

REPORT OF THE 51ST SESSION OF THE ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

Geneva, 10 July 2017



International
Trade
Centre

TRADE IMPACT
FOR GOOD

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ITC enables small business export success in developing and transition countries by providing, with partners, sustainable and inclusive trade development solutions to the private sector, trade support institutions and policymakers.

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Report of the 51st session of the ITC Joint Advisory Group

Geneva, 10 July 2017

Opening session

Opening remarks from the Chair of the 50th session

1. Mr. Yosef Kassaye, Minister Counsellor and Deputy Mission Head, speaking on behalf of Mr. Negash Kebret Batora, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia to the United Nations Office and Other International Organizations, and Chair of the 50th session of the Joint Advisory Group (JAG), opened the 51st session of the JAG.
2. Mr. Kassaye remarked that ITC has continued to deliver key results towards achieving inclusive growth. The increase in ITC's assistance to sub-Saharan Africa, to least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs) and small economies showcases ITC's ability to focus on those who need it most. Further, ITC's work to promote the economic empowerment of women and youth, to build agro-processing supply chains, to create e-solutions, and to improve countries' business environments is firmly linked to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to recipient countries' own priorities. Such assistance is invaluable, Mr. Kassaye said.
3. He noted that under the guidance of Executive Director Arancha González, ITC has delivered on its targets and has increased its profile within the international community. He concluded by calling on funders to continue to support and collaborate with ITC, since ITC delivers a valuable return on such investments.

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 51st session

4. Ms. Frances Mary Lisson, Ambassador of the Permanent Mission of Australia to the World Trade Organization, took up her position as Chair of the 51st session of the JAG.
5. In her opening remarks, Ambassador Lisson described ITC as a thought leader and a practical implementer in delivering trade impact for good. She confirmed ITC's position as a key actor in the 'Geneva Trade Hub' and noted that the work of ITC has provided significant evidence of the role of Aid for Trade in achieving the SDGs.
6. Highlighting some of ITC's 2016 results, she said that under the guidance of Executive Director González, ITC has delivered on its targets, has pioneered innovative approaches, and has found new ways of linking micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to markets. The 2016 *ITC Annual Report* was an enjoyable read, she said, documenting, for example, progress made in advancing ITC's goal of mainstreaming gender into its work, with 51% of the businesses supported by ITC being owned or operated by women.
7. Ms. Lisson concluded by highlighting an objective of the JAG meeting: to provide an opportunity to guide the work of ITC, particularly in areas where the membership sees room for even further improvement. In her view, there are two challenges for ITC going forward: coping with limited resources and coping with high demand for the organization's services.

ITC must thus focus on its areas of comparative advantage. As the organization's portfolio of programmes, projects, and initiatives continues to expand and diversify, ITC will also need to ensure that deliverables remain tailored to the regional contexts of their clients. Ambassador Lisson said she has full confidence that ITC's Executive Director and management team will do their utmost to make this happen.

Statement by Secretary-General of UNCTAD

8. Mr. Mukhisa Kituyi, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), emphasized that UNCTAD, WTO, and ITC form a natural trade hub in Geneva and are highly complementary to each other, with a clear division of labour. By working together, ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO contribute to a more effective and efficient development system.
9. Mr. Kituyi noted that in light of growing opposition to multilateralism, continuing funding shortfalls, and increasing demand to do more with fewer resources, organizations must look not only to their comparative advantages but also to complementary areas, and must capitalize on opportunities for collaboration.
10. He provided examples of how ITC and UNCTAD have cooperated efficiently to link their services; to address gender equality in trade; to study non-tariff barriers to trade, together with the African Development Bank and the World Bank under the Transparency in Trade Initiative; to strengthen the link between export development, investment, and entrepreneurship; and to help countries implement their trade facilitation commitments. Collaboration among ITC, UNCTAD, and WTO has resulted in the upcoming SME Trade Help Desk, he said, a measure designed to help enterprises take part in new trade opportunities.

