Promoting SME competitiveness in Saint Lucia: *Wider access to better market information*

Gaining wider access to higher-quality market information is key for firms in Saint Lucia. Results from 200 surveyed enterprises show that firm size, sector and integration into international value chains affect the extent of this access.

To improve competitiveness, the Saint Lucia Government and its Trade Export Promotion Agency (TEPA) are upgrading firms’ digital access to data and training stakeholders about their use.

Market information covers consumer preferences, expectations, habits, and the size or profitability of market segments. Recognizing the importance of access to, and quality of, this information, ITC and TEPA carried out an SME Competitiveness Survey in 2017 that asked firms about the information available to them, among other things. The survey focused on three sectors – manufacturing, food and beverages, and services.

**Firm size and sector matter**

While a significant share of firms reported having good access to information about the market in which they operate, micro and small firms appear less knowledgeable about these critical issues than medium-sized firms. A larger share of medium-sized enterprises perceived the availability of information as high or very high. Manufacturing firms, while still a small proportion of Saint Lucia’s economy, appear more vulnerable to information gaps.

Even enterprises in the services sector, which is a major contributor to the country’s output, seem to struggle with wide access to market information – about a quarter of responding firms reported having no to very low available information.

For those firms that do access information, a large share viewed it as high quality. Nonetheless, size and sectoral differences matter.

**Trade information system**

TEPA’s website is becoming a hub for many of the country’s exporters and foreign investors. Its trade information system includes market intelligence reports, trade guides, standards and quality recognition catalogues, customs and excise documents, and more.

The Government of Saint Lucia is also expanding the availability of data and information through its newly launched Open Data Portal (https://data.govt.lc). In June 2018, it complemented this information access with a Digital Literacy Boot Camp, organized together with the World Bank Group, Code for Africa, and SlashRoots Foundation. In this boot camp, civil servants, including officers from TEPA, and private citizens of various backgrounds learned how to acquire, use, analyse and present data to fit their purposes.
TEPA is planning to make more data and information available using the Open Data Portal, the organization’s websites, and the media so that its clients and the general public have greater access to TEPA generated data. Promoting awareness of, and access to, Saint Lucia’s various data outlets and services could help address a perceived lack of availability of market information in Saint Lucia.


Saint Lucia’s trade information system covers a broad range of information

Source: Based on http://tepa.org.lc/trade-information-system

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived availability of market information</th>
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<td>Very poor/poor</td>
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<td>Micro</td>
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<td>Small</td>
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<td>Medium-sized</td>
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<td>OVERALL</td>
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Note: Figures indicate the share of firms providing each type of evaluation in the total number of surveyed firms. Micro firms are those with 1-4 employees (including the owner), small firms are those with 5-19 employees, and medium-sized firms are those with 20-99 employees.


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ITC SME Competitiveness Benchmarking

ITC has developed an SME Competitiveness Benchmarking survey allowing countries to assess the health of their enterprises by identifying their strengths and weaknesses. To meet this objective, the survey captures a wide range of factors which determine firm competitiveness: www.intracen.org/SMEBenchmarking.