

Supporting development and building trade capacity

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The WTO aims to help developing countries build their trade capacity and allows them a longer time to implement trade agreements. Hundreds of training courses are organized each year for officials from developing countries.



Spotlight

Aid for Trade
Global Review 2019 136



Trade and development

- **The Committee on Trade and Development (CTD) pursued its mandate to be the focal point for development work at the WTO.**
- **The Committee held two dedicated sessions on the monitoring mechanism for special and differential treatment (S&D) for developing countries.**
- **Latest WTO Secretariat data showed continuing growth of the share of developing countries in world merchandise and services trade.**

Background on trade and development

The Committee on Trade and Development is the focal point for the coordination of all work on trade and development issues in the WTO. The Committee deals with a variety of issues, including all developmental issues, technical cooperation and training, and notifications under the Enabling Clause, which allows developed countries to give more favourable treatment to developing countries.

The Committee on Trade and Development continued work on the link between trade and development, as instructed by trade ministers. In particular, it looked at how to fully operationalize the mandate of the CTD as the focal point for development work within the WTO. The Chair of the Committee, Ambassador Chad Blackman (Barbados), encouraged WTO members to “explore all possible ways to move forward”.

The Committee also continued discussions on electronic commerce and duty-free and quota-free market access for least-developed countries (LDCs). It considered a report by the WTO Secretariat on the implementation of special and differential (S&D) treatment provisions for developing countries in WTO agreements and decisions. Such provisions range from increasing trade opportunities for developing countries and LDCs to granting longer transition periods for the implementation of WTO agreements and providing technical assistance. It was agreed that the report would be updated at least once every two years.

The Committee held two dedicated sessions on the monitoring mechanism on S&D, which acts as a focal point to review the implementation of S&D. WTO members expressed regret that no written inputs or submissions, which are required for the exercise, have been presented. Delegations differed on whether to proceed with a review of the mechanism regardless. Ambassador Blackman urged members to come to a “common understanding on the way forward” for the mechanism.

The WTO Secretariat presented an updated note on the participation of developing economies in the global trading system. The shares of developing economies in world merchandise and commercial services trade continued to rise during the 2016-18 period. For merchandise trade, the shares rose from 42.7 per cent to 43.4 per cent for exports and from 39.9 per cent to 41.1 per cent for imports. For commercial services, shares rose from 30.1 per cent to 30.8 per cent and 37.7 per cent to 38.2 per cent, respectively.



In a session dedicated to regional trade agreements (see page 101), the Committee considered the Partial Scope Agreement between El Salvador and Ecuador, the Framework Agreement for establishing a Free Trade Area between India and Thailand and the Free Trade Agreement between the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and Egypt.

Trade and the SDGs

Speaking at the United Nations' High-level Political Forum on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in New York in July, Deputy Director-General Yonov Frederick Agah called for greater cooperation among international organizations to help revitalize the global partnership for development and to deliver the SDGs. His remarks were delivered at a side-event on improving trade's contribution to sustainable development. International organizations are mandated by SDG 17 to revitalize the global partnership for development.

Technical cooperation and training

The annual performance report on technical assistance and training for 2018 was presented to the Committee. The WTO Secretariat undertook 307 technical assistance activities in 2018 and participated in several other related activities. Overall, 22,800 participants received training, representing an increase of 25 per cent over 2017. The biennial technical assistance and training plan for 2020 and 2021, which defines the strategy and priorities, was adopted by the Committee.



International organizations must follow the road of cooperation, as mandated by SDG 17, to revitalize the global partnership for development.

DDG Agah



Least-developed countries

- **Market access was a central theme in discussions in the Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries (LDCs).**
- **LDC exports of goods and services rose by 12 per cent in 2018, continuing a positive trend.**
- **In 2018, LDCs were associated with 62 per cent of all WTO trade-related technical assistance.**

Background on least-developed countries (LDCs)

The Sub-Committee on LDCs, established in July 1995 as a subsidiary body to the Committee on Trade and Development, focuses its work on an agreed WTO work programme for LDCs. This programme looks at a number of systemic issues of importance to LDCs in the multilateral trading system, such as market access, technical assistance and accession to the WTO.

Market access for LDCs

Market access for LDCs was a central theme in the Sub-Committee on LDCs in 2019. The WTO Secretariat's yearly report on trends in LDC trade and market access showed that LDCs' exports of goods and services increased by 12 per cent in 2018, continuing the positive trend from 2017.

LDCs' share of world exports increased slightly from 0.92 per cent in 2017 to 0.94 per cent in 2018. As this is still lower than in 2011, the LDCs are unlikely to achieve the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action target to double their export share by 2020. The LDCs' trade deficit remained substantial at US\$ 98 billion in 2018, more than twice the 2011 level.