Statement by Director-General of WTO

11. Mr. Roberto Azevêdo, Director-General of WTO, stressed the importance of working together to address development challenges and to deliver on the SDGs. The joint efforts of ITC and the WTO allow the multilateral trading system to function more effectively and to have real impact on people's lives, he said. Such efforts make clear the significance of capacity-building work in ensuring that everyone benefits from trade.
12. ITC had a strong year of successful projects that led to noticeable differences in the communities targeted, Mr. Azevêdo told the meeting. Such projects are a clear illustration of the power of trade to drive growth, development, and job creation. Progress in helping smaller companies from developing countries participate in trade means progress towards the more inclusive trading system that everyone wants to see, he said. Such progress also represents a major contribution to achieving the SDGs.
13. Looking ahead, Mr. Azevêdo highlighted a number of areas in which ITC and WTO can maintain and strengthen their partnership to ensure continued success. Noting the success of the ePing alert system that was jointly launched for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) by ITC, WTO, and the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA), he recommended further initiatives to share the wealth of information and expertise available on regulations and standards so that information gaps, which stop many SMEs from trading, can be reduced.
14. In the area of supporting WTO members in implementing the Trade Facilitation Agreement, Mr. Azevêdo said ITC plays an important role in ensuring that border measures and

customs-procedure reforms respond to the needs of the private sector, in particular SMEs. Strengthening this work will ensure that SMEs can fully benefit from the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

15. Further collaboration could explore innovative partnerships among capacity-building programmes, Mr. Azevêdo told the meeting. Aid for Trade support for SME development rose by 50% between 2005 and 2013, indicating the increasing focus on SME internationalization. Mr. Azevêdo said more can be done to ensure that WTO and ITC work in coordinated and complementary ways.
16. WTO will continue to support ITC projects, he said, since by working together to continuously improve and do better, the two organizations can make a practical difference in promoting the positive impact of trade.

Statement by Executive Director of ITC

17. ITC Executive Director Ms. Arancha González thanked the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the Director-General of WTO for their votes of confidence in ITC. She then provided an overview of how ITC worked with its partners around the world in 2016 to deliver results.
18. Ms. González noted that strong demand for ITC services continued in 2016, as evidenced by a solid pipeline of projects valued at over \$200 million. Extra-budgetary resources in 2016 totalled \$48 million, while ITC's overall delivery of market intelligence, technical assistance, and capacity-building support amounted to \$85.4 million.
19. She stressed the broader implications of ITC delivery of services: for example, every dollar that ITC received in extra-budgetary funding resulted in \$14 of exports and investment. In 2016, ITC estimated that its interventions resulted in \$685 million in additional exports and investments. Throughout 2016, ITC continued to enhance its impact assessments and project evaluations, and also incorporated lessons learned into new projects.
20. Furthermore, the work of ITC has been increasingly focusing on places with the most pressing development needs, Ms. González said. Over 85% of country-specific interventions in 2016 focused on priority countries – LDCs, sub-Saharan African countries, LLDCs, small island developing states, small, vulnerable economies, and post-conflict and fragile states. ITC equally expanded its operations in Latin America, Asia, and Central Asia in response to strong demand for ITC assistance.
21. Ms. González confirmed that ITC is committed to achieving the SDGs and noted that improving the competitiveness of MSMEs raises incomes and reduces poverty among those at the bottom of the economic pyramid. Furthermore, women-owned MSMEs contribute to healthier and better-educated families, and youth employment opportunities generated by MSMEs reduce migratory pressures. To fully deliver on the SDGs, ITC's operational structure has been aligned with them, and the forthcoming ITC strategic plan will centre on 'Trade Routes to 2030,' she told the meeting.
22. ITC streamlined its programmatic approach through the development of a 'one-ITC' log frame, through theories of change for all programmes, and through a refined project-design process, Ms. González said. An Innovation Lab was also established to further foster creative solutions and partnerships. Gender equity has remained a key focus for ITC, she noted, and progress towards gender parity at all levels has continued, with women accounting for 42% of the organization's professional staff. In addition, 52% of fixed-term recruitment competitions were won by women.

