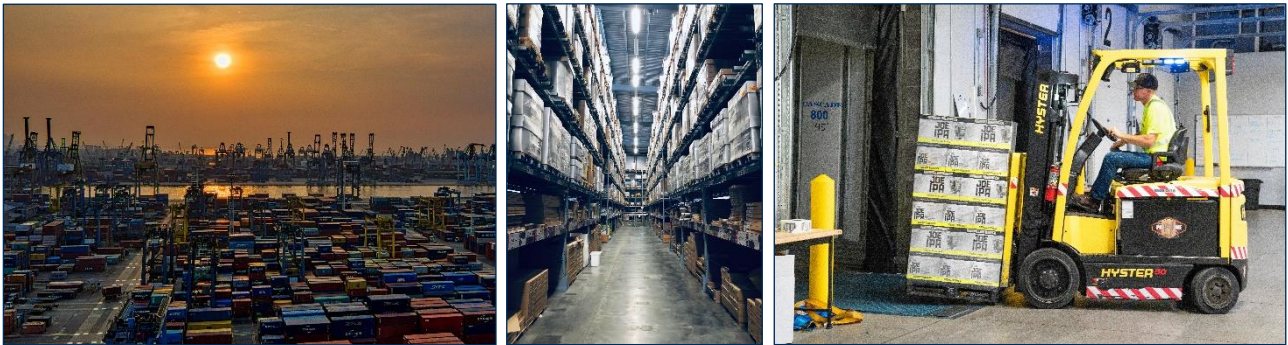


Evaluation of the ITC Trade Facilitation Programme



OVERVIEW

THE PROGRAMME

Ensuring quick and easy facilitation of imports and exports is critical to the competitiveness of SMEs. **Significant costs for importers and exporters are caused by inefficient control and clearance procedures at customs and other border authorities**, unnecessary border formalities and documentation obligations, and opaque administrative fees and charges.

The 2013 WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation addresses these challenges and is supposed to improve the movement, release and clearance of goods.

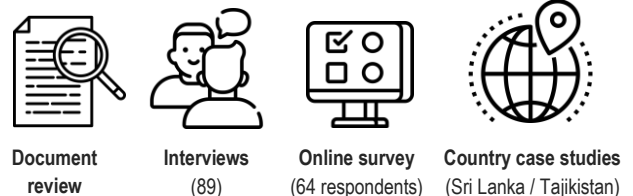
ITC's Trade Facilitation Programme (TFP) provides technical assistance to effectively operationalize the Agreement. While doing so, the TFP works in partnership with other relevant institutions such as UNCTAD and WCO to provide the necessary support.

THE EVALUATION

The evaluation assessed the work of the TFP within the 5-year period 2014-18. It was carried out to **assess the extent to which the programme achieves its intended results**, to identify areas where it has been most effective, and to provide recommendations for its future implementation.

The evaluation used a mixed method approach and was theory-based, which means it analyzed if activities contributed to intended results as foreseen by the programme's theory of change.

METHODS USED



Document review

Interviews (89)

Online survey (64 respondents)

Country case studies (Sri Lanka / Tajikistan)

RESULTS IN A NUTSHELL

- The programme's **main activities and focus have evolved over time**: from broad-based awareness raising about the WTO Agreement to in-depth country support relating to specific needs.
- The programme is delivering **good, timely and relevant work**, driven by a highly committed and resourceful team, whose work and client relationship is much appreciated by partners, funders and beneficiaries alike.
- By doing so, TFP has **successfully established ITC as one of the key organizations** offering support to implement the WTO Agreement.
- But with the programme's success and evolution also comes **growth that needs to be well-steered, managed and coordinated** in house.

WHAT GOT EVALUATED:	Trade Facilitation Programme
WHO IS DOING THAT:	Trade facilitation team, which is part of the section <i>Trade Facilitation & Policy for Business</i> (DMD/TFPB)
WHAT'S THE CONTEXT:	WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation (TFA). The TFA contains provisions for technical assistance and capacity building to support its implementation in developing and least developed countries.
PROGRAMME DURATION:	Established in 2014 and ongoing
EVALUATED TIMEFRAME:	The 5-year period 2014 to 2018
EVALUATED PORTFOLIO:	11 projects, 206 activities delivered in 75 countries, comprising a total budget of approx. \$7 million
MAIN ACTIVITIES:	Awareness raising of the TFA; Training and advisory services on categorization, sequencing and prioritization of TFA measures; Private sector capacity building; Support for national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs); Development of project proposals and implementation of TFA measures; Regional harmonization of trade facilitation practices

MAIN FINDINGS

RELEVANCE & ALIGNMENT: TFP's activities have been timely, being aligned to the evolution of the WTO Agreement and countries' needs for ratification and measure implementation. The programme's activity focus evolved from broad-based awareness raising about the TFA to in-depth country support relating to specific needs and targeting fewer states. The TFP mostly chose to respond to demand rather than focusing on countries and issues that it considered priorities, partially due to available funding. Therefore, targeted support for LDCs can be strengthened. Alignment to ITC's corporate mission, goals, and results framework is strong and the programme did raise ITC's profile in the area of trade facilitation at a global level. Nonetheless, communication should be improved to increase visibility.