LDCs called on WTO members to continue to make progress in the implementation of ministerial decisions on duty-free and quota-free (DFQF) market access (see page 128), preferential rules of origin (see page 81) and the LDC services waiver (see page 92) to further facilitate LDCs' market access.

The WTO Secretariat briefed the Sub-Committee on developments in preferential rules of origin in the Committee on Rules of Origin and presented analytical work on preference utilization. LDCs welcomed progress made in the notifications of rules of origin requirements and expressed interest in better understanding factors behind non-utilization of certain preferences.

LDCs welcomed the opportunity to learn about the findings of a mid-term evaluation of the European Union's General System of Preferences (2014-23) granting preferential tariffs to imports from developing countries. Duty-free access under the EU's Everything-But-Arms scheme, under which all imports to the EU from LDCs are duty-free and quota-free with the exception of armaments, was considered to be making a positive contribution to enhancing exports from LDCs.

Technical assistance and capacity building

The WTO continued to attach priority to LDCs in the delivery of technical assistance (see page 140). In 2018, LDCs were associated with 62

per cent of all WTO trade-related technical assistance. LDCs, especially from Africa, were among the biggest users of e-learning courses, accounting for close to one-third of participants. LDCs highlighted the importance of the WTO's technical assistance, including internship programmes and national activities, for strengthening trade capacity.

The Executive Secretariat of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), which assists LDCs in integrating trade into their national development strategies, updated members on EIF activities, including its strategic plan 2019-22 (see page 136). Highlighting the importance of the EIF for building their capacity to use trade as a tool for development, the LDCs called for further strengthening of the programme.

The Secretariat of the Standards and Trade Development Facility noted that LDCs benefited from 59 per cent of project preparation grants in 2018 (see page 138). LDCs highlighted the utility of the STDF not only as a funding mechanism but also as a global knowledge platform on sanitary and phytosanitary capacity-building.

Accession of LDCs to the WTO

The WTO Secretariat briefed WTO members on the state of play for LDC accessions (see page 26). Eight LDCs are in the process of acceding to the WTO (Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Timor-Leste). LDCs highlighted the importance of technical assistance in LDC accessions and called on members to intensify their efforts towards concluding ongoing LDC accessions.

LDC graduation

The WTO Secretariat briefed members on an EIF-WTO project on LDC graduation, launched in March 2019. The project, which responded to a request from the LDC Group, aims to help 12 LDCs on the way to graduating from LDC status to prepare for trade-related implications. Regional and national workshops are being organized as part of the project, and a report will be presented at the 12th Ministerial Conference. Members welcomed the project and looked forward to its findings.



Small economies

- **The Group on Small, Vulnerable Economies (SVEs) presented an “outcome” document on the challenges and opportunities faced by small economies in reducing trade costs.**
- **The SVEs introduced a proposal for a ministerial decision at the 12th Ministerial Conference on the Work Programme on Small Economies.**

Background on small economies

The Committee on Trade and Development – in dedicated sessions – oversees work on small economies and monitors the progress of proposals from small, vulnerable economies in the various WTO bodies and negotiating groups. Several small economies are small island states.

The Committee on Trade and Development held two dedicated sessions in 2019 on small, vulnerable economies (SVEs). At the first session, the SVE Group presented an “outcome” document on the challenges and opportunities experienced by small economies in their efforts to reduce costs in goods and services trade, particularly through trade facilitation. It was based on the discussions held in dedicated sessions in 2018.

The session also heard a presentation from the WTO on trade and natural disasters, which contained a summary of work done in two symposia in April and December 2018 to discuss the links between natural disasters and the multilateral trading system.

In the second meeting, the Committee considered a compilation paper by the WTO Secretariat of the work on SVEs since the beginning of the Work Programme on Small Economies. The SVE Group introduced a proposal for a ministerial decision at MC12 on the work programme to include a mandate for work on the impact of natural disasters on trade for small economies and the integration of small economies into new forms of trade. It also proposed that a discussion on attracting investments take place in early 2020.



Aid for Trade

- Aid for Trade disbursements rose to US\$ 43.1 billion in 2017, from US\$ 38.9 billion in 2016. US\$ 409.1 billion has been disbursed since 2006.
- The WTO hosted the Global Review of Aid for Trade on the theme “Supporting economic diversification and empowerment”.
- The Committee on Trade and Development began preparing an Aid for Trade work programme for 2020-21.

