

REPORT OF THE 57TH SESSION OF THE ITC JOINT ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

Geneva, 20 July 2023

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.

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Report of the 57th session of the ITC Joint Advisory Group

Geneva, 20 July 2023

Opening Session

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 56th session

1. H.E. Ms. Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Mauritius to the United Nations Office at Geneva, opened the 57th session.
2. Ambassador Dwarka-Canabady referenced the Annual Report and congratulated ITC staff for their dedication and hard work, which was instrumental in the results of 2022. She highlighted how ITC's commitment to Aid for Trade has been pivotal in supporting the resilience of small businesses, fostering a conducive business environment while equipping businesses and policymakers with data and intelligence.
3. She highlighted examples of ITC's achievements in 2022, including the One Trade Africa programme's role in operationalizing the Africa Continental Free Trade Area, the SheTrades programme's support to thousands of women producers and entrepreneurs, and ITC's high share of delivery in least developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing States (SIDS), sub-Saharan African countries, and conflict-affected countries.
4. Ambassador Dwarka-Canabady mentioned that Mauritius was proud to host a SheTrades Hub, facilitating the internationalization and institutional strengthening of women-led businesses. She thanked ITC Executive Director, Pamela Coke-Hamilton for taking the time to travel to Mauritius where she had a significant impact.
5. In closing she thanked the Executive Director and the JAG Secretariat for their support during her term as Chair of the 56th session of JAG.

Opening remarks by the Chair of the 57th session

6. H.E. Ms. Nadia Theodore, Ambassador, Permanent Representative to the WTO, Permanent Mission of Canada in Geneva, took up her position as Chair of the 57th session of the JAG.
7. In her opening remarks, Ambassador Theodore mentioned the relevance of the 2022 Annual Report title "Diversifying trade in times of crisis" in a year where the recovery from the pandemic was uneven and unstable due to the war in Ukraine and worsening impacts of climate change. In this a context, she appreciated that ITC dedicated 2022 to building the climate competitiveness of small businesses. She referenced the

Climate Smart Network, which featured climate-smart MSMEs and facilitated their connection to buyers, and the Sankofa project, in Ghana which promoted climate-smart cropping systems and diversification in cocoa production in Ghana.

8. Ambassador Theodore highlighted the need for trade to ensure that “no one is left behind”. She acknowledged the work done by ITC through the SheTrades Hubs – ensuring that the impact of ITC’s initiatives reach a large number of women-owned, and women-led businesses. She also appreciated the Gender Moonshot for forging into new areas such as public procurement to benefit women.
9. Ambassador Theodore stated that in 2022, ITC helped 27,000 MSMEs improve their competitiveness and 9,600 MSMEs transact international business. She noted that these achievements marked a good first year of implementation under ITC’s Strategic Plan 2022-2025.
10. She highlighted that Canada took pride in being a partner of ITC, supporting their core Window 1 budget and contributing to initiatives such as the moonshots, piloting innovative programs and fostering the development of Global Public Goods.
11. Ambassador Theodore invited donors to continue their support and welcomed new donors to join the cause and build a more inclusive and sustainable global economy.

Statement by WTO Director-General

12. Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO), recognized ITC for its impact on people's lives and for creating trade opportunities around the world. She commended the strong stewardship shown by Pamela Coke-Hamilton in leading ITC.
13. Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala highlighted that trade was about people and hence it was critical for the rules and frameworks established in the WTO to expand living standards, foster job creation and increase sustainability. She stressed the importance of supporting the progress being made by ITC to ensure that this was a reality.
14. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala highlighted the imminent need for MSMEs to understand and meet international standards. She added ITC’s results of 2022, where ITC worked in 134 countries to help MSMEs, governments, and business support organizations. As examples of ITC’s work in 2022 she referenced the One Trade Africa programme which empowers MSMEs across the continent to make use of the AfCFTA, the GRASP programme in Pakistan that helped rural MSMEs invest in green technologies and the SheTrades initiative which continues to grow its support to women-led businesses.
15. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala highlighted areas where ITC directly complements ongoing processes of the WTO. For example, ITC provided capacity building for developing countries, including LDCs, to engage effectively in the investment facilitation negotiations, supported WTO accessions of several countries and helped the

Cotton-4 (C4) countries in West Africa to integrate into the global sports apparel value chain.

