

REPORT OF THE 58TH SESSION OF THE ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

Geneva, 25 June 2024

Mission:

ITC supports sustainable and inclusive livelihoods by boosting the competitiveness of MSMEs, placing trade-led growth at the centre of public policy and building supportive business ecosystems in developing countries.

The designations employed and the presentation of material in this publication do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the International Trade Centre concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

August 2024

Original: English

Joint Advisory Group on the International Trade Centre

Fifty-eighth session

Geneva, 25 June 2024

© International Trade Centre 2024

ITC/AG(LVIII)/296

Opening Session **1**

 Opening remarks by the Chair of the 57th session 1

 Opening remarks by the Chair of the 58th session 2

 Statement by WTO Director-General 3

 Statement by Secretary-General of UNCTAD 4

 Statement by Executive Director of ITC 4

 Statements by Delegations 6

 Presentation of the 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR) 8

 Brief Remarks by the Executive Director of ITC on the AESR 9

Closing Session **9**

 Chair’s Summary 9

 Executive Director’s Closing Remarks 10

Report of the 58th session of the ITC Joint Advisory Group

Geneva, 25 June 2024

Opening Session

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 57th session

1. H.E. Ms. Nadia Theodore, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the World Trade Organization (WTO), Permanent Mission of Canada to the WTO in Geneva, opened the 58th session of the Joint Advisory Group (JAG).
2. She stated that ITC has made connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade possible, even during times of conflict. She noted ITC's role in advocating for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) as important drivers of the global economy and their importance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
3. Ambassador Theodore highlighted that this year's JAG was particularly significant as it marks ITC's 60th anniversary. She noted that it provided an opportunity to reflect on ITC's past achievements and examine its future direction.
4. She cited the Annual Report and congratulated the ITC staff for their hard work and dedication. She referenced the "Alliances for Coconut Industry Development for the Caribbean" project, which won the United Nations' Small Island Developing States Partnership Award. She also highlighted the success of the One Trade Africa initiative at the Intra-African Trade Fair in Cairo, Egypt.
5. Ambassador Theodore reiterated Canada's commitment to inclusion and diversity, referencing the ITC-UN Women Global Campaign on Gender-Responsive Public Procurement (GRPP), to which Canada has provided a statement of support and country pledge. She also expressed appreciation that ITC is developing a pilot programme centered on Indigenous Peoples and trade.
6. She reaffirmed Canada's strong partnership with ITC, pledging support for ITC's core unearmarked Window 1 budget, which allows ITC to invest in innovative projects, facilitate the development of global public goods, support future project concepts and advance ITC's four moonshots on gender, youth, digital connectivity and green trade. She also encouraged existing and new donors to support ITC through Window 1.
7. In closing, Ambassador Theodore thanked the Executive Director and the JAG Secretariat for their support during her term as Chair of the 57th session of JAG.

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 58th session

8. H.E. Ms. Hend Abdulrahman Al-Muftah, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations Office at Geneva, took up her position as Chair of the 58th session of the JAG.
9. She highlighted the challenges faced by small businesses, including conflicts, climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic, and global economic instability, which continue to jeopardize the attainment of the SDGs.
10. Ambassador Al-Muftah emphasized the need to address fragility, which is a priority for Qatar, particularly in the Middle East and North African region. She referred to the Qatar Fund for Development's "Women in Conflict Zones" initiative, which combines humanitarian and developmental aid to support women in fragile settings.
11. She underscored the value of collaborative efforts to break the cycle of fragility, involving small businesses, local governments, and international agencies. She cited ITC's Strengthening the Agriculture and Agri-food Value Chain and Improving Trade Policy (SAAVI) project in Iraq as a successful example of such a partnership.
12. Ambassador Al-Muftah highlighted ITC's commitment to inclusive trade, referencing the "She's Next" grant programme which supports women-owned businesses in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) region. She announced plans for further support through the ITC SheTrades initiative in partnership with Visa in Kuwait and Qatar.
13. She emphasized the importance of digital training and access to finance for women entrepreneurs, highlighting the launch of the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy Fund (WEIDE) by WTO and ITC.
14. Ambassador Al-Muftah noted ITC's extensive work in 144 countries, focusing on least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), small and vulnerable economies (SVEs), conflict-affected countries, and countries in sub-Saharan Africa. She praised ITC's accomplishments, which included supporting 36,000 MSMEs improve their competitiveness and 11,000 transact international business.
15. She congratulated ITC on its 60th anniversary, recognizing the organization's long history of promoting connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade.
16. Ambassador Al-Muftah encouraged existing donors to continue their support while welcoming new donors to join the cause of building a more inclusive and sustainable global economy.

