

Possible options for a trade policy coherence mechanism in Sierra Leone

Enhancing public private dialogue in agricultural trade

July 2023



International Trade Centre

About the paper

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trade policy inherently spans across many economic sectors, necessitating coordination to get policies right, effectively engage in international negotiations, and for effective policy implementation. The proposal, informed by stakeholder views from three public private dialogues, is for the re-establishment of a modernised National Coordinating Committee on Trade (NCCT). Such a mechanism should prioritise i) Coordination within government and ii) Collaboration with the private sector, to improve the quality of trade policy and its implementation in Sierra Leone.

1. BACKGROUND

For policies to be effective they must be coherent across government. That can pose challenges when parts of government – as they inevitably do – operate independently. It can be more difficult still when policies are made at different levels. Policies may be created solely at the national level with national issues in mind. We might think of those as being design with a “zoom lens”, focused into details but sometimes lacking a wider perspective. Other policies may be designed within the confines of regional frameworks or through negotiations with regional and international partner countries. A good example is the African Continental Free Trade Area, in which Sierra Leone negotiated with 54 other African countries to agree to common rules governing trade. Continuing the camera lens analogue, we can think of such policies as being designed through a “wide angle lens” that takes in a much broader range of interests across different countries, but in doing so necessarily sacrifices focus on detail in national issues.

It is easy to say that policies should be coherent. Fulfilling that aspiration can be difficult in practice with policies designed through different “lenses” focusing in different ways on different issues at different levels. Incoherent policies risk not being implemented, or even worse, overlapping and conflicting with other policies and making regulations overly complex and uncondusive to economic activities and development. This brief proposal for a mechanism for trade policy coherence in Sierra Leone aims to offer a solution to address these challenges.

The proposed mechanism for trade policy coherence aims to ground policy coherence through two key concepts. The first is **coordination** within government. The second is **collaboration** with the private sector. *Coordination* aims to ensure that policies designed or negotiated by different parts of government, or at different levels, are cognisant of the wider framework of government policymaking. It aims to connect policy silos. *Collaboration* recognises that the central feature of economic policymaking is whom it aims to govern, the private sector. Collaboration with the private sector is identified as the compass that can give direction to how policy is being made *irrespective* of by which part of government, and at what level. The private sector is then, in turn, seen as the central node in monitoring the extent to which regional policies and rules have been mainstreamed into regulations that affect them.

Trade policy in Sierra Leone continues to be severely capacity constrained. The solution is therefore not grandiose, complex or informationally intensive solutions, but those anchored in simplicity, functionality and practicality, and especially those that make policy implementation easier.

This brief proposal first outlines the methodology used to draft the mechanism for trade policy coherence, comprising an analytical approach, the focus of the mechanism and key risk factors. Next to outlines the principles of an effective policy coherence mechanism drawing from the validated inputs of key stakeholders. This is followed by an outline of how such a mechanism would be structured and could work and a (suggestive) preliminary action plan.

2. METHODOLOGY

Approach

The proposed mechanism for trade policy coherence draws from the following inputs:

- *Desk research*: on effective tools for policy design and implementation in capacity constrained countries in general, as well as technical assistance reports from different programmes of support to the Ministry of Trade and Industry.
- *Knowledge products*: developed in the course of the WACOMP-Sierra Leone project and in particular those on the 'Mapping of Public-Private Dialogue platforms in Sierra Leone', and the reports of the three public private dialogues held on 'Trade Policy Perspectives for the Cocoa Sector in Sierra Leone', 'Inspection Rules for Produce (Cap 185) in Sierra Leone', and 'Access to Inputs'
- *Stakeholder interviews*: with both public and private stakeholders involved in trade in Sierra Leone included in dedicated public private dialogue sessions held in February and March 2023.

The history of trade policy design and implementation in Sierra Leone is of policy action being severely capacity constrained. To quote the 2020 Sierra Leone National Trade Strategy, trade policy "faces acute and long-standing capacity challenges" which results in, "struggles with inter-ministerial coordination, donor collaboration, private sector dialogue and policy development".