16. She suggested areas of further improvement. First, she urged ITC to maintain its focus on 'what it does best' in relation to donor-driven ideas that can sometimes divert organizations from their core goals. Second, she recommended ITC pay greater attention to scaling up successful approaches. An example of this is the joint ITC-WTO shea butter project in Nigeria. To expand projects such as this, there is a shared commitment between WTO and ITC to work together to raise resources for initiatives that empower women in digital trade. Third, the three parts of the Geneva Trade Hub must continue working together, overcoming turf wars. Examples like the forthcoming trade pavilion at COP28 in the UAE demonstrate a commitment to stronger collaboration.
17. Dr. Okonjo-Iweala concluded by saying that these were difficult times for ITC's clients and donor countries, and she appreciated their support. She called on everyone to leverage trade to put growth and development back on track and encouraged all stakeholders to work together.

Statement by Secretary-General of UNCTAD

18. Rebeca Grynspan, Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) asserted that the cascading crises have put the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at risk; at the mid-point to 2030 only 12% of SDGs are on track.
19. She highlighted three important areas of concern. First, the digital revolution affects both products and trade, leading to digital skill gaps between urban and rural areas, as well as gender disparities. Second, climate change disproportionately impacts developing countries with limited means for mitigation and adaptation, demanding a just transition. Trade and trade policy can aid in this transition and facilitate technology access. Third, to foster inclusivity, MSMEs need the ability to integrate into global value chains as they are the backbone of all economies worldwide.
20. Rebeca Grynspan then mentioned areas in which UNCTAD and WTO work together, including e-trade readiness and e-commerce legislation. For example, in Kazakhstan, UNCTAD partnered with ITC to develop e-commerce legislation. WTO, UNCTAD, and ITC collaborate on the Global Trade Helpdesk, providing a single window for trade intelligence. In fostering a green transition, ITC and UNCTAD have been working together on the UN Forum on Sustainability Standards to translate standards into real opportunities.
21. Rebecca Grynspan emphasized the importance of cooperation between organizations to tackle challenges and informed that UNCTAD and ITC were for example discussing joint proposals for the upcoming SDG Acceleration Day. COP28 will see a joint trade pavilion by WTO, UNCTAD and ITC.

Rebecca Grynspan concluded by emphasizing the SDGs as a collective promise to ourselves. She urged everyone to make the best use of resources and talents to fulfil that promise. Lastly, she expressed gratitude to Pamela Coke-Hamilton and the donors.

Statement by Executive Director of ITC

22. Ms. Pamela Coke-Hamilton, ITC Executive Director, expressed her gratitude to Ambassador Usha Chandnee Dwarka-Canabady of Mauritius for setting a high bar as JAG Chair, efficiently managing the speakers' list and echoing themes that make ITC's work special. She also thanked Ambassador Theodore for accepting to chair this year's JAG, representing Canada's commitment to trade, development, inclusion, and multilateralism. She further thanked the Director-General of the WTO and the Secretary-General of UNCTAD for providing ITC's twin identity as its parent agencies.
23. Ms. Coke-Hamilton reminded everyone that 2022 heightened volatility, uncertainty, and complexity, contradicting her earlier belief that the world was at a low point in 2021 with the four Cs of COVID-19, climate change, conflict and cost of living. The increased challenges contributed to setbacks in achieving the SDGs. However, despite the grim circumstances, she expressed hope that change was on the horizon for global trade.
24. Ms. Coke-Hamilton explained that despite the challenging context, ITC's clients have not stopped seeking new routes to market. The uncertainty of the last year has accelerated the search for export diversification. She also observed a change in ecosystems; the stress placed on MSMEs led to the realization that a flourishing and functioning private sector ecosystem was crucial for global value chains. The fragility and uncertainty faced by ITC's clients have reinforced the belief that the future of trade needs to be more inclusive, connected, and sustainable.
25. Ms. Coke-Hamilton highlighted ITC's Annual Report 2022, showcasing a year of strong delivery during the first year of the Strategic Plan. Notably, the delivery in 2022 surpassed 150 million US dollars, setting a new record for ITC's highest ever delivery. ITC's Market analysis tools garnered nearly 1.5 million registered users, Window 1 financing reached over 12 million dollars, and approximately 37,000 MSMEs experienced improved competitiveness through ITC interventions.
26. ITC made progress on its moonshot initiatives in the areas of green, gender, youth, and digital. Through the digital moonshot, the Switch ON pilot in Zambia attracted new investment for MSMEs. The green moonshot presented a compelling business case to MSMEs for adopting sustainable practices. ITC amplified the voice of the next generation in global trade through the youth and gender moonshots and expanded the SheTrades initiative to empower more women across countries and sectors.
27. Ms. Coke-Hamilton highlighted successful initiatives from the Annual Report. For example, the EU-funded SAAVI project facilitated two and a half million US dollars in potential deals through Iraq's first-ever National Trade Forum. In Kenya, ITC's RESI project supported young entrepreneurs from Dadaab, and the UK-funded United

Kingdom Trade Partnerships Programme (UKTP) helped Saint Lucian artist Sherwin "Dupes" Brice showcase his music at the WOMEX festival in Lisbon. The EU-funded Colombia PUEDE project led to a 200% increase in farmer productivity and incomes, along with hundreds of new export certifications for producers from conflict-affected communities.

