Coordinating a Regional Approach to Overcoming Trade Obstacles Related to Non-Tariff Measures Across the Arab Countries
**Donor:** USAID  
**Timeframe:** 2014-2017  
**Geographic coverage:** Arab region

**Objective:** Generate greater trade integration among countries in the Arab region, and between them and the rest of the world through the implementation of a regional approach to improving the transparency, harmonization and awareness of NTMs in the Arab region; and to reduce related trade barriers.

**Strategy:** The objectives will be achieved by working closely with the League of Arab States in the framework of implementation of GAFTA and involving national trade facilitation committees where they exist.

**Beneficiaries:**  
- Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) doing business in the Arab region;  
- Trade support institutions and trade facilitation actors;  
- Policymakers.

**Expected results:**  
- Promote transparency and awareness of NTMs through data collection, online dissemination and surveys;  
- Enhance harmonization of requirements and procedures working at regional level in collaboration with the League of Arab States and other regional groupings as relevant;  
- Build regional capacity on policy leadership and coordination.

The project aims to facilitate the coordination and implementation of a regional approach to improve the transparency of non-tariff measures (NTMs) in the Arab region, and to overcome related trade obstacles. Analysis of trade-pattern complementarity suggests that trade between Arab states is well below its potential despite preferential trade agreements that reduce import duties on regional trade. ITC’s enterprise-level surveys and cross country trade analysis reveal that non-tariff obstacles are to blame, hampering private sector competitiveness and increasing the time and cost of doing intra-regional business.

Challenging NTMs reported by firms participating in ITC’s surveys include:  
- Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT), specifically product standards, and conformity assessment;  
- Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Measures;  
- Customs procedures, rules of Origin and other trade-related measures.

Firms also call for greater transparency of market regulations, trade procedures and fees as well as certification requirements.
Strategic partners and beneficiaries

At national level, strategic partners include:

- Policymakers, particularly Ministries of Trade, Finance and other key technical ministries;
- Public and private trade support institutions;
- Customs authorities.

National strategic partners will play a key role in promoting the harmonization of requirements and practices related to SPS, TBT, rules of origin and customs procedures. They will also assist in the collection of NTM data and customs procedures.

At regional level, strategic partners include:

- League of Arab States and other regional groupings such as GCC, AMU and Agadir Agreement member countries;
- ITFC as the leader of the Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States;
- Other regional partners outside the Arab countries, including: the European Commission; the Union for the Mediterranean; and the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).

ITC will identify synergies and complement the activities related to harmonization of requirements and procedures of other regional partners, such as the Gulf Cooperation Council Standardization Organization and the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization.

Links with other ITC initiatives

The project has strong synergies with and is being implemented in coordination with:

- ITC’s NTM programme;
- The Aid for Trade Initiative for Arab States, launched by ITFC;
- The EuroMed Trade and Investment Facilitation Mechanism, an EU funded project implemented by ITC.
ABOUT ITC

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. ITC assists businesses in developing countries to become more competitive in global markets, speeding economic development and contributing to the achievement of the United Nations Global Goals for sustainable development.

ABOUT USAID

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is the lead U.S. Government development agency. USAID works to end extreme global poverty and enable resilient, democratic societies to realize their potential. It supports countries’ efforts to achieve sustained and road-based economic growth creating opportunities for people to lift themselves, their families, and their societies out of poverty, away from violent extremism and instability, and toward a more prosperous future. USAID’s “aid for trade” assistance helps countries take advantage of global economic opportunities and harness trade as a driver of shared prosperity and job creation.