Focus on coordination and collaboration

The conceptual objective of a trade policy coherence mechanism is considered to be coordination and collaborate. It is through designing a mechanism to achieve these two concepts that trade policy coherence is perceived to be achieved.

- **Coordination** within government: *Coordination* aims to ensure that policies designed or negotiated by different parts of government, or at different levels, are cognisant of the wider framework of government policymaking. It aims to connect policy silos.
- **Collaboration with the private sector**: *Collaboration* recognises that the central feature of economic policymaking is that it should aim at the private sector. Collaboration with the private sector is identified as the compass that can give direction to how policy is being made *irrespective* of by which part of government, and at what level. The private sector is then, in turn, seen as the central node in monitoring the extent to which regional policies and rules have been mainstreamed into regulations that affect them.

Risk factors

The following are considered to be the risk factors affecting a trade policy coherence mechanism in Sierra Leone.¹

Transaction intensity: How many actors should be involved to ensure trade policy coherence?

Because trade, by necessity, spans across many economic sectors of an economy (from agriculture, manufacturing, minerals and even services such as tourism) it is a relatively *transactionally* intensive policy area. To use the example of the African Continental Free Trade Area – one of the regional trade frameworks that Sierra Leone is involved in - its remit covers financial services (Protocol on Trade in Services), the digital economy (Protocol on Digital

¹ These were inspired by, and elaborate on, Andrews, M., Pritchett, L., Smji, S., & Woolcock, M. (2015). building capability by delivering results: Putting problem-driven iterative adaptation (PDIA) principles into practice. OECD. and Kyle, J. (2017) Perspectives on the Role of the State in Economic Development: Taking Stock of the 'Developmental State' after 35 Years.

Trade), intellectual property rights (Protocol on Intellectual Property Rights), and trade in commercial goods (Protocol on Trade in Goods), among others.

A large number of interactions are correspondingly needed to ensure coherence in the design of trade policies and then implement them. Where more actors are involved, coordination becomes more complex, monitoring costs increase, and the potential for deviation in the execution of a policy increases. That can make trade policy relatively more difficult. The transaction intensity of a trade policy coherence mechanism can be reduced by focusing on only the most impact actors.

Informational complexity: How clear, straightforward, and precise is the information needed for trade policy coherence?

Trade policy requires a relatively sophisticated breadth of analytical skills. It must integrate both an economist's skillset, to understand (and ideally model) the impacts of trade policy designs on an economy, but also a lawyer's skillset, as the regional and international frameworks for trade policy are negotiated and implemented through legal texts. Beyond that, it necessitates an understanding of the breadth of sectoral areas that trade policy touches upon. For example, the WTO agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) is an international legal agreement that provides scope for least developed countries like Sierra Leone to benefit from specific legal carve outs to encourage pharmaceutical manufacturing.

On the other hand, trade is a popular area of analysis with ample research and studies on trade strategies and solutions, including in least developed countries like Sierra Leone, and with an ample availability of third-party resources.

Political complexity: How much must a trade policy coherence mechanism weigh-up on decisions involving a political economy of gains and losses

Where policies must necessarily balance the interests of both winners and losers of decisions, they entail much more difficult political complexities. They must account for how politically powerful are potential winners and losers, the voice of different actors, and political factions. Trade decisions are famously those that create winners and losers. For example, the beneficiaries of a reduction to tariffs on rice imports may be domestic consumers, while the losers would be local rice producers or investors.

Political complexity makes trade policymaking much more difficult. If actors perceive a beneficial status quo to be at threat, they may entrench positions against trade policy reforms or even 'freeze' a willingness to make trade reforms. Policymakers may be unwilling to risk scarce political capital on decisions entailing political complexity.

Resource intensity: How expensive is a proposed course of action relative to available resources?

Simply, the ongoing running costs required in relation to likely resources. The public sector in Sierra Leone is in general severely budget constrained. This undermines grander policy visions and mechanisms and requires a focus on what is realistic and achievable.

The former Sierra Leone Business Forum, which has now been defunct for over 6 years, was reported to have operated effectively when donor funding was available but struggled before becoming inactive thereafter. While donor funding could continue as a resource strategy, donor-funded public-private dialogues can risk displacing more sustainable locally-owned alternatives and result in a focus on interests that are driven more by donor interests.