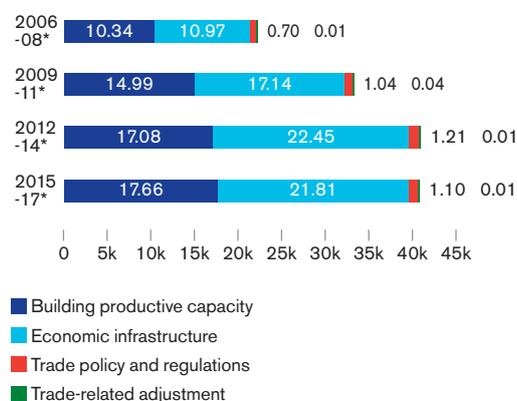
Background on Aid for Trade

Aid for Trade helps developing countries, and particularly least-developed countries (LDCs), to trade. The WTO-led Aid for Trade initiative encourages developing country governments and donors to integrate trade objectives into their development plans. It seeks to mobilize resources to address the trade-related constraints faced by developing countries and LDCs.

The WTO hosted the 2019 Aid for Trade Global Review in July (see page 134). The event drew some 1,500 participants to 84 sessions and facilitated high-level dialogue on trade and development issues. There was a particular focus on Aid for Trade’s role in supporting economic diversification, the empowerment of women and youth.

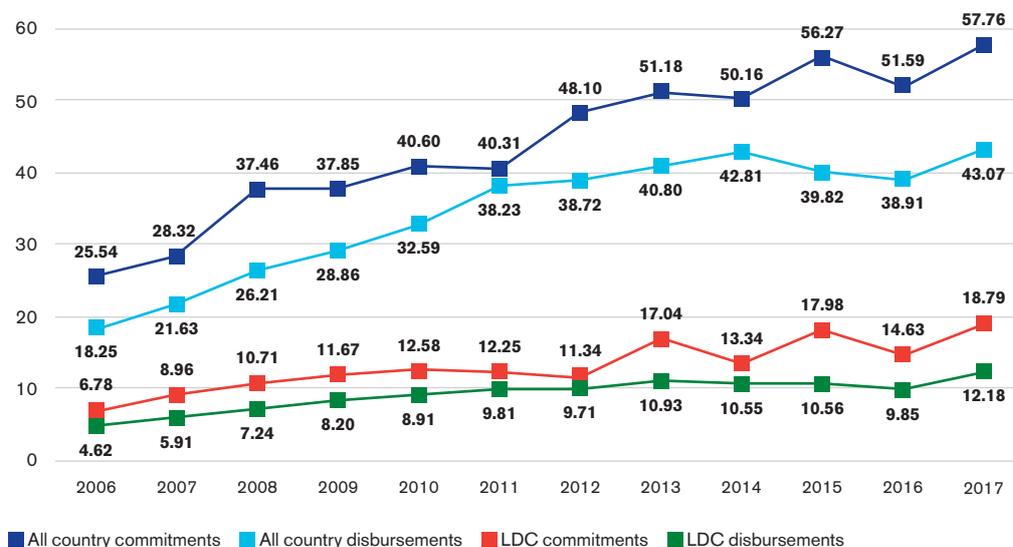
The Global Review also saw the launch of the 2019 edition of the flagship publication “Aid for Trade at a Glance”, co-published with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, which analyses the latest Aid for Trade monitoring and evaluation exercise (see page 159).

Figure 1: Aid for Trade disbursements by category (in US\$ billion, 2017 prices)



Source: OECD-CRS, Creditor Reporting System

Figure 2: Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements by income group (in US\$ billion, 2017 prices)



Aid for Trade financing

The most recent Aid for Trade data published by the OECD show that total disbursements rose to US\$ 43.1 billion in 2017 from US\$ 38.9 billion in 2016 (see Figures 1 and 2). Commitments reached US\$ 57.8 billion in 2017, up from US\$ 51.6 billion in 2016.

Between 2006 and 2017, the total amount of Aid for Trade, part of official development aid, disbursed to developing countries reached US\$ 409.1 billion. An additional US\$ 346 billion in development finance was also provided at non-concessional rates.

Disbursements have increased in every region since the launch of the Aid for Trade initiative (see Figure 3). In 2017, they increased again in all regions other than Europe. Support targeting least-developed countries (LDCs) also grew to reach US\$ 12.2 billion in 2017, up from US\$ 9.8 billion in 2016. An increasing proportion of this support was provided in loans rather than grants.