28. Ms. Coke Hamilton expressed gratitude to ITC's funders for their support in 2022. She also thanked the foundations, intergovernmental organizations, UN partner agencies, and private sector partners who contributed their time, ideas and energy. She extended her thanks to the entire WTO and UN membership for their faith in ITC.
29. Looking at the way forward, ITC's delivery for 2023 remains on track, and ITC will continue its focus on strategic planning, governance, risk planning, and resource mobilization. Ms. Coke-Hamilton elaborated on the "ITC Moving Forward" initiative, including the six-point action plan for addressing prohibited conduct and the twenty-point action plan for a better workplace. She assured stakeholders that ITC will continue to report on these initiatives through its various governance bodies.
30. Ms. Coke-Hamilton concluded her speech by sharing a personal account from her recent travels to Kenya, where she met the women of "Nyota Farsamo," one of the Dadaab refugee groups supported by ITC's RESI project. They skilfully hand-weave baskets that are featured in many shops throughout Nairobi. The women expressed how this activity brought meaning to their day, boosted their self-esteem, and enabled them to afford books and uniforms for their children. This story reflects the core of ITC's mission and signals an impending change in global trade.
31. Ms. Coke-Hamilton closed her remarks by thanking the ITC staff for their hard work, dedication and creativity.

Statements by delegations

32. Throughout the meeting, 46 delegates from both funder and programme countries took the floor. Overall, delegates appreciated ITC for its achievements in 2022 and its role as an important development partner. Areas of ITC's work most referenced by delegates included SheTrades, One Trade Africa, the UK Trade Partnerships Programme, Alliances for Action and the Global Trade Helpdesk. Other programmes highlighted by delegations included ITC's work on climate competitiveness, Arise Plus, the Euromed programme, the Switch ON initiative, the GTEX/MENATEX programme and the Partnership for enhancing export capacity of Africa to China (PEECAC).
33. Delegates appreciated ITC for its successful first year of implementing the Strategic Plan 2022-2025. ITC's role as an important partner in promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development, being solution-oriented, and delivering despite challenges ("four Cs") was highlighted by several delegates. ITC's focus on LDCs, assistance to women, youth, and refugees, and support to developing countries to benefit from bilateral and multilateral trade, including flagship events like WEDF, were appreciated. ITC's leadership and staff were praised for their achievements in 2022.

34. Several delegates mentioned the Annual Report, emphasizing the case studies and powerful stories. They appreciated how ITC's work linked to the SDGs, fostered competitiveness and resilience, and proved to reliably deliver time-bound targets.
35. Delegates commended ITC for prioritizing vulnerable communities, women and youth. The essential work on trade and gender aligns with the aspiration of supporting sustainable growth, with recognition for the SheTrades initiative. SheTrades Hubs were acknowledged for providing a unique platform for integrating various areas, including digital tools and green competitiveness. Delegates saw potential for further horizontal integration for gender, sustainability, and green criteria in ITC's work.
36. Digital was highlighted as an area of extreme importance due to the rapid changes in the post-pandemic world. Delegates acknowledged the challenges related to the digital divide, technology transfer, and digital competitiveness. They were pleased with ITC's considerable efforts in this regard but also called for additional support to assist MSMEs in developing countries with their digital transition.
37. Delegates emphasized the importance of strengthening partnerships with other actors to complement each other's strengths and maximize synergies. They recognized ITC, WTO, and UNCTAD as the three core strengths of the multilateral trading system in Geneva and called for increased collaboration between the agencies. Additionally, there were requests for ITC to participate more closely in WTO meetings, including on food security, e-commerce, and MSMEs.
38. Delegates appreciated ITC's efforts to connect trade and environment at the WTO. They particularly commended the Climate Competitiveness Project, which highlights the role of trade in fostering the climate competitiveness of MSMEs. Delegates believed this addressed the sustainability needs of countries and saw potential for further growth of such initiatives on the ground.
39. Delegates emphasized the importance of ITC reaching its 45% delivery target for LDCs, as per the Strategic Plan. Delegates recognized ITC's vital role in integrating LDCs into the global economy and called on ITC to implement the Doha Plan of Action.
40. Delegates expressed gratitude to ITC for the support during the AfCFTA discussions and called for continued action in the future. They highlighted the One Trade Africa program, which trained numerous MSMEs and requested additional grassroots assistance.
41. Delegates referenced the ITC Moving Forward and appreciated ITC's efforts to improve the working environment. They expressed gratitude for the transparent dialogue and updates and look forward to future updates.
42. Several delegates from developing countries used the opportunity to appreciate donor countries for their generous contributions. Beneficiary countries also expressed the need to analyse cases when projects are discontinued, to facilitate learning. Funders reaffirmed their countries' commitments to continue their collaboration with ITC.