3. PAST EXPERIENCES AND CASE STUDIES

Sierra Leone National Coordinating Committee on Trade (NCCT)

As a result of Sierra Leone's first WTO Trade Policy Review in 2004, A National Coordinating Committee on Trade (NCCT) was established through a Cabinet Conclusion (CP 142 of 17th July 2004). Its purpose was to brainstorm on trade policy issues and to provide direction to negotiations within different regional and international fora.

It had the role of seeking perspectives and coordinating among trade-related line ministries, the private sector, academia, and civil society organisations. On paper its membership comprised 38 public and private sector members, including ministries, agencies, departments, universities, and private sector associations, such as the Chamber of Commerce. In practice, the private sector found it difficult to engage effectively because of its limited capacities on trade issues and a reported lack of invitations to Committee meetings and events that took place.

The NCCT had become defunct by 2008, due to a lack of funding, when it was resuscitated with funds and technical assistance from the ECOWAS Trade Negotiation Capacity Project and then with funding through the Enhanced Integrated Funds (EIF) project between 2009 until 2015, when the EIF project concluded. During this time the Ministry of Trade and Industry was also mandated to propose a budget line for the activities of the NCCT and solicit support from other donors and development partners. In this period, when operational, the NCCT met about once a quarter with only the sub-committee on standards meeting during this period.

Previous periods of activity for the NCCT have usually coincided with support by donors for its activities. Transitioning from donor support to budget support would help address the sustainability of such a mechanism. As of July 2023, there was no publicly available documentation on the objectives and mandate of the NCCT.

Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF)

The Sierra Leone Business Forum (SLBF) was a Public/Private Dialogue Forum established in 2007 under the International Finance Corporation's RABI project at the request of the Sierra Leone Government, as a mechanism for improving the Sierra Leone business and investment environment.

The SLBF involved a dialogue platform to inform government policies affecting the private sector. Its Board comprised the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the President of the Chamber of Commerce as co-chairs alongside six representatives of different private sector associations. It was run by a dedicated Director and seven-person secretariat, and hosted working groups and technical committees.

The initial focus of the SLBF was primarily on investment climate reform issues including agri-business reforms, land reform, tax reform, financial sector reform, and doing business reform. The SLBF was effective, but not specifically oriented towards trade policy formulation or trade negotiations.

In 2009, the SLBF transitioned from a donor-led platform to a locally owned and managed limited company. When financing from the International Finance Corporation expired in 2012, the SLBF lacked funds to effectively operate. It was adopted as a trade support institution of the MTI in 2014 and operated for 2 years with government financing before eventually dwindling into dormancy.

Sierra Leone National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC)

The National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) was established by a Cabinet Conclusion of the Government of Sierra Leone in 2019 in accordance with the provisions of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement requiring each WTO member to establish a national committee on trade facilitation to facilitate both domestic coordination and implementation of the provisions of the agreement.

According to its terms of reference, the purpose of the NTFC is to a) provide a permanent forum for consultation on matters of trade facilitation, b) identify and eliminate trade barriers, c) to monitor the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, and d) provide advice and assistance to the government on trade facilitation matters as requested.

The establishment of the NTFC followed the preparation of the World Bank trade facilitation strategy (2019-2014) and funding from the World Bank, though its terms of reference also provide for the MTI to secure financing in its annual budget for the Secretariat to the NTFC. The NTFC is co-chaired by the MTI and the National Revenue Authority (NRA) Customs, with the Secretariat for the NTFC being housed at NRA Customs. NRA Customs reportedly have good technical capacity to address many of the technical issues required by the NTFC.

The meetings of the NTFC, and its sub-committees on Governance and Automation, had reportedly been held with increasing infrequency until 2023. In the absence of structured meetings and reports, many of the parties are implementing aspects of the Work Plan (2018-2024) as it relates to their entity, but without central coordination.

