with the change. Youth are excited with the change. They are creative, they have the political will, they want to move with their lives, they want to really increase their contributions to nation-building.’

Jobarteh is among those seeking to move forward. The first step is to raise scholastic standards.

INVESTING IN YOUTH

‘Getting an education – a good education – is vital to your success internationally,’ says Jobarteh, who studied in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland at the Royal College of Music and SOAS University of London. SOAS is the only higher-education institution in Europe that specializes in the study of Asia, Africa and the Middle East, according to its website.

‘Just as important was going back to Africa after completing my degree courses,’ she adds. ‘So many people leave the country and don’t return after they gain their qualifications. We are not getting the right expertise coming in and the people who are best suited to develop the country are Gambians themselves.’

Youth in particular would benefit from members of the diaspora returning home to share knowledge and skills. The average Gambian is under the age of 21, according to the World Factbook of the Central Intelligence Agency. High unemployment, especially among young people, has driven both domestic migration and migration abroad.

Fostering entrepreneurship and creating quality jobs at home would help strengthen and stabilize The Gambia and benefit other countries, especially those that have traditionally received migrants.

Somewhat unexpectedly, music can play a key role in making this happen.

INSTITUTIONALIZING CULTURE

‘Culture is very important for opening up avenues to trade,’ Jobarteh says. ‘We can use that as a channel to train people in areas that they otherwise feel a little bit intimidated to enter because they may not have the qualifications.’

Because music, culture and the arts easily cross borders, they can serve as gateways to business and entrepreneurship.

Jobarteh is doing this by a process she calls ‘institutionalizing aspects of our culture’. She established the Amadu Bansang Jobarteh School of Music for children and youth, which specializes in Manding music, one of West Africa’s oldest surviving musical traditions. The goal is to invest in the youth and keep traditions alive by adapting to modern times.

She is also partnering with the International Trade Centre through The Gambia Youth Empowerment Project, funded by the European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Africa. The project is designed to reduce migration pressures in the country by fostering youth entrepreneurship and job creation through the production of value-added goods and services, as well as stronger links to international markets.

Visit the Youth Empowerment Project webpage for more information: http://www.intracen.org/yep

2. Music, culture and the arts can serve as gateways to business and entrepreneurship.
Currently, there are several levels of discussion that refer to making trade more inclusive through digitalization. One level considers access to information. Another emphasizes functionality: simplifying local submission of information, documentation and payments (for example, through a national access window) and its cross-border compliance equivalent. Yet, when considering access to information, it must be determined whether the notion of transparency is merely a legal requirement or if it includes functional outcomes.

Accessing trade information can be a difficult prospect, as disparate systems provide data inputs of international organizations and governments. While the world is rich in trade-enabling data and information, a lack of functionality originates in its delivery architecture. In this case, valuable and highly skilled human effort is required to navigate the requisite information. This creates costs for consumers, firms and
While the world is rich in trade-enabling data and information, a lack of functionality originates in its delivery architecture.

governments. However, with technological developments and the emergence of the internet, there are new opportunities to reduce costs associated with asymmetries in the global ‘information system’ for trade.

Additionally, the advent of a formalized system for collecting national rules and regulations in categories of non-tariff measures (NTMs) has changed how we discuss trade policy. In the past there were only two means of resolving associated issues: harmonization of regulations or mutual recognition. Now, digital technology is enabling opportunities to mitigate the costs associated with NTMs without governments having to change regulations.

While established approaches created the potential for a democratic deficit, new options can avoid this risk (for example, by changing the medium of policy delivery). A market-relevant level of transparency empowers users, reducing uncertainty and informational barriers, and lowers the costs associated with NTMs that hinder or prevent micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) from participating in global markets.

DATA AND NEW BARRIERS
There is an entire ‘supply chain’ affecting the data and information that can enable trade. Its efficiency is critical to optimizing market outcomes, including the participation of MSMEs in trade. Its functionality depends on the adequate provision of quality data, information, and minimizing the degree of fragmentation.

Regarding interoperability, it is not enough to provide inputs online: they must be easy to find, understand and process. New initiatives, such as open data and linked data, provide a foundation for the development of new navigation tools. Access to information is not solely about supply or quality: it includes its organization, format and the medium through which it is delivered.

The fragmentation of the information or data supply chain increases costs for MSMEs while greater interoperability decreases them. For example, the World Trade Organization (WTO) Trade Facilitation Agreement requires governments to establish a single access window where traders can submit queries for necessary information. These integrated, internet-enabled, platforms can decrease search times, reduce capability dependencies and lower transaction costs for parties to a cross-border transaction.