Statement by WTO Director-General

17. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the WTO, praised ITC's work and emphasized the impact of trade on people's lives. She referred to ITC as a 'secret weapon' and commended its Executive Director for her outstanding leadership.
18. Reflecting on the WTO's 30th anniversary, she noted that increased trade has significantly contributed to global economic growth and poverty reduction, though countries and communities have not equally shared in this progress.
19. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala reaffirmed that trade can be a powerful tool to address this exclusion. The WTO is advocating for inclusive 're-globalization' to integrate marginalized countries and communities into global production. This reimagined globalization would deliver socioeconomic inclusion and economic resilience through more diversified and deconcentrated supply chains.
20. She underscored ITC's crucial role in providing supply-side support, particularly for MSMEs and women-owned businesses, in connecting to international markets. This support promotes inclusion and drives economic growth.
21. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala highlighted examples of collaboration between ITC and WTO, such as providing accessible trade information, assisting countries in implementing and negotiating WTO agreements, supporting WTO accession processes, promoting trade as a catalyst for low-carbon transition, enhancing the West African cotton-to-textile value chain and supporting gender-focused initiatives.
22. She emphasized the importance of using trade to empower women economically, referencing the SheTrades Initiative and the recently launched WEIDE fund, which supports women-owned MSMEs in digital trade.
23. Referencing the ITC Annual Report, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala noted ITC's efforts in various regions, from assisting Ethiopian coffee farmers to supporting MSMEs in Lao People's Democratic Republic and enhancing agricultural productivity and sustainable farming in the Caribbean.
24. She advised ITC to maintain focus on its core strengths and scale up successful initiatives, such as the WEIDE Fund. She also encouraged continued collaboration among ITC, the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the WTO to avoid inter-institutional conflicts.
25. In closing, Dr. Okonjo-Iweala expressed appreciation for ITC's long-standing work in Aid for Trade. She invited everyone to celebrate ITC's achievements at the upcoming anniversary event and urged stakeholders to leverage trade to foster growth and development.

Statement by Secretary-General of UNCTAD

26. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, emphasized significant shifts in the global landscape. Despite a small recovery expected in 2024, global trade has experienced a slowdown. She described the concept of "deglobalization" as a reconfiguration rather than a complete reversal of globalization.
27. She noted that while the trade of physical goods has declined, the trade of services, particularly digital services has increased.
28. Rebeca Grynspan emphasized the resurgence of industrial policies and protectionism, with major economies implementing large subsidies to secure their share of this emerging market. She expressed concern that developing countries burdened by rising debt might struggle to compete in this new landscape.
29. She highlighted the rise of the Global South, noting that South-South trade now surpasses North-North trade. Citing International Monetary Fund (IMF) projections, she mentioned that the global economy will grow by \$26 trillion over the next five years, with \$16 trillion originating from the Global South.
30. Regarding trade reconfiguration, Rebeca Grynspan highlighted a trend toward the decentralization of economic and political power, which she described as "polyglobalization." She also noted that geopolitical factors are increasingly shaping investment flows, leading to increased volatility and a trend towards 'nearshoring'.
31. She highlighted the importance of sustainability as a major driver of investment, but acknowledged the challenge of ensuring that more investments reach developing countries in need of sustainable development solutions. She mentioned that concerns over greenwashing have led to a "greenlash", with a 60% decline in new inflows to sustainability-linked funds in 2023.
32. She reinforced the critical role of collaboration among UNCTAD, WTO, and ITC in addressing these challenges. Initiatives such as Trade Facilitation portals and sustainable trade guidelines are vital for empowering businesses, especially MSMEs in developing countries.
33. Rebeca Grynspan concluded by emphasizing the shared responsibility to harness trade and investment for sustainable and inclusive development amidst evolving global challenges.

Statement by Executive Director of ITC

34. Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, Executive Director of ITC, expressed her gratitude to Ambassador Nadia Theodore for her impactful tenure as the outgoing Chair of the JAG and warmly welcomed Ambassador Hend Abdulrahman Al-Muftah as the incoming

Chair. She further thanked the Director-General of the WTO and Secretary-General of UNCTAD noting this as their first joint appearance in their current roles.