Other regional experiences in ECOWAS

Countries across the West African region employ a varying array of institutions to coordinate, craft policy, and address trade challenges. Some have institutions focusing on the coordination of trade or business policy more broadly, such as the Ghanaian Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trade Issues and WTO Matters, the Nigerian Presidential Enabling Business Environmental Council, the Liberia National Investment Committee, or the Liberian Better Business Forum. Most countries now have National Trade Facilitation Committees. Some have specialised committees or institutions focusing on particular aspects of trade, such as the National Committee for the Supervision of trade Barriers in Togo.

A Presidential National Action Committee on AfCFTA was set up in Nigeria in November 2019 to provide strategic guidance over the implementation of the AfCFTA in Nigeria. It involves public and private sector entities including trade and economic-related government ministries, departments and agencies, and organised private sector associations.

As of August 2023, the Committee was reportedly actively meeting three times a quarter with funding from the Nigerian Presidency. It additionally conducted seminars, workshops and stakeholder engagements, and shared information regularly and publicly through social media. It was reported to be effective in terms of stakeholder engagement in the formulation stages of trade policies, but faced challenges on meeting consensus over decisions and because of the overlapping policy jurisdictions of some of its members.

Senegal has a formal mechanism for coordinating multilateral trade negotiations, the National Committee for International Trade Negotiations (CNCNI), established by a Ministerial Decree and funded by direct budget support through the Ministry of Trade. It is chaired by the Minister of Trade and in addition to representation from the Ministry of Trade, its members are drawn from the Presidency of the Republic, the Prime Minister's Office, Ministerial Departments (at the highest level), the private sector, employers' organizations, professional organizations, civil society and consumer associations to ensure that voices of the private sector, civil society are taken into account in the discussions and exchanges on the topics under negotiation

The CNCNI has six subcommittees, each responsible for dealing with the specific issues under negotiation within the WTO, ECOWAS, WAEMU or other framework. The work of the sub committees is facilitated at expert level according to the negotiating themes under discussion by representatives from the different organisations. For example, at the time of the Agriculture negotiations for the WTO Agreement on, the Agriculture Sub-Committee was chaired by a high-level representative of the Minister of Agriculture, the rapporteur being a

representative of the Minister of Trade and representatives of agricultural producers' organizations, civil society and the private sector took part.

In many instances, specialised institutions of committees, such as National Trade Facilitation Committees, already exist. There may also be many private sector associations with differing specialisations. Ensuring effective collaboration and buy-in to a coordinating mechanism would be important.

It is important to involve the ministries of finance and economic planning in institutional dialogue mechanisms. These ministries in many instances are stronger, with greater policy clout, and their involvement can be necessary to make mechanisms impactful and to ensure coordination with other aspects of economic policymaking.

4. STAKEHOLDER FEEDBACK: PRINCIPLES OF AN EFFECTIVE POLICY COHERENCE MECHANISM

A series of public-private dialogues were held in Freetown, Sierra Leone, involving trade and agriculture stakeholder on 14-16 February 2023 (Trade Policy Perspectives for the Cocoa Sector), 7-9 March 2023 (Inspection Rules for Produce [Cap 185]), and on 14-16 March (Access to Inputs). In the course of these workshops, stakeholders identified the following principles as priorities for an effective trade policy coherence mechanism. These serve to guide the desired operating features of the mechanism for trade policy coherence.

Mandate and institutional alignment

- **Consultation and advice:** engagements should explicitly form a two-way communication channel allowing both the public sector to feel able to consult the private sector and enabling the private sector to be able to advise government.
- **Dual coordination:** engagements should be co-coordinated by both government and private sector to create ownership.
- **Focus on implementation:** a recurring theme in advice solicited by stakeholders was for the orientation of such mechanisms to be on implementation to achieve practical results.
- **Publish mandate and terms of reference:** the focus and mandate of the mechanism should be publicly available to guide transparency and awareness of the purpose of the mechanism and its functioning.