23. Highlights from ITC's work in 2016 included the launch of the second edition of the *SME Competitiveness Outlook*, which focuses on standards and regulations; continued enhancement of trade and market intelligence tools with the launching of the Export Potential Map to help users identify promising export opportunities; and the development of ePing, a notification system for greater transparency in standards and regulations. In 2016, ITC's tools facilitated \$300 million in trade transactions. Along with WTO and UNCTAD, ITC is working to develop the SME Trade Help Desk, to be launched in 2017 at the WTO Ministerial Conference, Ms. González said. The Desk will allow SMEs to access trade data, intelligence, and analyses to help improve their competitiveness. Further, the SME Trade Academy has increased the number of its participants and course offerings, and its geographic scope. To help countries implement the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement, ITC partnered with other UN organizations and has continued to support performance improvements and benchmarking at trade and investment support institutions (TISIs).
24. Several ongoing initiatives showed marked success in 2016, Ms. González told the meeting. Through the SheTrades initiative, ITC connected 600,000 women to markets. Business-to-business networking and ITC's matchmaking app mobilized \$11 million in business deals. The ITC Ethical Fashion Initiative connected artisans in poor communities to the global fashion industry, with projects in Haiti, Burkina Faso, and Mali leading to increased incomes for such artisans.
25. Two major projects in 2016 focused on expanding South-South trade by linking the two largest emerging economies, India and China, to trade and investment opportunities in Africa, Ms. González reported. The Supporting Indian Trade and Investment for Africa (SITA) project resulted in \$15 million in orders, with additional investments and trade deals under negotiation that ultimately may be worth \$60 million. The Partnership for Investment and Growth in Africa (PIGA) concluded its 'scoping' phase and already has led to positive engagements between Chinese companies and partners in Ethiopia, Kenya, Mozambique, and Zambia, she said.
26. Over the first half of 2017, ITC continued to expand existing initiatives and to develop new projects. ITC launched the Gambia Youth Empowerment Project (YEP) to support skills training, value addition, and entrepreneurship to generate jobs and deter detrimental migration from the country. SheTrades was launched in Rwanda and Colombia, and ITC led the celebrations of the first UN International MSME Day in June. Upcoming events include the fourth Trade for Sustainable Development Forum in September, which will come up with recommendations for the promotion of sustainable value chains, the World Export Development Forum in Hungary in October, and the Women in Trade event at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Argentina in December.
27. By working to meet country and regional needs, innovate and adapt, and learn from experiences and expand partnerships, ITC continues to generate results and impact, Ms. González said. Looking ahead to its *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, ITC intends to continue in this direction.
28. In concluding, Ms. González appealed to the JAG membership for their continued support and thanked them for their vote of confidence in ITC. She acknowledged the role played by ITC's staff and by the senior management team led by Deputy Executive Director Dorothy Tembo.

Special address by the Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment of the Gambia

29. Dr. Isatou Touray, Minister of Trade, Industry, Regional Integration, and Employment of the Gambia, opened her remarks by expressing her gratitude to the countries, organizations,

and individuals who have supported and celebrated the new Gambia. She further assured the country's trade and development partners of the Gambia's readiness to embrace the rule of law and of its commitment to the multilateral trading system.

30. Dr. Touray said that trade liberalization can facilitate competition, investment, increased productivity, and job creation. At the same time, she stressed that trade openness must result in an equal share of trade growth and economic opportunity for all segments of society, and particularly for women and youth.
31. Gender inequality reduces the potential for beneficial trade impacts for women, she noted. In the Gambia, over 50% of the population consists of women, but they represent only 38% of the labour force. Further, the majority of the Gambia's businesses are informal micro enterprises, 80% of which are comprised of women. These women entrepreneurs face barriers in accessing the necessary finance, information, and technologies that would increase their productivity and incomes.
32. As a result, the Gambian government is firmly committed to women's economic empowerment, Dr. Touray said. It has developed a National Gender Policy and a Private Sector Development Strategy aimed at promoting gender equality and addressing gender issues. Dr. Touray noted that ITC's SheTrades initiative and work on empowering women are vital for ensuring that women receive the benefits of trade growth. She appealed on behalf of the Gambian government for ITC to expand the SheTrades initiative to the Gambia.
33. Youth unemployment, which has reached 38%, is another prominent concern, as it negatively affects social cohesion and encourages irregular migration, Dr. Touray said. The Gambia has one of the highest rates of irregular migration, with negative effects on the potential future development of the country. To reduce youth unemployment, the Gambia has partnered with the European Union and ITC to launch the Youth Empowerment Project (YEP). YEP is designed to support and empower Gambian youths by creating job opportunities and by encouraging youth entrepreneurship.
34. Working with ITC, the Gambia is developing Youth and Trade Roadmaps that connect business opportunities in domestic, regional, and global markets with interested youth, Dr. Touray said. YEP also provides vocational training support and business development services that cater to youth. Dr. Touray asserted her confidence that the YEP project and the country's ongoing partnership with ITC will be beneficial and will create quality and sustainable jobs to help build a prosperous Gambia.