EFFECTIVENESS: A variety of activities have contributed to the programme's achievements, such as the participation to high-level events, publications, training and advisory services and support for the implementation of TFA measures. Activities that have been particularly appreciated by beneficiaries are the support for private-public dialogues, primarily through national trade facilitation committees (NTFCs); the establishment of Trade Facilitation Portals, providing guidance on procedural requirements for importation, exportation or transit; as well as more recent SME training activities on trade facilitation-related issues (Training-of-trainer and on-the-job coaching).

The wide interest among developing countries to learn more about the TFA has been a major supportive factor as is the fact that much practical work remains to be done. At the same time, implementation depends largely on factors outside TFP's influence: clear buy-in from stakeholders at a very high level is often required.

EFFICIENCY & SYNERGIES: The close involvement of TFP's staff in all the organised activities has been a hallmark of the programme so far and contributed to its success by establishing close working relationships with governments. However, the team's capacities are reaching their limits both technically and in terms of the team size and administrative support, particularly in view of the steadily growing programme scale. Project management needs strengthening and programme documentation is fragmented. TFP has developed a very good collaboration with many development partners, notably UNCTAD and UNECE. On the other hand, collaboration with other teams in ITC is sometimes marked by an element of competition and has room for improvement.

IMPACT (LONG-TERM CHANGE): It is too early to assess measurable impact of the programme on trade volumes, costs and time. But findings in trade facilitation literature suggest that TFP support will have a positive and significant impact on exports and trade costs. Support provided to changes in trade policy and regulations tends to have a positive and significant impact on exports, trade costs, and time of trading, while the promotion of digital trade procedures is likely to have a strong impact in reducing trade costs.

SUSTAINABILITY: The sustainability of recent activities is strongly based on the assumption that governments and chambers will take ownership after programme support ends. The evaluation has found supporting evidence for this in several cases. Scaling up was achieved very successfully in the TFA awareness raising activities. Recent activities targeting the private sector show good potential for scaling up and replicability but also face challenges to be well adapted to specific country contexts and beneficiary needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

RECOMMENDATIONS

To further improve alignment with the SDGs, strengthen the focus on LDCs and the inclusion of SDG-related content into programme activities.

Continue fostering public-private dialogue on trade facilitation reform and work on digital trade procedures such as Trade Facilitation Portals.

Ensure in-house communication and coordination regarding SME training activities.

Foster internal communication and cooperation in-house to take advantage of available expertise and potential synergies as well as to avoid overlap.

In light of increasing delivery, provide a clear and detailed staffing and work plan to ensure that necessary expertise and capacity will be provided in time and in a sustainable manner.

Planning, reporting and communication offer room for improvement. Moreover, the programme's theory of change should be updated and associated monitoring data reliably collected.

AGREED FOLLOW-UP ACTIONS

Proactively liaise with *Division of Country Programmes* (DCP) teams to identify project development opportunities in LDCs, and to review TFP standard materials and activities to include discussion on SDGs where relevant.

Continue technical assistance services in these areas and build upon these core offers to tailor the design and implementation of other trade facilitation reform. Ensure regular information-sharing between UNCTAD and ITC on further potential areas for portal implementation.

Engage with colleagues in the section *Sector and Enterprise Competitiveness* and ensure that TFP activities to coach and train SMEs to efficiently comply with cross border reforms do not overlap, but complement SME trainings conducted by others.

Regularly review project portfolio to ensure that activities are designed to reflect synergies as per respective expertise of different teams to enhance cooperation and coordination with other ITC teams.

Develop a detailed staffing and work plan, which will be developed with members of the TFP team and shared with Senior Management. Engage with Senior Management for additional staffing and appropriate funding arrangement.

Organize an internal workshop to sensitize the team on ITC's results management approach. Review indicators and plan monthly meetings to review TFPs results against programme and projects objectives. These actions are expected to lead to improved quality and comprehensiveness of reporting.

SUPPORT TO SDGs



INDICATOR

- 5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere.
- 9.3 Increase the access of small-scale industrial and other enterprises, in particular in developing countries, to financial services, including affordable credit, and their integration into value chains and markets.
- 17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020.
- 17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships.

SUPPORT

- TFP contributes to authorities implementing changes to avoid gender discrimination, e.g. by supporting the automation of cross-border transactions through initiatives such as Single Windows.
- The programme helps to connect SMEs to international markets and global value chains. The programme also has had an impact on SME capacity to compete within the immediate business environment and at the macro level, and on SME capacity to connect within the immediate business environment.
- TFP support will have a positive and significant impact on exports and trade costs. Support provided to changes in trade policy and regulations tends to have a positive and significant impact on exports, trade costs, and time of trading, while the promotion of digital trade procedures is likely to have a strong impact in reducing trade costs.
- The programme systematically promotes public-private dialogue mechanisms, in particular to reflect private sector needs in the policy design and implementation processes. It also puts a strong emphasis on inter-agency coordination to allow for comprehensive and coherent policies that addresses the regulatory and procedural obstacles at all stages of the cross-border transaction process.