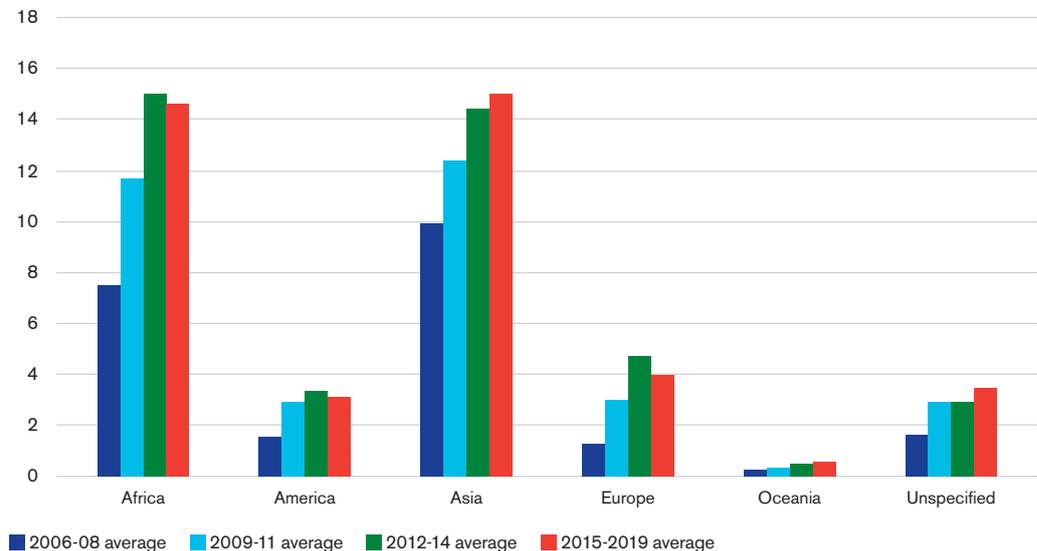
Aid for Trade work programme

The Committee on Trade and Development continued to review the implementation of Aid for Trade at three sessions during the year. Members, development institutions, UN agencies and multilateral development banks participated and reported on their activities.

The Committee also organized four dedicated thematic workshops on: sustainable development and the green economy; connectivity and digital skills development; findings of the Aid for Trade monitoring and evaluation exercise; and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and access to finance. All these themes were further developed at the Global Review.

In November, the Committee started developing a new Aid for Trade work programme for 2020-21. The Chair, Ambassador Chad Blackman (Barbados), highlighted the continued relevance of economic diversification as a policy objective for developing countries, in particular LDCs. He also highlighted some themes emerging from the Global Review, including inclusivity and empowerment, digital connectivity and diversification in terms of green growth.

Figure 3: Aid for Trade disbursements by continent (in US\$ billion, 2017 prices)



Source: OECD-CRS, Creditor Reporting System

Spotlight:

Aid for Trade Global Review 2019

On 3-5 July 2019, the WTO hosted the Global Review of Aid for Trade on “Supporting economic diversification and empowerment”. In 84 sessions, spread over three days, some 1,500 participants discussed the many facets of trade and development, with economic diversification and empowerment as the main threads.

High-level panellists included the prime minister of Cambodia, over 30 ministers or deputy ministers and 20 heads or deputy heads of agencies and international organizations. The conference also brought together a large number of officials from WTO members and professionals from the development arena.

High-level opening session

The opening session featured remarks from DG Azevêdo and General Council Chair Sunanta Kangvalkulkij before a keynote address by Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodia’s Prime Minister, who highlighted the economic progress his country has made since its WTO accession. “As a small economy, Cambodia believes in the benefits of globalization and international cooperation based on multilateral rules,” he said. Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Secretary-General Ángel Gurría, the Secretary General of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), Mukhisa Kituyi, Chief Executive Officer Philippe Le Houérou of the International Finance Corporation (IFC), then International Trade Centre (ITC) Executive Director Arancha González, and Hani Sonbol, CEO of the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, were also on the opening panel.

Participants emphasized the importance of Aid for Trade in achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including through generating economic growth, poverty reduction, and the economic empowerment of women, youth and micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs). The initiative also helps integrate developing countries into the multilateral trading system, particularly low-income, fragile and vulnerable economies, they said.

Launch of “Aid for Trade at a Glance”

The opening session saw the launch of the 2019 edition of “Aid for Trade at a Glance” – a joint OECD/WTO publication with contributions from the Enhanced Integrated Framework, the ITC, UNCTAD, the UN Development Programme, the UN Industrial Development Organization and the World Bank (see page 159). The report analyses the 2019 monitoring and evaluation exercise, which showed that economic diversification and empowerment are core objectives of the trade and development strategies and policies of WTO members.

The opening session was attended by Samdech Hun Sen, Cambodia’s Prime Minister, DG Azevêdo and OECD Secretary-General Ángel Gurría.



DG Azevêdo participated in a session on “Women entrepreneurs: Making the Buenos Aires declaration happen”.



DG Azevêdo told the Global Review that diversification and empowerment help countries increase their participation in global trade flows and facilitate opportunities to move up the value chain. “In turn, all this helps to build better prospects and opportunities for improved livelihoods,” he said.

Many of the 133 respondents to the monitoring exercise highlighted how economic diversification is a gateway to economic empowerment, with respondents seeing empowerment in turn stimulating economic diversification. Also included in the publication was a breakdown of the US\$ 410 billion disbursed in Aid for Trade since the launch of the initiative in 2006 (see page 132).

Several other reports were launched at the Review. A lack of trade finance is severely hindering the trade opportunities of small businesses in developing countries, according to a co-publication released by the WTO and the IFC (see page 110).