Special address by the African Union Commissioner for Trade and Industry

35. Mr. Albert M. Muchanga, Ambassador and African Union (AU) Commissioner for Trade and Industry, opened his remarks by celebrating the leadership of ITC Executive Director González and praising the example she sets for gender equality and women's empowerment.
36. Ambassador Muchanga promised that the African Union Commission will be monitoring measures taken by ITC to mainstream and strengthen gender equality, and said the Commission plans to mainstream gender into the establishment of Africa's Continental Free Trade Area.
37. He applauded ITC for its on-the-ground impact, which he called a positive reflection of the multilateral trading system. The direct connection between ITC projects and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals is commendable, he said, and aids in the fulfilment of the aims and goals of the AU.

38. ITC's programmes and initiatives address the issues necessary for the revitalization of AU economies, Mr. Muchanga told the meeting. The work ITC conducts on export capacity-building offers significant potential benefits to the African private sector, and the AU hopes to collaborate with ITC in implementing the Pan-African SME strategy to improve intra-African trade and competitiveness.
39. Ambassador Muchanga detailed several ongoing projects between ITC and the AU. The African Trade Observatory uses trade data collected and analysed by ITC to build a platform to disseminate such data relevant to policymakers who are developing intra-African trade policies. Additionally, the African Business Council, currently under formation, will amount to an ongoing effort to establish a private-sector platform to open a channel of communication between that sector and policymakers to boost trade. Both projects will stimulate intra-African trade and will inform policy for the Continental Free Trade Area. They also will contribute to sustainable economic growth and to rising income levels.
40. Beyond these projects, the AU looks forward to broader collaboration with ITC in an effort to implement the framework of the Continental Free Trade Area, to support gender equality and women's empowerment, and to strengthen the continent's SMEs, Mr. Muchanga said. Partnering with ITC on these objectives will help the AU achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and integrate into global and regional value chains.

Special address by the Minister of Commerce and Industry of Liberia

41. Mr. Axel M. Addy, Minister of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Liberia, began his address with a reflection on the changes of the past year. In 2016, Liberia completed its accession to the WTO, thanks to the assistance of ITC. Working with ITC, Liberia was able to fast track the stakeholder consultative process and develop strategies to meet the commitments outlined in the country's accession package.
42. ITC also offered integral assistance to Liberia in enacting the Small Business Empowerment Act and in developing export strategies to target and support economic diversification, he said. With ITC's support, Liberia has been able to begin reforming its business climate to make it more transparent. The country also has worked at transforming its informal sector so that the sector benefits SMEs.
43. In a year of global transitions and increasing difficulties, Mr. Addy noted, the work of ITC has been more important than ever. ITC offers solutions that will transform the business environment in Liberia so that it will increase the productivity of the invisible economy and facilitate the economic empowerment of women and youth.
44. ITC's innovative work helps to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and to alleviate poverty, he told the meeting. By connecting the local to the global and by promoting local expertise, ITC inspires lasting solutions and positive impacts. Mr. Addy highlighted the *SME Competitiveness Outlook* as an insightful tool that helps policymakers better understand sector intelligence. In Liberia, this has been used to discover and develop the tourism sector, allowing the economy to grow, evolve, and better people's lives.
45. Mr. Addy concluded his remarks by expressing his gratitude for ITC Executive Director González's assistance and leadership. He said that with the continued support of ITC, Africa can achieve sustainable and inclusive growth that will bring hope to future generations.