Decreasing fragmentation is largely a question of system design. New technologies enable better designs, linkages and market outcomes. Consideration must be given to the set of best practices that will emerge from various initiatives. It is not unreasonable to project that solutions based on better access to information through digital technology will be a major source of best practices for trade facilitation going forward, particularly those associated with implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

ENTERPRISE SUCCESS
The speed of information and the governance of data flows can determine the success of firms of all sizes. Several countries are enacting rules and standards for data protection. A regulatory-induced fragmentation of the data supply chain may be seen as a digital trade oversight. Although government’s data protection and localization regulations may present a real threat to the future of digitally enabled trade, there are also many opportunities.

Through open-data initiatives and legal-technology policies, both public and private activities are creating potential efficiency gains within the data supply chain for global trade. The 2017 adoption of the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL) Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records (MLETR) suggests that regulations for the use of digital records are becoming mainstreamed. UNCITRAL has adopted the law with the expectation of benefits for speed of information transmission, reuse of record data and a move toward entirely paperless trade. The door also remains open for new multilateral rules at the WTO to clarify obligations related to trade digitization and access to information.

MORE INCLUSIVE TRADE
Such initiatives are largely to benefit small business. This is particularly relevant when considering the potential for smaller firms to leverage embedded trade-automation technologies in private, business-to-consumer (B2C), e-commerce marketplaces such as Alibaba, Amazon.com and eBay. Different stages of global value chains are also worth considering. There are also significant implications for MSMEs that produce intermediate goods and do not use e-commerce platforms to connect into global value chains.

Although present options for trade digitization to improve access to information are not perfect, they path toward better policy delivery and improved market outcomes. For now, working on access to data and trade information may represent the best starting point for a discussion on making trade more inclusive with digital technology.

1. There is an entire ‘supply chain’ affecting the data and information that can enable trade.
2. Fragmentation of the information or data supply chain increases costs for MSMEs while greater interoperability decreases them.
Ensuring better trade through regional integration is key to re-booting the Afghan economy

Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in Afghanistan that want to become a part of the global trade market are faced with a myriad of problems that render this objective very difficult, if not impossible, in many cases.

Afghan SMEs face a plethora of barriers. These include a lack of competitiveness and knowledge of international markets, crumbling infrastructure, a poor business environment, declining investments, and economic and political and security instability. Being a landlocked country adds to the problem, which increases significantly the costs of exports, as does a shortage of trained personnel and skilled labour, and access to finance. A key challenge is ensuring that the country is re-integrated into the regional and global economy.

Though there is no doubt that SMEs based in Afghanistan need assistance, the country has made remarkable progress in addressing trade barriers. In recent years governance structures have become more stable, more jobs have been created and a greater number of people have access to education and healthcare services. Increased economic growth would help create sustainable alternative employment for even more people, particularly those who are currently the most at disadvantage, such as the young and inexperienced.

STRAIGHT CROSSROADS

Despite such challenges, Afghanistan remains at a strategic crossroads and could take greater advantage of this to export its own goods or be used as transit to link for bordering countries and beyond. This could help ensure that the country benefit more from better cooperation with its neighbours and strengthen its ties with the global economy.
Afghanistan remains at a strategic crossroads and could take greater advantage of this to export its own goods.

A sure sign the country is taking steps to be a part of the global system, is the country’s recent accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). This demonstrates that the country is on the right track and is a recognition of the work done by the Government of Afghanistan and the private sector to align themselves with the multilateral community.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

However, much has yet to be done before Afghan SMEs can fully benefit from access to regional and international markets. Internal conflict continues to negatively affect Afghanistan’s human, social and economic development, effectively discouraging vital private investment.

Trade and investment institutions are not as efficient as they could be. Focusing on reworking costly and tedious regulatory requirements and approaching trade facilitation on a regional level can improve trade and investment immensely.

The international community understands the urgent need to address these issues in the interests of regional economic cooperation, reduced trade barriers, connectivity and creating a business environment that can boost the country’s competitiveness and potential. Many countries and international agencies have promised financial and political support for the reform agenda proposed by the government.

This includes a joint project by the EU and the International Trade Centre to strengthen the capacity of government institutions to formulate and implement trade strategies and policies, improve cross border movement of goods, enhance and quality standards of products to meet international standards and equip Afghan businesses better to seize the opportunities stemming Afghanistan’s accession to the WTO.

‘Moving forward, the private-sector development agenda must be a priority for Afghanistan if it wants to shift from aid dependency towards sustainable growth and job creation,’ says Franz-Michael Skjold Mellbin, former ambassador of the EU to Afghanistan. ‘The ITC-implemented National Export Strategy will guide Afghanistan’s efforts to realize the potential of its exports sector as an important driver for economic growth.’