Structure and participation

- **Regular and *ad hoc* meetings:** regular engagements to discuss ongoing policy developments and updates and additional, targeted, as well as *ad hoc* engagements on specific issues such as the formulation and design of any new of upcoming policies.
- **Deep participation:** Engagements need to better filter down to reflect and gather the views of stakeholder across the private sector. Recommendations for this involved the use of:
 - Member surveys of businesses
 - Surveys and statistics collected from farmers
 - Focus groups at the community level
 - Expert discussions with government focal points to share information
 - Up-to-date mapping of relevant stakeholders
- **Broad government representation:** engagements need to better represent all policy stakeholders, agencies, the private sector, and trade support institutions

Openness and transparency

- **Regularity of meetings:** government should call regular dialogues with stakeholders from a range of business sectors. This could involve monthly meetings focusing on different topics and with different stakeholders or broader quarterly meetings with a wider participation. The predictability of these meetings would be an essential element for the private sector buy-in, as one other key concern is to be kept informed of the outcomes organized.
- **Publicising of meetings:** government should better publicise dialogues as currently interested private sector members are excluded from invitation list, or invitations are shared through defunct email addresses.
- **Online publication of policy work:** Better use of social media was suggested to publicising upcoming dialogues as well as information sharing through governmental websites, to allow the private sector to follow policy work and developments and to popularise the awareness of policy changes.
- **Improve government communication:** Government struggles with communication. Internal communication units within Ministries are needed for updating websites, using social media platforms and issuing press releases.
- **Advanced notice:** Government should provide reasonable notice to changes in policy to the private sector wherever possible, while recognising that some policy changes mandate urgent changes. This would better allow the private sector to adjust, prepare and challenge policy changes, if necessary, while building trust.

Representation

- **Improve private sector representation:** relevant organisations, such as SLCCCP (Sierra Leone Cocoa Coffee Cashew Platform), SLeCAD, SMEDA, SLIEPA and the Farmers' Federation, need to re-map and invite private sector businesses who may be missing from invitation lists or have outdated contact information.
- **Leverage cooperatives:** cooperatives should be continually involved in engagement to connect with the voices of smallholders.

Communication and outputs (how should communication happen)

- **Breadth of communication channels:** Government should share information through newsletters, having meetings and media interviews, but also more broadly through bulletins, social media and the radio.
- **Follow ups:** Meetings need to be followed-up with further engagements for clarifications or additional information to lead to action.
- **Advocacy:** Combine engagements with strengthened independent advocacy to push government to take action in these issues in which reforms have been slow.

5. PROPOSAL FOR A TRADE POLICY COHERENCE MECHANISM

Overview

The proposal is the reinstatement of the National Coordinating Committee on Trade (NCCT).

The reinstatement of the NCCT is further called for in the 2020 Sierra Leone National Trade Strategy and there is appetite from both the trade public and private sectors interviewed, in the course of researching this briefing, for such an institution. Part of its revitalisation must entail the modernisation of the NCCT to reflect changes in Sierra Leone's trading arrangements, such as its participation in the AfCFTA, greater efforts for its sustainability, and improved integration of the private sector.

The NCCT would serve as the platform for public-private *collaboration*, as well as public-public *coordination*, on all matters of trade policy. Given the breadth of actors involved in trade in Sierra Leone, both government and otherwise, a common vision must first be developed. With,

as of July 2023, the Medium-Term National Development Plan (2019-2023) set for review and renewal, now is the time to constitute the NCCT to gather trade policy issues and ensure that trade is better reflected in the next Sierra Leonean national development plan.

As the history of trade policy implementation in Sierra Leone evidences, plans and strategies, which admirably provide trade policy direction, in practice frequently amount to little more than pieces of scarcely read paper “gathering dust”. A more meaningful vision must exist collectively in the minds of those involved in trade in Sierra Leone, rather than documents stored on shelves and hard drives. This requires genuine commitment, reiterative engagement, and open discussion from all parties involved to work towards the same trade policy goal. The following *preliminary* vision and objectives should serve as a starting point, but one to be reaffirmed, interrogated and developed by the NCCT in its engagements.

For the NCCT to be sustainable, it is critical that the Ministry of Trade and Industry negotiate for and secure a dedicated budget line for the NCCT. Donor funding can be crowded-in of specific technical issues, however the sustainability of the initiative requires dedicated and persisting government funding.