Special address by the Minister for Commerce of Pakistan

46. Khurram Dastgir Khan, Engineer and Minister for Commerce of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, opened his address with praise for the progress towards inclusive growth generated by ITC's capacity-building work.
47. Pakistan's partnership with ITC from 2004 – 2007 led to the establishment of WTO reference centres in Pakistan that raise awareness among trade support institutions, the private sector, and policymakers about WTO issues, Mr. Khan said. ITC also conducted studies during that period to highlight the export potential of various sectors of the Pakistani economy.
48. Since 2011, Pakistan's institutional capacity has been strengthened through ITC programmes that develop mentorships and training courses, he told the meeting. Support from ITC also has aided the Competition Commission of Pakistan and has helped shape Pakistan's export enhancement policies. Additionally, ITC assisted in the reform of the national consultative process, promoted the inclusion of the private sector in policymaking, and increased the efficiency of Pakistan's implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement.
49. In 2017, ITC launched its SheTrades initiative in Pakistan, the Minister noted. Several more ITC projects are ongoing or under development, including a roadmap for trade and development reforms and an initiative undertaken by the province of Punjab to reduce barriers to Pakistani enterprises seeking to connect to markets through e-commerce. Currently, ITC is assisting in the formulation of a programme aimed at supporting rural SMEs by increasing gender-inclusive opportunities in the Sindh and Baluchistan provinces.
50. Mr. Khan noted that e-commerce is reshaping trade. As more businesses connect to the global market through such technological advances, communities have the potential to reap tremendous economic and social benefits. The capacity-building work of ITC is helping more SMEs adjust to the changing business environment and take advantage of new opportunities, and Pakistan has benefited greatly from ITC support.

Statements by delegations

51. Delegates expressed appreciation for ITC's continued emphasis on promoting inclusive and sustainable trade and economic growth, and noted that these efforts are necessary for sustainable development and for effective contributions by trade to the achievement of the SDGs.
52. Various delegations commended ITC for the focus of its *Operational Plan* and draft *Strategic Plan* towards contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. Many delegates also expressed their appreciation for ITC's commitment to sustainability and welcomed ITC's work on Trade for Sustainable Development, in particular the ITC Standards Map.
53. Commenting on the *ITC Annual Report 2016*, several delegations noted with satisfaction the positive results achieved during 2016 and remarked that the report showed a series of successes in regard to work aimed at supporting SMEs and improving export capacities.
54. ITC was commended for continuing to respond to growing demand, despite budgetary pressures. The difficult funding environment was noted, and delegations urged ITC to continue its efforts to diversify its funding mechanisms. They also called for existing and new funders to increase support for ITC.
55. In addressing ITC's internal structure, delegates highlighted that considerable improvement has been made in terms of internal coherence and evaluation, and noted with appreciation the increased focus of ITC's work across six thematic 'baskets'. Delegates encouraged ITC to carry on its process of internal reform, to maintain its pursuit of stronger evidence of

impact, and to continue to establish clearer theories of change, more coherence across projects, and a more secure funding base. Member states affirmed that they look forward to working with ITC to sharpen focus in the new *Strategic Plan* and to further demonstrate the plan's impact.

56. Various delegates commended Executive Director González for her leadership and ITC staff for their dedication and professionalism.
57. Several delegates applauded ITC's focus on least developed countries (LDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small, vulnerable economies (SVEs) and post-conflict states, reiterating that 85% of ITC's country-specific interventions were focused on such priority countries. Some member states urged ITC to continue to work in post-conflict or fragile countries and to continue investing in LDCs. Similarly, delegates called on ITC to strengthen efforts to ensure that deliverables remain tailored to the contexts of clients.
58. Multiple delegates underscored the importance of ITC interventions promoting South-South trade and regional integration, citing the Partnership for Investment and Growth in Africa (PIGA) and Supporting Indian Trade and Investment for Africa (SITA) initiatives as examples.
59. Several member states congratulated ITC for collaborating with various partners and for working to engage and promote synergies between the private sector and government actors. Delegates also applauded ITC's role as a reliable, open, and transparent partner for trade and development, and encouraged ITC to continue to deepen existing partnerships.
60. With regard to the thematic focus of ITC, delegates highlighted important work on value-chain development, SME competitiveness, export promotion and diversification, technical assistance on non-tariff measures, and trade facilitation, in particular for implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement. Some delegates requested that work on TISI development receive complementary support to provide better services for SMEs that are otherwise neglected by TISIs.
61. Several member states applauded ITC's efforts to connect MSMEs, especially those involving women and youth, to international value chains. ITC's participation in the first MSME Day was commended and delegates noted the role of MSME development in the achievement of the SDGs. While it was affirmed that ITC's work supporting MSMEs should remain a priority, it was particularly recommended by one delegation that ITC strive to improve the link between supporting MSMEs and helping developing countries to make better use of trade preferences.
62. There was clear support for ITC's work on women's economic empowerment and gender equality. Multiple delegates highlighted the work of SheTrades, conveying their support for the initiative and its role in women's economic empowerment. The Group of Latin American countries, along with other delegations, requested that ITC expand the SheTrades initiative to additional countries.
63. Addressing ITC's services and products, delegates commended the usefulness of market analysis tools, the launching of ePing, the crucial support of TISIs, and the work of the Ethical Fashion initiative. The public goods nature of many of ITC's products was praised, as it allows ITC to reach diverse MSMEs regardless of location. Delegates requested the opportunity to work further with tools such as the Export Potential Map and SME Trade Academy.