Main themes

Themes that emerged strongly from the Review included the importance of digital connectivity for diversification and inclusion, the need to promote greater economic sustainability, building diversification in climate-sensitive sectors, and how to promote adaptation measures that increase resilience to natural and other disasters. Inclusion and empowerment also featured prominently in the debates, including many on women’s economic empowerment. Other debates around inclusivity and empowerment included a particular focus on ways to empower least-developed countries.

Adapting to modern realities

The Global Review concluded with participating members reaffirming their commitment to, and the importance of, Aid for Trade, and with calls for the initiative to continue promoting economic development, sustainability and inclusiveness, while adapting to modern realities. “The richness of the debate clearly reflects two things: first, that Aid for Trade continues to be a fundamental tool to help economic empowerment; second, that there is much scope for this initiative to adapt, change, improve and evolve in order to keep helping members to address structural challenges, both old and new,” DG Azevêdo said in concluding remarks.



A session entitled “Africa focus: Supporting economic diversification and empowerment” was held on 3 July.

Enhanced Integrated Framework

- The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) officially launched its 2019-22 strategic plan, which aims to better position least-developed countries (LDCs) in the global economy.
- New projects totalling US\$ 35 million were submitted to the EIF Board for approval in 2019.
- The Board extended the current EIF programme for two years until 2024 to allow more time for LDCs to implement projects.

Background on the Enhanced Integrated Framework

The EIF is the only multilateral partnership dedicated exclusively to supporting least-developed countries in using trade as an engine for growth, sustainable development and poverty reduction. The EIF partnership of 51 countries, 24 donors and eight partner agencies works closely with governments, development organizations, civil society and academia. The WTO houses the EIF Executive Secretariat.

Implementing EIF's new strategic plan

The EIF began to deliver on its 2019-22 strategic plan – “inclusive trade for better lives” – working to ensure that LDCs are able to use trade and investment to integrate more fully into global trade and achieve sustainable development and poverty reduction. Officially unveiled on 19 February 2019 in Kampala, Uganda, the new plan is designed to better position LDCs in the global economy at a time of growing concerns about trade.

In 2019, new projects totalling US\$ 35 million were submitted to the EIF Board for approval aimed at building analytical, institutional and productive capacity for trade in LDCs. The Board extended the current, seven-year EIF programme (2016-22) for two years until 2024 to allow LDCs more time to implement projects. Total commitments to the programme stand at US\$ 136 million. In 2019, Australia, Denmark, Germany, Finland, Japan and Sweden pledged some US\$ 14 million.

Building capacity for trade

Eighteen projects to build productive capacity in LDCs were designed with input from EIF countries and submitted for approval by the EIF Board.

Of these, 13 projects valued at US\$ 19 million have been approved. They aim to increase exports and access to international markets. Examples include strengthening the shea value chain in West Africa, enhancing export growth initiatives in Rwanda and promoting export diversification in Bhutan.

The Cambodia Trade Integration Strategy (2019-23) is providing a blueprint for the country's trade development. It includes chapters on trade facilitation, trade logistics development, e-commerce and digital transformation. Sustainability support projects were also approved in Lesotho, Malawi, Mali, Senegal and Sierra Leone.

A project in Zambia, which is being implemented by the International Trade Centre, delivered technical training to over 120 women-owned businesses to enhance their business export strategies and access to finance. The project contributes to the EIF's “Empower Women Power Trade” initiative, which was announced by DG Azevêdo on International Women's Day in March 2019 and unveiled at the Women 20 meeting in Tokyo. The four-year initiative will involve working with partner LDC governments to shape policy and bring women into decision-making bodies as equal participants. The programme aims to benefit 50,000 women in LDCs by 2022.



The EIF partnered with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific for a regional capacity-building project in South Asia. The project aims to enhance the knowledge and capacity of women entrepreneurs in the use of e-commerce platforms in order to expand their business exports and increase their participation in local, regional and global supply chains.

In partnership with the UN Conference on Trade and Development, “eTrade” readiness assessments were made for Kiribati, Lesotho, Malawi and Tuvalu, evaluating the ability of these LDCs to join the global digital economy.

The EIF is partnering with the WTO on a project to assess the trade-related implications for LDCs of their “graduating” from LDC to developing country status. For example, a project is under way in Vanuatu, which is scheduled to graduate in December 2020.

Reaching out

At the 2019 Global Review of Aid for Trade (see page 134), the EIF’s main event, “Seeing Impact and Looking Forward”, hosted over

200 participants. An EIF-organized side event, “Diversifying Exports in Fragile LDCs”, generated a lively discussion on trade challenges for LDCs in fragile and conflict-affected regions.