This section outlines proposed suggestions for the vision and objectives and structure and responsibilities of a revitalized NCCT. While these could form the basis for the reinstatement of the NCCT, they should be reviewed, revised and validated collectively by an initial meeting of the NCCT with all stakeholders.

NCCT Vision and objectives

Vision

- *Effective and coherent trade policy aligned to support the Sierra Leonean private sector to seize trade as a vehicle for development*

This vision would involve the NCCT operating as the apex institution for trade policy coherence in Sierra Leone. Other thematic trade committees exist, such as the National Trade Facilitation Committee (NTFC) and the National AGOA Steering Committee. The role of the NCCT would be as an umbrella to give overarching policy coordination and consolidate activities, and delegate technical work to subcommittees such as the NTFC.

Objectives

- **Coordination** within government on issues of trade policy

Coordination within government aims to ensure that the breadth of relevant ministries, departments and agencies are knowledgeable about trade policy decisions and have the opportunity to input into and advise those decisions. This speaks to the ‘coherence’ part of the above stated vision. It involves a two-way line of communication, with the NCCT being used both as a platform for circulating information about trade policy decisions, but also for the solicitation of information to better make those decisions, particularly when they interact with sector policies and strategies.

- **Collaboration** with the private sector on issues of trade policy

Collaboration with the private sector aims to anchor the NCCT, and trade policy in Sierra Leone in general, in supporting the private sector. This connects to the part of the vision relating to ‘support’ to the private sector to seize trade as a vehicle for development. It involves effective, continuous and two-way engagement with the private sector to better design and implement aspects of trade policy.

NCCT Membership and representation

The past experiences of trade policy coordination mechanisms in Sierra Leone have shown that simplicity is important, if sustainability is to be achieved, given severely stretched public resources. Accordingly, options for the membership and structure of the NCCT must be conceived with resource and transactional efficiency in mind while integrating key perspectives.

Public-private co-chairing

The NCCT should be co-chaired by both the public and the private sector to ensure ownership and trust.

On the side of the public sector, it is recommended that both the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Finance co-chair. While the Ministry of Trade and Industry is the natural custodian of trade policy issues, the involvement of the Ministry of Finance is needed to give political and financial heft to the institution. The Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food Security should also have a central role, given the importance of agriculture to export diversification in Sierra Leone. The involvement of the National Investment Board, given its cross-cutting functions, can help extend the reach of the NCCT.

On the side of the private sector, a transversal private sector (ie broad-based association, like the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Agriculture) representative should be elected through consensus, or vote, and to serve a pre-determined term (such as 1 year). Technical issues of trade will always require more detailed perspectives than can be afforded by such an overarching representative however, and so the involvement of sector-specific private-sector representation will be critical, including at the company and business level on specific issues.

NCCT membership

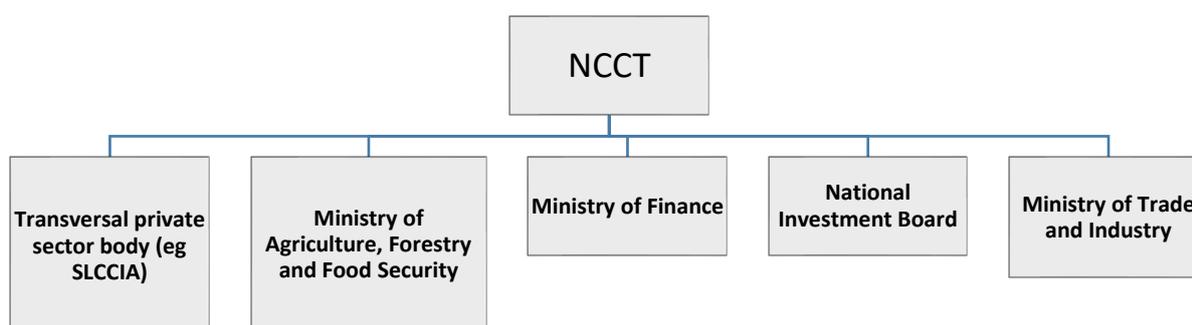
Participation is key to “include the right players and policy makers”².