Presentation of the 2023 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report

43. Mr. Miguel Jiménez-Pont, Head of the Independent Evaluation Unit (IEU), presented the [ITC 2023 Annual Evaluation Synthesis Report \(AESR\)](#), which conveyed critical insights and lessons learned from evaluations, ensuring better learning. The report also included lessons learned from the implementation of the first year of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025.
44. Mr. Jiménez-Pont highlighted the main findings of the evaluations, showing the high degree of alignment between projects and ITC's overall priorities, strategic mandate, and beneficiary needs. The evaluations also noted appropriate consideration was given to the integration of SDGs. While integration was generally well planned, there were areas for improvement, such as the use of expertise and research from other divisions and in-country collaboration.
45. The report found that active involvement of project teams on the ground with beneficiary communities was crucial, and hubs and hybrid delivery models were identified as success factors for efficiency and effectiveness. Overall, the AESR report found projects to be effective, with some room for strengthening management for results. The AESR observed a positive contribution of several projects in building inclusive, sustainable, and prosperous economies.
46. Mr. Jiménez-Pont summarized key conclusions from the report. While projects intended to address cross-cutting issues, implementation could be seen as slightly uneven, with gender aspects more emphasized. The AESR highlighted the importance of improved strategic assessments and consultations with beneficiaries and partners from inception.
47. Mr. Jiménez-Pont also mentioned that the intensity of in-country collaboration varied by project, and it was important to continue efforts to operationalize collaboration with UN agencies at the country level. The AESR also noted that the logframes were generally designed to meet compliance purposes, with a recommendation to strengthening them through additional M&E tools, especially for large projects and complex projects.
48. Mr. Jiménez-Pont concluded that this year's AESR results were good. ITC's projects were well-aligned with most parts of the Strategic Plan 2022-2025, particularly with its vision, mission, and principles. Additionally, projects clearly demonstrated that ITC's model was valid in generating sustainable development through trade and entrepreneurship.

Closing Session

Chair's summary

49. In closing, Ambassador Nadia Theodore thanked delegates for their contribution to ITC's work. She congratulated ITC's Executive Director for sharing a positive outlook

on the future of trade, despite ongoing challenges. Amid global instability, she highlighted ITC's commitment to its core mission of helping small businesses access international markets and contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. Ambassador Theodore noted that 46 statements were made by delegates. Many of the contributions alluded to how ITC had continued delivering results at a time of multiple crises, in line with the JAG theme of "new trade routes, new opportunities." Against this backdrop, delegates voiced their support for the work of ITC and underlined the importance of trade-related assistance in helping to bring their economies back on the path towards recovery.
51. Ambassador Theodore also conveyed that delegates had challenged ITC to do more and maintain its focus on the neediest and most vulnerable. She underlined that Director-General Okonjo-Iweala emphasized the need for ITC to keep scaling up its interventions. Ambassador Theodore expressed her encouragement to see that ITC's programming was on the right track to meet the ongoing and rapidly changing needs of small businesses in developing countries. She argued that through close cooperation with partners, including the WTO and UNCTAD, trade would continue to have a transformative and positive impact on jobs, economic resilience, and poverty reduction.
52. Ambassador Theodore concluded by thanking everyone for their time and their engagement in shaping ITC's role in building trade capacities in various countries.

Executive Director's Closing Remarks

53. In her closing remarks, Ms. Coke-Hamilton expressed her gratitude to the Chair for moving the discussion along, and ably keeping time and track with humour.
54. Ms. Coke-Hamilton expressed her appreciation to everyone who spoke during the session, as it provided valuable lessons and insights. She noted the acknowledgment of ITC staff's dedication and support to countries' strategic priorities, with a call for ITC to remain focused on the most vulnerable. She welcomed the calls for ITC to be more ambitious, keep innovating, and improve internal processes and workplace culture.
55. She urged delegates to join ITC on project visits, as they could change one's perspective. She emphasized the global setting in which COVID-19 continues to have negative long-term effects, climate change is worsening, geopolitics threaten global trade routes, and inflation remains unacceptably high. She highlighted that all funders and beneficiary countries' investments in ITC were contributing to a change in global trade towards a more inclusive, sustainable, and connected world.
56. Ms. Coke-Hamilton closed the 57th JAG meeting by expressing her appreciation to the delegates for their affirmation, perseverance, and engagement.

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