64. The 2016 edition of the *SME Competitiveness Outlook*, with its focus on standards and regulations, was welcomed by member states, and many delegates praised ITC for the high-quality analysis and recommendations provided by the report.
65. There was appreciation for ITC's work promoting tourism, and delegates noted satisfactory results from tourism projects. Several said the sector has important potential for ITC's further engagement. One member state requested additional assistance to develop destination management and tourism.
66. Several delegates highlighted ITC's achievements in e-commerce and the promotion of the digital economy and noted the importance of such work in helping developing countries to engage with new technologies. One member state urged ITC to enhance its support for online training and participation in the digital economy.
67. JAG members applauded ITC's commitment to delivering innovative solutions. They appreciated ITC's focus on innovation, both in operations and as a method for engaging entrepreneurs. ITC was commended for its work in developing innovative solutions to support migrants through trade, the digital economy, and value-chain engagement. One delegate suggested further consideration of the synergies between the work of ITC and the humanitarian-development nexus. Delegates also highlighted the role that ITC's work involving youth can play in mitigating irregular migration.
68. Several delegates urged member states to continue their support of ITC and, in particular, to contribute un-earmarked funds to allow the organization to plan for the future.

Presentation of Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report

69. Mr. Miguel Jimenez-Pont, Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU), presented ITC's 2017 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report, which includes a summary of the findings of the past year. The report's purpose is to synthesize lessons learned and to provide recommendations to ITC management and project managers for future operations. One chapter is dedicated to findings relating to the development of agricultural value chains.
70. The report comprises 23 project evaluations. Performance ratings were introduced for each of five evaluation criteria: relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability, and impact, and for the two cross-cutting issues of gender equality and women's empowerment. These allowed for corporate-level comparisons.
71. Mr. Jimenez-Pont confirmed that overall results were positive and that the organization is on track in terms of its core business and management approach. The evaluations indicate that ITC projects have achieved strong results, as evidenced by an average overall score of 4.7 on a rating scale of 1-6 for the 10 external and internal evaluations.
72. These results mainly relate to two areas: project strategy and project services, where progress and good practices have been recognized and opportunities for improvement have been identified. In terms of project strategy, ratings are higher for recent projects than for older ones, which indicates that the programmatic approach is being progressively integrated into new project design. Mr. Jimenez-Pont stressed that it remains important for project managers to employ project-level theories of change and systematic approaches for verification and quality assurance. The evaluations recommend that project monitoring and

reporting be a 'major, budgeted, and assigned task', as good monitoring remains a collective challenge.

73. Regarding ITC's project services for clients, Mr. Jimenez-Pont said, evaluations confirmed ITC's clear comparative advantage in supporting SMEs in their efforts to internationalize. It also is clear that such services present further opportunities for ITC to increase responsiveness at the country level. Recommendations included the following: an increased focus on consistently evaluating the needs and capacities of SMEs; development of an explicitly gender-conscious needs assessment; further work on strengthening TISI capacities; development of a realistic three-year TISI capacity-building plan; and work towards maximizing private-sector partnerships to leverage their marketing power.
74. Within ITC, Mr. Jimenez-Pont said, the IEU has implemented a three-tier evaluation system which requires that all ITC projects be subjected to a form of evaluation. The three-tier system also includes the publication of ITC Evaluation Guidelines to be used by ITC staff and Aid-for-Trade evaluation practitioners, and the development of an online evaluation course to train ITC staff to better equip them with evaluation and monitoring skills. Recently the first corporate-level evaluation was launched to assess ITC performance in its participation in the "Delivery as One" UN system, he said.
75. Finally, Mr. Jimenez-Pont said, a formal impact evaluation was conducted in 2016 on the Netherlands Trust Fund Phase II Project in Uganda (NTF II Uganda), uncovering evidence of the long-term impacts generated at the SME, TISI, and policy-advocacy levels. This study served as a pilot for testing and customizing ITC's impact-assessment methods.
76. Mr. Jimenez-Pont concluded his presentation by confirming that the IEU is dedicated to fully embedding an evaluative culture within ITC that promotes accountability and learning.