In 2019, the EIF’s Trade for Development News platform launched a series of articles focusing on three major trade conversations – the Fourth Industrial Revolution, climate change and the evolving global trade landscape – with a particular emphasis on the impact on LDCs.

Monitoring, evaluation and learning

Significant investments in strengthening effective monitoring, evaluation and learning were put in place. Workshops in Cotonou, Kampala and Luang Prabang focused on results-based communication and planning.

A so-called meta-evaluation of EIF projects was conducted to assess the quality and use of project evaluations for continuous learning and for drawing lessons about the overall performance of EIF projects. The performance was rated as satisfactory across each of the evaluation criteria. The results were presented to the full EIF partnership at the year-end Steering Committee meeting.

A project to promote export diversification in Bhutan has been approved by the EIF Board.



Standards and Trade Development Facility

- The Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) approved US\$ 4.2 million for projects aimed at improving food safety, animal and plant health and helping developing countries meet sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements for trade.
- Africa remained the leading beneficiary of STDF grants.
- An independent external evaluation reconfirmed the STDF’s key role as a knowledge network and catalyst for developing and rolling out collaborative, innovative SPS projects. It also said the STDF is achieving more than can be expected in responding to developing country needs, given its budget and resources.

Background on the Standards and Trade Development Facility

The STDF is a global partnership helping developing countries improve food safety, animal and plant health and meet sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements for trade, based on international standards. Established by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, the World Organisation for Animal Health, the World Bank, the World Health Organization and the WTO, the STDF contributes to sustainable economic growth, poverty reduction and food security. It is financed by voluntary contributions from Australia, Canada, Denmark, the European Union, Finland, Germany, France, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Strengthening SPS capacity in developing countries

The STDF in 2019 approved six project grants and seven project preparation grants (PPGs) totalling US\$ 4.2 million. New projects in Africa aim at strengthening the phytosanitary system in Guinea, improving SPS capacity in Penja pepper in Cameroon and preventing fruit fly pests in South Africa and Mozambique.

In Asia, new projects will boost food safety and market access for peppercorns in Viet Nam, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Cambodia, and will contribute to pesticide residue mitigation using biopesticides. In Latin America, a new project was approved to mitigate trade barriers due to high cadmium levels in cocoa in Colombia and Ecuador.

New PPGs will develop projects to strengthen sanitary capacity in the shellfish sector in Senegal, promote regulatory harmonization on biopesticides in the Southern African Development Community, and improve compliance with SPS requirements for feed in Afghanistan. Other projects include strengthening food safety and quality in Sri Lankan spices and developing a food-safety risk analysis programme in Latin America. PPGs will also pilot the use of good regulatory practices in the Philippines and use the STDF’s evidence-based approach to prioritize SPS investments in Ecuador.

STDF projects mostly benefit countries in Africa, followed by Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean (see Figures 4 and 5).

Since its founding in 2004, the STDF has provided US\$ 53.2 million for projects to develop the SPS capacity of producers, traders and governments in developing countries to meet international standards for food safety, plant and animal health and to access international markets. Of these funds, over US\$ 35 million has been allocated to projects in least-developed and other low-income countries.

Figure 4: STDF regional projects and PPGs (number), 2004-19*

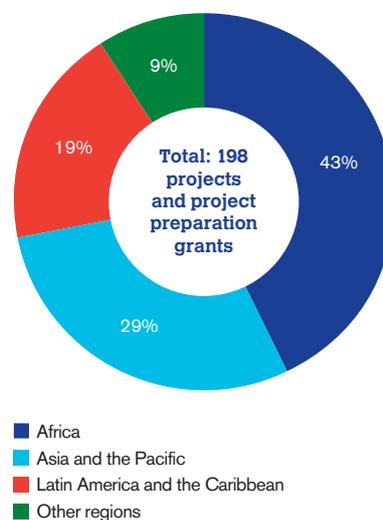
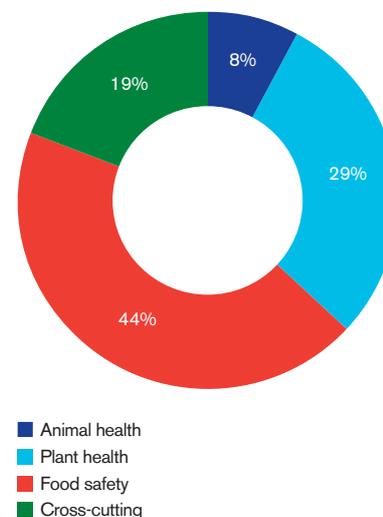


Figure 5: STDF projects and PPGs by topic (number), 2004-19*



*The figures comprise total STDF funding and non-STDF funding.





Flower workers have been supported by STDF's project to promote exports in Uganda.