Support for the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement will provide Afghanistan with faster customs clearance that will better enable SMEs to get goods to neighbouring countries and ports without competitiveness-reducing delays, which will improve Afghanistan’s appeal as a transit route.

To accelerate trade and growth, Afghanistan’s short and medium-term focus needs to be on strengthening relations with its neighbours and trading across borders. For job creation and economic growth, the country should also focus on regional trade and strengthening Afghan SMEs’ competitiveness, along with improving the business environment.

‘Finalizing a national export strategy will be a top priority, to be followed by the implementation of its recommendations for reforms to catalyse export-led growth and job creation in promising sectors,’ said George Cunningham, deputy head of the EU delegation in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan’s potential is clear and can be realized by making it easier for SMEs to trade via an effective domestic reform agenda and improved trade relations with its regional partners and the international community.

1. Finalizing a national export strategy is a top priority for Afghanistan.
2. Increasing the number of women in trade will help strengthen the Afghan economy.
Spicing up south-south trade

AMAN GOEL, Programme Adviser, and GOVIND VENUPRASAD, SITA coordinator, International Trade Centre

The fruits of disappointment: wow ITC drew lessons from an attempt to revive Ethiopia’s ginger sector

Some 80,000 farmers in Ethiopia depend on ginger cultivation. A 2011 outbreak of bacterial wilt, a plant disease, reduced ginger yields nearly to zero, putting their livelihoods at grave risk.

Four years later, as the International Trade Centre (ITC) Supporting Indian Trade and Investment for Africa (SITA) project started its implementation phase, spices were being looked at as a promising sector for promoting increased trade and investment between Ethiopia and India. In meetings with ITC and other project partners, Ethiopian officials argued any strategy for improving farmers’ livelihoods through spice exports would make little sense unless the ginger sector was rehabilitated. During one session, Ethiopian colleagues demanded to know how the project would help ginger farmers. This priority, though emphatically voiced by the project’s Ethiopian counterparts, sat uneasily with SITA’s post-farm gate focus.

The SITA team weighed the risks. On one hand, tackling plant disease went beyond ITC core competences. On the other, the disease was in effect a supply-side constraint on export capacity and the payoff, in terms of potential livelihood improvement, was enormous. Moreover, given
Development assistance provides a unique opportunity to invest in projects where market risks might dissuade private investors even though the potential social and economic returns are high.

ginger’s widespread cultivation in India, where farmers also cope with bacterial wilt, the situation tied neatly into SITA’s understating of leveraging Indian investment and expertise to boost exports and job creation in eastern Africa.

RESEARCH AND EVALUATION

The project team decided to undertake a survey of affected farms in Ethiopia’s Oromia region to evaluate the extent of the problem while consulting Ethiopian stakeholders, government and local research agencies across the region about solutions SITA could offer. An Indian subject matter expert was identified: Dr. C.K. George, the former executive director of the Spices Board of India. Following desk research, ginger experts and ITC team members went on field visits, meeting with dozens of farmers and five processors in the wilt-affected region. Incomes and morale had fallen drastically and farmers were unsure of what to blame for the destruction of their crops.

A compelling case emerged for a pilot intervention. The options reviewed ranged from leaving the land fallow to quarantining affected areas in a manner worthy of a science-fiction movie. Ultimately, what seemed most viable was what George described as ‘a tailored package of practices’ that had helped India learn to live with the disease. India has developed practical solutions that may not eradicate the disease completely but allows farmers to manage good yields in a low-cost innovative hack to solve a problem – the SITA team had been seeking.

Given the unusual risks associated with the pilot initiative, a proposal was prepared immediately for approval by SITA’s funder, the United Kingdom’s Department for International Development, as well as ITC management. Once approval was secured, the team reassessed the feasibility of replicating Indian bacterial wilt management practices in Ethiopia. A large commercial farmer agreed to try to the package of practices and set up a demonstrator farm to try new planting, ploughing and fungicide use techniques. Procedures such as ‘soil solarization’ – mulching soil and then leaving it in the sun under clear plastic during the hot season – were also practised in an attempt to use heat to kill pests. The idea was that if the demonstration succeeded, smaller farmers could replicate the improvements.

GINGER REHABILITATION

Ethiopian government and research institutions were invited to be part of the process. News of the pilot programme started to spread. The Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Development and Marketing Authority (ECTDMA), Ethiopia’s nodal agency for spices, contacted SITA’s national coordinator in Ethiopia to express appreciation for the initiative and offered to convene a national workshop to develop a work-plan for ginger rehabilitation. This represented a significant step forward for ginger farmers, who had been suffering for lack of a coherent plan to tackle the bacterial wilt problem.