Presentation of outline of ITC's *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*

77. Mr. John Gillies, ITC Senior Advisor on Strategic Planning and Partnerships, presented the consultative document for ITC's *Strategic Plan 2018-2021*, entitled *Trade Routes for Sustainable Development*. He confirmed that the document aligns with ITC's purpose of contributing to the SDGs through trade. It also outlines future objectives, upcoming changes, and the future direction of the organization.
78. Development of the Strategic Plan has involved consultations with diverse stakeholders, including partners, clients, and other UN bodies. Consideration of several challenges and trends in the global trade environment are guiding the formulation of the Strategic Plan, Mr. Gillies said.
79. To implement its new strategy, ITC will prioritize results and impact analyses and will further develop public-private partnerships, he said. The sustainable mobilization of resources will be crucial to the efficient and effective delivery of services.
80. The intention of the new Strategic Plan is to focus ITC's work with its clients, using customized approaches for each country that account for specific trade needs and potential, Mr. Gillies said. By establishing new partnerships, by capitalizing on ITC's comparative advantages, and by developing new funding platforms, ITC will be able to improve its capacity to achieve trade results that contribute to the SDGs.

Closing session

Chairperson's summary

81. Chairperson Mary Frances Lisson presented the Chair's report on the proceedings of the session.
82. She thanked the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, WTO Director-General, ITC Executive Director, and special guests Mr. Albert M. Muchanga, Dr. Isatou Touray, Mr. Khurram Dastgir Khan, and Mr. Axel Addy for their insightful statements, noting that these presentations laid the groundwork for a fruitful discussion. Ms. Lisson noted that the heads of WTO and UNCTAD emphasized the importance of complementary work between their organizations and ITC to facilitate trade, apply Aid for Trade to integrate underserved populations, and achieve the SDGs. The special guests provided contextualized examples of the challenges faced by their communities and confirmed the impact ITC's assistance has had in surmounting these obstacles and in promoting sustainable economic empowerment and growth.
83. Ms. Lisson emphasized ITC's many achievements in 2016, noting that the organization maintained a high degree of deliverables and continued to focus on inclusive growth and capacity-building, particularly through gender- and youth-empowerment initiatives. The SheTrades initiative was commended for its significant contributions to women's empowerment, and many delegates saw strong potential for its expansion. Furthermore, the creation of ePing, Market Access Maps, and the SME Trade Academy all demonstrated ITC's capacity to discover innovative methods for expanding market access and stimulating growth.
84. Many delegations, impressed by ITC's impact, called for more predictable and continued funding of the organization, she said, and delegations from China, Finland, and Germany declared their future commitments to and contributions to ITC. The coordinator of the donor group (United Kingdom) encouraged further innovation at ITC, including more public-private partnerships. Several donors voiced their appreciation for ITC's internal reforms and underscored the importance of continuing work on impact assessment and evaluation, on theories of change, and on developing additional partnerships.
85. The *Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report* summarized insights gained from both internal and external evaluations of ITC's work in 2016, Ms. Lisson said. This information will assist ITC in continuing to improve its deliverables and bolster its accountability both to donors and to recipient countries. Additionally, an outline of the *Strategic Plan 2018-2021* was presented. Feedback from delegations and the related online survey will be essential for constructing an effective strategy for the coming years, she told the meeting.
86. Ambassador Lisson closed by saying that the discussions at the JAG session were constructive demonstrations of ITC's commitment to engagement and impact. She extended thanks to funders and beneficiaries for their continued commitment to and support of ITC.

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>

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