Developing SPS capacity

The STDF continued to facilitate dialogue among public and private-sector partners within its projects and on thematic topics cutting across the areas of food safety, animal and plant health, and trade. These include good regulatory practice, electronic SPS certification, border risk management, public-private partnerships and prioritization of SPS investment needs. The STDF Secretariat shared experiences and lessons from the STDF's work at over 70 conferences and SPS capacity-building workshops worldwide.

External evaluation

An independent external evaluation, released in 2019, reconfirmed the STDF's key role as a knowledge network and catalyst for developing and rolling out collaborative, innovative SPS projects. It also concluded that the STDF and the STDF Secretariat have delivered outputs and results beyond what might be expected given their budget and resources. The evaluation, carried out

by Nathan Associates, highlighted the STDF's added value and set out various recommendations to shape its future direction.

New STDF strategy 2020–24

In January 2020, the STDF launched its 2020-24 strategy entitled "Safe and Inclusive Trade Horizons for Developing Countries". In support of the UN's 2030 Agenda, and building on the STDF's strong track record, the strategy sets out how the STDF will continue to assist developing countries by connecting diverse stakeholders with a role in SPS capacity development, delivering innovative and collaborative SPS projects and catalysing change in developing and least-developed countries.



Technical cooperation and training

- The WTO undertook just under 300 technical assistance activities in 2019, including e-learning, national, regional and global training activities.
- Least-developed countries (LDCs) participated in 50 per cent of all technical assistance activities.

Background on technical cooperation and training

The Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation coordinates the WTO's technical assistance programmes. Its activities include e-learning, global and regional training courses, academic programmes and workshops at national and regional level. The technical assistance programmes help WTO members better understand their rights and obligations in the multilateral trading system. This strengthens countries' capacity to benefit from participation in the system.

The WTO Secretariat undertook just under 300 technical assistance (TA) activities in 2019 to help government officials gain a better understanding of WTO rules and the multilateral trading system. More than 18,600 participants benefited. The number of online courses rose by 10 per cent to 87, showing a continuing shift towards online learning.

The WTO's 2018-19 technical assistance and training plan follows a "results-based management" approach to ensure that training is delivered in the most effective way. Guidelines and benchmarks help to maintain a high standard of content for all training, consistent teaching methods and regular evaluation of all WTO technical assistance activities.

The WTO Secretariat participated in 12 conferences and other events organized by partner institutions. The number of technical assistance activities in which LDCs participated was roughly unchanged – 50 per cent. More than 60 per cent of all participants accessed their training through e-learning resources on the WTO's online platform.

The WTO continued to involve international and local partners in technical assistance activities to integrate a local perspective in the design of the training programmes.

Sixteen per cent of activities were focused on African countries, 13 per cent Asia and the Pacific, 9 per cent Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia, 8 per cent Latin America, 4 per cent Middle East countries and 3 per cent the Caribbean (see Table 1). The remaining 47 per cent were "global" activities (including online courses), mostly held in Geneva and aimed at participants from all WTO members and observers. In line with the demand-driven approach, just over 30 per cent of all activities were delivered at the national level in countries where a specific need was identified.

Participation levels

Women represented 48 per cent of participants for all WTO technical assistance activities, an increase of two percentage points on 2018. Roughly 68 per cent of participants undertook technical assistance in English, 12 per cent in Spanish and 11 per cent in French. Another 8 per cent benefited from multilingual training.



Table 1: Technical assistance activities by region in 2019*

Target region	Regional	National	Global**	Total
Africa	37%	26%	0%	16%
Asia and the Pacific	19%	29%	0%	13%
Caribbean	6%	5%	0%	3%
Central and Eastern Europe and Central Asia	13%	20%	0%	9%
Global**	0%	0%	100%	47%
Latin America	14%	15%	0%	8%
Middle East	11%	4%	0%	4%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%

* Totals may not add up to 100 per cent due to rounding.

** Activities under the "global" category are not targeted at a specific region but include activities such as Geneva-based courses, distance learning, internship programmes and an advisory role on legal issues.

Technical assistance continued for countries seeking to join the WTO (see page 28), with approximately 350 government officials participating in 46 technical assistance events.

Internship programmes

In 2019, the majority of officials completing WTO internship programmes were from LDCs and other low-income countries in Africa and the Asia and Pacific regions. Nineteen candidates completed the French and Irish Missions Internship Programme, thirteen candidates are currently in the Netherlands Trainee Programme (which commenced in May 2019), five candidates completed the Regional Coordinator Internship Programme and eight completed the Accession Internship Programme.

WTO internship programmes offer government officials hands-on experience in WTO activities. The programmes give priority to applicants from Africa and LDCs, to small, vulnerable economies and to countries in the process of joining the WTO.

Young Professionals Programme

Following a merit-based selection process, 13 young professionals (seven men and six women) were recruited for the Young Professionals Programme in 2019. The programme was launched in 2016 to increase the representation of professionals from nationalities currently under-represented at the WTO Secretariat. Funded by the Global Trust Fund, the programme aims to improve the opportunities for the young professionals to be recruited by the WTO and/or other regional and international organizations.