The workshop was held in April 2016, hosted jointly by ECTDMA and ITC. The gathering brought together a wide cross-section of stakeholders from Ethiopia’s spices industry, including the state minister for agriculture. It led to the development of a 30-month ginger rehabilitation plan funded entirely through national resources. In parallel, with ginger now firmly on the policy radar, other donors pooled resources to invest in revising the sector. Consequently, numerous workshops were organized across the country and additional approaches were tested, such as intercropping with turmeric and planting lab-grown ginger. Farmers described the concerted efforts to tackle bacterial wilt as a ray of hope they had not seen for years.

Meanwhile, the ITC team closely monitored the ginger project. The demonstration farm sent crop pictures fortnightly to George to seek his advice. Despite the interventions and the surveillance, however, the crop due for harvest in December failed. The package of practices that worked in India did not produce successful results in Ethiopia.

INITIAL SUCCESS

Yet when the SITA team carried out an objective assessment of the interventions, it became clear that farmers in the country’s Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples’ Region were receiving far more support than before the pilot programme had started. Though it is too soon to know whether these alternative approaches to combating ginger wilt will fare any better, results should become visible in 2018.

From SITA’s point of view, the team managed to generate goodwill and to expand its clientele. The SITA team will thus continue to allocate a part of its resources to promising high-risk, high-impact pilots. Such investments will happen within a clear framework: there must be a compelling case for intervention and both public and private-sector partners must be committed, with ‘skin in the game,’ to seeing the initiative through. One such example is the recent introduction of new hybrid chili varieties in Rwanda with an eye to exporting to India and other markets.

Development assistance provides a unique opportunity to invest in projects where market risks might dissuade private investors even though the potential social and economic returns are high. When such projects merit strong support, fear of failure should not discourage us from pursuing them. At ITC we are committed to doing so. While we may not always succeed, we learn from our disappointments.

1. Ginger is promoting increased trade and investment between Ethiopia and India.solutions to revive the industry.
2. Ginger is traded at a market in Addis Ababa, the Ethiopian capital.
Agenda
from 24 October 2017

Upcoming events

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Connecting one million women entrepreneurs to market by 2020

1 Champion. Quality data
2 Enact. Fair policies
3 Secure. Government contracts
4 Strike. Business deals
5 Enable. Market access
6 Unlock. Financial services
7 Grant. Ownership rights

#SheTrades
New technical papers
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SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL STANDARDS: FROM FRAGMENTATION TO COORDINATION
Voluntary standards have been rising fast, leading to similar standards operating in the same markets. This study finds multiple standards in 86 of 90 markets it reviewed, creating confusion for consumers and producers alike. This joint report with the European University Institute is the second of a series that goes from identifying social and environmental standards to outlining markets that are most fragmented. It offers recommendations for coordination for standard-setting organizations and policymakers.


NEW PATHWAYS TO E-COMMERCE: A GLOBAL MSME COMPETITIVENESS SURVEY
This first International Trade Centre (ITC) e-commerce survey provides valuable insights that will allow countries to shape policies and practices that address business needs on the ground. To ensure that micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) can benefit from e-commerce, they need better access to e-platforms, payment and delivery services; streamlined customs procedures; and targeted skill building. These are the key findings from this ITC survey of 2,200 MSMEs in 111 countries. In addition, the survey reveals that the share of logistics costs over final price is nearly doubled in developing countries compared with developed countries and that product return is a significant cost factor for enterprises from least developed countries.

http://www.intracen.org/publication/New-Pathways-to-E-commerce/

SHETRADES: PROMOTING SME COMPETITIVENESS IN INDONESIA
While women make up almost half of Kenya’s labour force, they remain on the margins of business ownership: only 9% of Kenya’s firms are majority women-owned. Kenyan women entrepreneurs say they need better access to loans, business registries, patents, quality certifications and affordable internet access to address the gap, according to an ITC SME Competitiveness Survey of women-led firms in the country. The survey was carried out as part of the SheTrades Initiative to connect one million women to markets by 2020.

http://www.intracen.org/publication/SheTrades-Indonesia/

SHETRADES: PROMOTING SME COMPETITIVENESS IN KENYA
Being a women-owned company negatively affects the credibility of their business, say Indonesian women entrepreneurs in the services sector. They also need better access to patents, internet access, quality certifications, marketing opportunities and customer outreach to run a business successfully, according to an ITC SME Competitiveness Survey of women-led firms in the country. The survey was carried out as part of the SheTrades Initiative to connect one million women to markets by 2020.

http://www.intracen.org/publication/SheTrades-Kenya/
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