35. Reflecting on ITC's 60th anniversary, Pamela Coke-Hamilton underscored the institution's evolution and pivotal role in global trade. She highlighted ITC's pioneering efforts in trade and market intelligence and MSME competitiveness, which have expanded to encompass gender equality, youth empowerment, digital innovation and sustainability.
36. She celebrated significant milestones for the WTO and UNCTAD, noting the 30th anniversary of the Marrakesh Agreement and UNCTAD's evolution into UN Trade and Development, highlighting their contributions to global trade governance.
37. She highlighted collaborative efforts among ITC, WTO, and UNCTAD, especially in promoting trade's role in addressing climate change at international forums like the UN Climate Change Conference and supporting developing countries in new rulemaking and gender-responsive trade policies.
38. She highlighted the collaboration between ITC and WTO for the launch of the WEIDE fund in Abu Dhabi, while also acknowledging the United Arab Emirates' pivotal role with an initial \$5 million contribution and inviting further support for this initiative.
39. Pamela Coke-Hamilton underscored the longstanding collaboration between ITC and UNCTAD, particularly in enhancing trade facilitation portals, providing trade and market intelligence and helping countries assess their e-trade readiness.
40. She presented ITC's Annual Report for 2023 as a testament to the achievements, highlighting significant milestones such as expanded global outreach, and impactful support for MSMEs worldwide.
41. Pamela Coke-Hamilton emphasized the human impact of ITC's work through case studies, showcasing success stories from Mongolia, Côte d'Ivoire, Sierra Leone, Ukraine, and Central Asia, illustrating how trade initiatives directly benefit local communities.
42. She emphasized the importance of partnerships in driving positive change, citing collaborations with Visa and Mastercard Foundations as examples of innovative approaches to supporting refugees and promoting the creative economy.
43. Pamela Coke-Hamilton called for continued collective action to ensure connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade, referencing the success of the Global Trade Helpdesk and its endorsement by G20 ministers for enhancing MSMEs' access to trade information.
44. Addressing the challenges ahead, she stressed the increasing vulnerability of small businesses due to conflict, natural disasters, and climate change, highlighting the need for resilient policies and international cooperation.

45. Pamela Coke-Hamilton expressed optimism in the growing recognition of small businesses' pivotal role in global policy forums and sustainable development, citing initiatives like the Antigua and Barbuda Agenda for SIDS: A Renewed Declaration for Resilient Prosperity.
46. She concluded by urging immediate action to support small businesses amid global uncertainties, reaffirming ITC's commitment to delivering on its promises and expressing gratitude to the governments and partners who supported ITC's projects throughout 2023.
47. Finally, Pamela Coke-Hamilton invited attendees to join the upcoming 60th anniversary celebrations at the WTO, promising an event that would transform how we think about trade and its potential for good.

Statements by Delegations

48. Throughout the meeting, many delegates from both funder and programme countries took the floor. Overall, delegates expressed appreciation for ITC's achievements in 2023, congratulated ITC on its 60th anniversary, and thanked ITC staff and leadership for their hard work and achievements in 2023.
49. Delegates valued ITC's role in fostering sustainable and inclusive growth, facilitating multilateral cooperation and providing multifaceted support to help small businesses compete in global markets. They recognized ITC's support for MSMEs in developing countries, which is crucial for job creation, economic growth, and poverty reduction.
50. Projects and programmes most referenced by delegates included SheTrades, Global Trade Helpdesk, Global Climate Competitiveness project, and Alliances for Action. Other programmes highlighted by delegations included Arise Plus, UK Trade Partnerships Programme, Trade Facilitation projects in Jordan and Sri Lanka, Ready4Trade, SMECO, Youth Startup Academy and the Netherlands Trust Fund V programme.
51. Delegates appreciated the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, particularly the significant progress made across impact areas. Statements also commended the well-prepared and informative Annual Report which reflects ITC's highly relevant work in areas of global development.
52. The statements highlighted ITC's role as crucial for LDCs and LLDCs. Delegates thanked ITC for 'leaving no one behind', especially LDCs, and encouraged ITC to continue working toward the 45% LDC delivery target as outlined in the Strategic Plan.
53. Delegates mentioned that in the context of ongoing conflicts and crises, ITC's role in promoting inclusive growth is increasing, as women, youth, and refugees are the most affected by such crises. Delegates highlighted interventions under the SheTrades

Programme, such as SheTrades Outlook and SheTrades Hubs, as well as projects focusing on agricultural value chains, the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), and public procurement.