All the young professionals came from members currently without any professional staff in the WTO Secretariat. The 2019 group comprised professionals from Afghanistan; Cambodia; Haiti; Honduras; Hong Kong, China; Liberia; Macao, China; Maldives; Namibia, Oman; Papua New Guinea; Sri Lanka; and Tajikistan. Their tasks ranged from contributing to WTO Secretariat working documents, attending meetings and preparing minutes to assisting in the organization of the WTO's Public Forum.

DG Azevêdo met with them in November to thank them for their good work and contribution to the organization. "This programme helps to strengthen the diversity at the Secretariat," he said. "This is very important in an organization like the WTO, where inclusivity and diversity are at the core of our activities."

Financing technical assistance

The bulk of the technical assistance programme is financed by the Global Trust Fund, which receives voluntary contributions from WTO members. Excluding some annual fluctuations, there has been a steady decrease in voluntary contributions for a decade. In 2019, total contributions were CHF 6.2 million compared with CHF 7.4 million in 2018.

Other funding sources include the WTO regular budget for Geneva-based courses and national technical assistance activities – CHF 4.5 million for 2019 – and contributions from other trust funds (such as the French and Irish Missions Internship Programme and the China Programme), which totalled CHF 2.5 million in 2019.

Trade and women's empowerment

- DG Azevêdo told an event marking International Women's Day that "gender issues are central to who we are as an organization".
- The WTO launched a training module looking at the intersection between trade and women's economic empowerment.
- The WTO participated in 16 international conferences to showcase its work on trade and gender. It also published a number of studies on how trade impacts women's empowerment.

Background on trade and women's empowerment

In 2017, the WTO appointed a Trade and Gender Focal Point, who is leading the work on trade and gender in the WTO. The WTO seeks to build a more inclusive trading system, raise awareness on the link between trade and gender, facilitate WTO members' actions on trade and gender, generate new data on the impact of trade on women and provide training to government officials.

Research work on trade and gender

In 2019, the WTO published a number of studies on how trade impacts women's empowerment. A paper published in April looked at how WTO members integrated women's empowerment into trade policies between 2014 and 2018. Almost half of the membership has implemented at least one trade policy in support of women. Another paper looked at how Aid for Trade has impacted women's economic empowerment by building their capacity to trade and to use trade as a tool for their economic development.

In partnership with the South Asian Women Development Forum and TradeMark East Africa, a trade-promoting organization, the WTO conducted two surveys in South Asia and in East Africa of over 200 women entrepreneurs. They showed that most women wanted to export and join global markets but were not sure where the opportunities were or how to access them.

The WTO marked International Women's Day on 8 March 2019 with an event – "Unlocking Trade for Women's Empowerment through Innovation and Sustainability". It took place a little over a year after a large group of WTO members and observers endorsed at the 11th WTO Ministerial Conference an initiative to boost women's role in international trade (see page 54). Opening the event, DG Azevêdo reviewed what the organization is doing on trade and gender and talked about future work and initiatives. "Gender issues are central to who we are as an organization," he said.

He also announced a new research project to look at how trade can help women seize new economic opportunities arising from the development of the green economy and how it can help them benefit fully from new environmental innovations. At a session at the Aid for Trade Global Review 2019, DG Azevêdo said that women entrepreneurs play a vital part in the world economy but more must be done to dismantle barriers to their full participation in global trade.



The WTO marked International Women's Day with an event entitled "Unlocking Trade for Women's Empowerment through Innovation and Sustainability".



Trade and gender training for government officials

A WTO training module on trade and women's economic empowerment was launched on 8 March 2019. It looks at the intersection between the two, examining the issue in the context of WTO rules and members' different perspectives on how these rules can be reflected in trade policies. The module contains concrete examples, case stories and WTO members' best practices. It is based on the mandate provided to the Secretariat by WTO members in the 2018-19 Biennial Technical Assistance and Training Plan (see page 129).

The training module has been gradually included as part of courses delivered by the Institute of Training and Technical Cooperation (see page 140), and as part of advanced and regional trade policy courses, Geneva Week events, introductory trade policy courses for least-developed countries

and e-chats. Thirteen training activities were organized for trade officials in 2019.

The WTO also contributed to a capacity-building workshop on women and trade organized by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's Committee for Trade and Investment in Santiago, Chile, in March.

The WTO participated in 16 international conferences in 2019 to showcase the WTO's work on trade and gender. Through the Public Forum (see page 150) more links were established with civil society. The WTO partnered with Graduate Women International to celebrate the NGO's 100th anniversary. It has also started a dialogue with the Gender and Trade Coalition, a group initiated by NGOs to call for equitable trade policy.