A balance must be struck to involve representation from across trade-related parts of the public and private sector while retaining focus, simplicity and not over-expanding resource requirements. For this, the NCCT could consider a two-tiered membership structure involving a small central committee of permanent members alongside ad hoc members, invited to consider specific topics. Rather than involving all members in each meeting, the NCCT could consider different trade-related issues sequentially, involving relevant members only when necessary to the subject matter of meetings.

The NCCT should not overly rely on private sector representative associations within its membership. The nature of the trade policy challenges in Sierra Leone suggest that the specific businesses and agents within the economy are often the best interlocutors of the specific challenges to the private sector. Fortunately, the private sector in Sierra Leone is small. Individual affected companies and businesses should be invited to represent their own interests on specific trade policy issues.

The permanent membership of the NCCT should involve the following suggested actors:

Figure 1. Suggested permanent members of the NCCT



Source: Authors

NCCT Structure and responsibilities

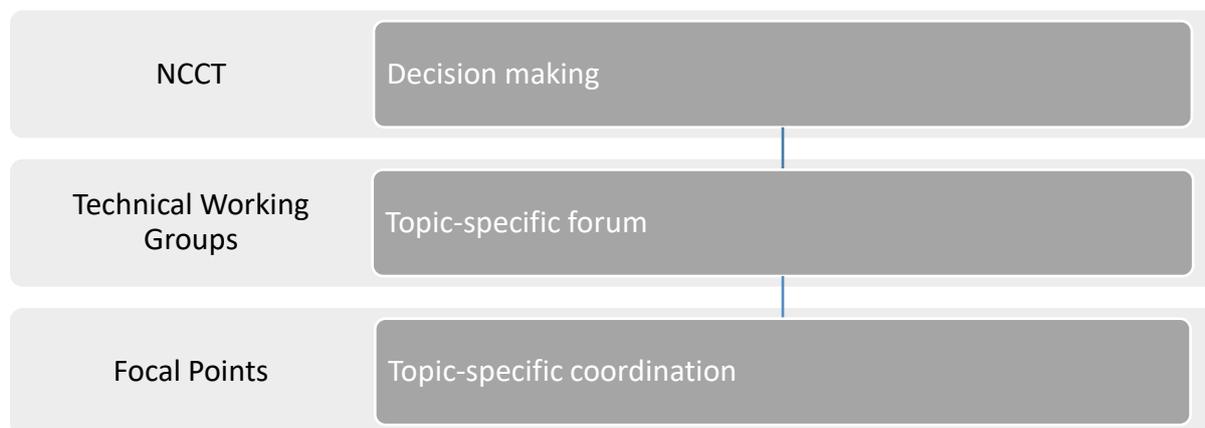
To undertake its operations, the NCCT should be as simple and streamlined as possible. It is suggested that it meet to address dedicated issues sequentially, rather than as a complex system of committees and sub-committees. Nevertheless, it should have the power to

² Stakeholder feedback from March 2023 Public Private Dialogue on Access to Inputs

establish temporary technical working groups to report back of specific issues where necessary.

Technical working groups could, for instance, be temporarily constituted to consider specific issues relating the African Growth and Opportunities Act (of which Sierra Leone is a beneficiary), negotiating opportunities in the AfCFTA, or sector specific issues affecting important high-potential export industries such as palm oil, cocoa or cashew.

Figure 2. Suggested structure and responsibilities of the NCCT



Topic specific engagement: Technical Sub-Committees

Technical Working Groups would deliberate on topic-specific detail, temporarily and only as necessary, before reporting to the NCCT. Such actions could involve, for instance, developing position papers on key thematic areas including trade facilitation, customs and tax reform, canvass members with surveys, arranging focus group discussions to a certain sub-category of member, or organising topic-specific roundtables from which to identify challenges or propose solutions on trade policy matters.

Technical Working Groups should be encouraged to invite sector expertise, and even external sources of expertise, as needed on specific topics and themes to address informational complexities.