54. Delegates appreciated ITC's Market Analysis Tools, such as the Global Trade Helpdesk platform, which provides crucial trade information to tens of thousands of enterprises, helping them make informed business decisions.
55. Several delegates appreciated ITC's work supporting MSMEs since the inception of the AfCFTA. They looked forward to deepening collaboration on meeting the requirements of the agreement and encouraged ITC to expand training on exporting through the AfCFTA. There was also a call for ITC to engage in regional integration in Latin America.
56. There was appreciation for ITC's work on Digital Trade and e-commerce, including initiatives like the Digital Moonshot, digital payment tools, trade and market intelligence platforms as well as publications such as 'Living with the Genie'. Delegates looked forward to strengthening collaboration to realize the full potential of these initiatives.
57. Delegates highlighted ITC's work on Green Trade, especially through the Global Climate Competitiveness project, which helps developing countries increase their engagement on environmental issues at the WTO. They also commended the Alliances for Action projects for increasing food security and fostering partnerships to transform livelihoods. Statements called on ITC to scale and strengthen its work to support more small businesses in relation to environmental regulations.
58. Statements recognized the important role played by ITC in advocating for the perspective of small businesses in global events such as the 13th WTO Ministerial Conference, the 4th International Conference on SIDS, and the AfriCaribbean Trade and Investment Forum. Delegates welcomed ITC's collaboration with international organizations such as WTO, UNCTAD, and the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and encouraged ITC to keep strengthening collaboration with them. They also encouraged ITC to increase its advocacy in Geneva.
59. Statements commended ITC's progress on the Moving Forward Action Plan for supporting the well-being of staff and helping ITC achieve high-quality results. Delegates requested to be kept informed of the progress made through the Plan.
60. Several delegates used the opportunity to appreciate donor countries for their generous contributions and expressed a call to increase unearmarked core funding to ITC. There was a strong call from both donor and beneficiary countries to continue ongoing collaboration with ITC in areas of mutual priority.
61. Delegations also encouraged ITC to increase the diversity of its staff, looked forward to the opening of country offices, and suggested the careful implementation of

unilateral trade measures taken by some countries to ensure they contribute to sustainable development within the global trade framework.

Presentation of the 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR)

62. Mr. Miguel Jiménez Pont, Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit, presented the 2024 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report (AESR), focusing on the midterm evaluation of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. This evaluation was conducted by external evaluators to maintain independence.
63. The evaluation affirmed ITC's mandate of supporting MSMEs, crucial for economic growth and achieving the SDGs, noting that MSMEs support 70% of employment in developing countries. While the Strategic Plan engaged technical staff, management, and stakeholders, it also identified opportunities for improved teamwork across divisions.
64. The evaluation found that the corporate strategy was effectively operationalized into sub-strategies addressing challenges like climate change, gender equality, youth empowerment, and digital connectivity. It adapted to trade developments post-COVID-19, with senior management effectively managing organizational changes.
65. ITC made significant strides in enhancing MSMEs' capacity to transition to green business practices and embed sustainability in their operations, and in promoting trade inclusion and MSME participation at the UN Climate Conferences. However, the monitoring system was found to cover too many indicators, thereby limiting its utility for strategic decision-making.
66. The evaluation recommended a more systematic adaptation of the Strategic Plan in response to evolving global contexts and highlighted the need for deeper country and regional engagement, using the success of ITC's country office in The Gambia as a model.
67. Mr. Jiménez Pont highlighted recommendations from the evaluation, including that the next Strategic Plan should clearly articulate core offerings, ambitions, and success criteria, driven by the Executive Director and the Senior Management Committee (SMC). It suggested to define success with streamlined key performance indicators, and enhancing organizational cohesiveness through targeted training and improved management efficiency. Additionally, it advised adopting a phased approach for implementing the country engagement strategy to ensure alignment with each country's needs and with the global funding environment.

Brief Remarks by the Executive Director of ITC on the AESR

68. Pamela Coke-Hamilton thanked Miguel Jiménez Pont for the presentation and the diligent work carried out by the Independent Evaluation Unit. The latest AESR highlighted significant progress as ITC prepares for the final years of its current strategic plan.
69. She explained that the emphasis on learning and adaptation showcased in the report was crucial amidst global fragility and uncertainty. ITC's commitment to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with MSMEs playing a pivotal role, was evident throughout its initiatives.
70. Pamela Coke-Hamilton outlined that the report also shows ITC's internal efforts to ensure it serves MSMEs and the ITC team. The rationale behind the Moving Forward Action Plan is to enhance service delivery to MSMEs and increase organizational effectiveness within ITC. She added that the case study on The Gambia illustrated the Strategic Plan's implementation in a country context, emphasizing the importance of local presence.
71. She valued the feedback and recommendations from the AESR, which will guide delivering on the current Strategic Plan's objectives and shaping the next one. Priorities included clarifying and communicating ITC's offerings more effectively, strengthening performance metrics for decision making, and strengthening cohesion within the organization while enhancing engagement at the country level.

Closing Session

Chair's Summary

72. In closing, Ambassador Al-Muftah thanked the WTO for hosting the JAG and extended thanks to the many delegates who shared their views and appreciation for ITC's work in over 140 countries.
73. She emphasized the essential role of ITC in supporting countries, especially as the global community approaches the final years of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
74. Ambassador Al-Muftah noted ITC's commitment to ensuring small businesses thrive despite increasing global fragility. She highlighted ITC's dedication to collaboration and its belief that trade is fundamentally a human story.
75. She congratulated Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton for a successful JAG session and her reflections on the importance of supporting small businesses. She acknowledged the reminders from the WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala

and UNCTAD Secretary-General Rebeca Grynspan about global challenges and the importance of the partnership among ITC, WTO and UNCTAD.

76. Ambassador Al-Muftah reported that many delegates shared their perspectives on ITC's impact, the fragility of MSMEs, and the importance of sustainable and inclusive trade. She noted that delegates called for tailored technical assistance and capacity building support for ITC's priority countries, especially for LDCs. She highlighted that delegates celebrated ITC's four moonshots on gender, youth, digital, and green initiatives. Furthermore, they urged ITC to diversify its funding sources and make further progress towards a more geographically diverse workforce. Delegates acknowledged the progress on ITC's Moving Forward Action Plan and the efforts to build on feedback from the AESR.
77. In her closing, she congratulated the ITC team for their work throughout 2023, their preparations for the JAG event, and their 60 years of demonstrating what effective Aid for Trade should look like. She then invited the ITC Executive Director to share her closing remarks.

Executive Director's Closing Remarks

78. In her closing remarks, ITC Executive Director Pamela Coke-Hamilton thanked the Chair for her strategic leadership and expressed enthusiasm for future collaboration.
79. She emphasized that events like JAG are more than discussions and that they help steer ITC for the future. She appreciated participants' contributions and engagement, especially ahead of the WTO's Ninth Aid for Trade Global Review.
80. Pamela Coke-Hamilton stressed the importance of making trade work for the people ITC serves. She highlighted shared values such as collaboration, resilience, and innovation which unite the diverse experiences of trade-led development across different countries.
81. She acknowledged concerns about the volatile global landscape and its impact on small businesses. She reaffirmed the value of ITC's partnerships within the "sisterhood" of ITC, WTO, and UNCTAD. She appreciated the confidence in ITC's four moonshots and their importance for the Strategic Plan and MSMEs. She welcomed the encouragement to enhance efforts towards more connected, sustainable, and inclusive trade. Additionally, she committed to addressing areas needing improvement, such as diversifying funding sources and tailored support for priority countries.
82. Pamela Coke-Hamilton closed the 58th JAG meeting by expressing her anticipation for the upcoming 60th anniversary celebrations and thanked everyone for their participation and contributions to the session.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is the joint agency of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations.

Street address: ITC
54-56, rue de Montbrillant
1202 Geneva, Switzerland

Postal address: ITC
Palais des Nations
1211 Geneva 10, Switzerland

Telephone: +41 22 730 0111

Fax: +41 22 733 4439

E-mail: itcreg@intracen.org

Internet: <http://www.intracen.org>

Printed by ITC Digital Printing Service on FSC paper, which is environmentally-friendly paper (without chlorine) using vegetable-based inks. The printed matter is recyclable.