Focal points

Technical subcommittees should be served by dedicated focal points knowledgeable on specific topics. For instance, a technical subcommittee on the AfCFTA might have as its focal point the Sierra Leone’s chief negotiator to the AfCFTA negotiations. A Focal Point on for trade-related issues for the oil palm sector could involve an officer from the tree crops division of MAFFS. The role of the focal point is to support the functioning of the Technical Sub-Committees.

NCCT Functions and operations

The following preliminary list of suggested functions, elaborated from the principles of an effective policy coherence mechanism (see previous section), can guide the operations of the NCCT. These should be confirmed in a mutually agreed and validated terms of reference.

Meetings

- *Standing meetings*: held quarterly on predetermined and scheduled topics
- *Supplementary ad hoc meetings*: available to be held, at the instigation of either government or the private sector, on specific issues when the need arises. The private sector should have the capacity to instigate ad hoc meetings through the private sector representatives of the NCCT.
- *Meeting notification*: quarterly meeting schedules, including requests for agenda topics, should be circulated with advanced notice (ideally 1 month)

- *Follow up*: further engagements for clarifications and additional information should supplement, precede, and follow formal scheduled meetings

Policy transparency

- *Online publication*: policies determinations to be published both within the NCCT and online through MTI website and social media channels
- *Advanced notice*: reasonable notice given to changes in trade policy, with potential decisions or options shared in advance through the NCCT
- *Communication channels*: trade policy information reviewed by the NCCT should be shared through newsletters, media engagements, bulletins, social media and the radio, to the extent possible

Accountability responsibilities

- *Information collation*: private sector representatives should improve policymaking arguments by submitting to the NCCT information gathered through the use of member surveys of businesses, surveys and statistics collected from farmers, focus groups at the community level, expert discussions with government focal points to share information, up-to-date mapping of relevant stakeholders.
- *Policy advocacy*: private sector representatives should follow up and hold government accountable outside of merely the formally NCCT scheduled meetings.

Capacity building

- *Capacity development*: identify capacity blind spots and weaknesses and work with development partners and private sector experts where necessary to bring together and develop expertise.

6. PRELIMINARY ACTION PLAN

Activity	Detailed actions	Focal point	Timeline
1. Establish and operationalise the NCCT			
1.1. Re-establish the National Coordinating Committee on Trade (NCCT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Produce, discuss and negotiate draft ToRs for the re-establishment of an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Trade ▪ Nominate a focal points in MTI and MoF to lead on the NCCT 	MTI Chief Director, MTI NCCT Focal Point Director	Immediately
1.2. Identify and validate NCCT focal points	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify and validate initial focal points in MDAs, the private sector and civil society invited to participate, including encouraging substantial participation of women's business associations 	MTI NCCT Focal Point Director	3-months
1.3. Resource strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Identify seed financing and resource focusing on low-cost and sustainability options ▪ Secure budget line in MTI annual budget 	MTI NCCT Focal Point Director	3-months
1.4. Transparency and awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Publish terms of reference of the operationalised NCCT, contact details of focal points, and issue call for inputs into first annual agenda 	MTI NCCT Focal Point Director	3-months
1.5 Evaluation and renovation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review and adapt the structure after 1 year of operation 	MTI NCCT Focal Point Director	1 year
2. Year 1 activities			
2.1. Planning and coordination meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host a planning and coordination meeting with NCCT focal points to develop a draft 1-year agenda 	MTI Minister, MTI Chief Director	3-months
2.2. Host NCCT 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host first NCCT quarterly meeting ▪ Validate terms of reference, establish necessary working groups, nominate technical focal persons ▪ Validate year-1 agenda and work plan 	MTI Minister, MTI Chief Director	3-months
2.3. Host NCCT 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host second NCCT on predetermined topic, with scope for additional agenda issues 	NCCT Focal Points	6-months
2.4. Host NCCT 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host third NCCT on predetermined topic, with scope for additional agenda issues 	NCCT Focal Points	9-months
2.5. Host NCCT 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Host fourth NCCT on predetermined topic, with scope for additional agenda issues ▪ Review and evaluate year-1 performance and effectiveness on the NCCT 	NCCT Focal Points	12-months