Supporting development and building trade capacity

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.
Harvesting tea leaves at a plantation in Chiang Mai, Thailand.

146 Trade and development

151 Aid for Trade

154 Enhanced Integrated Framework

157 Standards and Trade Development Facility

160 Technical cooperation and training

164 Trade and women’s empowerment
Activities in 2020

WTO members discussed the COVID-19 outbreak at a virtual session of the Committee on Trade and Development in May 2020. Several members reported a decline in their exports, noting that developing countries with limited resources were the most affected by the crisis, especially those whose exports are concentrated in a small range of goods.

The Committee continued work on the link between trade and development, as instructed by trade ministers. It also continued discussions on electronic commerce and duty-free and quota-free (DFQF) market access for least-developed countries (LDCs).

A dedicated session was held on the monitoring mechanism on implementation of special and differential treatment (S&D) provisions, such as technical assistance, for developing countries in WTO agreements and decisions. The Chair, Mohammad Qurban Haqjo (Afghanistan), noted that no written inputs or submissions, which are required for the exercise, had been presented. He urged members to come to a common understanding on how to move forward with the mechanism.

Montenegro notified the Committee of its DFQF scheme for LDCs and Kazakhstan notified its Generalized System of Preferences, under which developed countries grant preferential tariffs to developing countries. Documents relating to the Latin American Integration Association were circulated and considered by the Committee.

The Committee considered the preferential trade agreement between the Southern
Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Southern African Customs Union, the free trade agreement between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and the Republic of Korea, the preferential trade agreement between India and Afghanistan and the accession of Egypt to the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa. The Committee also considered the economic complementarity agreement between Mexico and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, and the comprehensive economic partnership agreement between India and the Republic of Korea.

SDGs Trade Monitor

In October, the WTO, the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) launched the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) Trade Monitor. The online portal collates the latest progress in achieving the trade-related SDGs of the United Nations. It allows users to conduct customized analysis of trade-related SDG indicators, with the objective of improving understanding of the relationship between trade and development in the SDG agenda and highlighting the latest state of play in achieving the relevant SDG targets.

Technical cooperation and training

The Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) provided updates on technical assistance. Face-to-face technical assistance activities were disrupted in mid-March 2020 by the COVID-19 outbreak. However, online training courses continued through the e-Campus.

The WTO Secretariat undertook 278 technical assistance activities in 2019 and participated in several other related activities. Overall, 14,500 participants received training, representing a decrease of 37 per cent on 2018. This decline was partly due, particularly among LDC beneficiaries, to participants having to use a new cloud-based platform and registration process. The WTO provided guidance to address the problems.

The Committee took note of the Secretariat’s technical assistance monitoring and evaluation plan and was briefed by the ITTC on a new simplified procedure to request national technical assistance activities online. In addition, the Committee was introduced to the new format for the annual performance report on technical assistance and training. Prepared by the Secretariat, it includes testimonials, quotes and interviews with various stakeholders and showcases good practice.

The ITTC presented new technical assistance dashboards, launched to help members, donors and others track the implementation of WTO technical assistance and training programmes. They will help developing countries strengthen their trade capacity and participate more effectively in global trade.

In October 2020, the WTO, the ITC and UNCTAD launched the SDGs Trade Monitor, which collates the latest progress in achieving the trade-related SDGs.
The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the economies of least-developed countries (LDCs) featured prominently in the work of the Sub-Committee.

In the first half of 2020, LDCs’ merchandise exports fell 16 per cent. Services exports dropped by around 40 per cent.

The WTO Secretariat updated members on the ongoing EIF-WTO project, which aims to help LDCs better comprehend the trade-related implications of graduation from LDC status.

COVID-19 and support for LDCs

In addition to discussing standing items on the agenda, the Sub-Committee on LDCs provided an opportunity to exchange views on the trade-related impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on LDCs. The UN Conference on Trade and Development and the World Bank shared their respective analyses, warning of severe consequences for LDCs due to their vulnerabilities and lack of financial resources. The LDCs highlighted the need for global cooperation to help them recover from the crisis, including through assistance for healthcare systems and economic recovery.

Market access for LDCs

The trade-related impact of the pandemic took centre stage in WTO members’ discussions on market access.

The WTO Secretariat’s yearly report on market access for LDCs included a special chapter on trade developments during the first half of 2020. LDCs entered the pandemic with a trade deficit of US$ 100 billion and a decline in exports of goods and services of 1.5 per cent in 2019. LDCs’ share of global exports was only 0.96 per cent in 2019, little changed over the past few years.

In the first half of 2020, LDCs’ merchandise exports declined by 16 per cent, steeper than the 13 per cent decline for world exports. LDCs’ exports dropped significantly for fuels and mining products (down 26 per cent) and clothing (down 18 per cent), while exports of agricultural products were less affected (down 1 per cent). LDCs’ services exports dropped

Background

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.

LDCs and other low-income countries benefited from 71 per cent of STDF’s project funds in 2019, well above its target of 40 per cent.
by around 40 per cent, mostly due to a slump in travel exports which contracted by around 60 per cent.

The LDCs highlighted the steep decline in exports and their dependence on the economic conditions of trading partners. They called on WTO members to continue making progress in the implementation of ministerial decisions on duty-free and quota-free market access (see page 146), preferential rules of origin (see page 99) and the LDC services waiver (see page 111) to enhance their exports. Members underlined the need to continue to monitor trade developments in LDCs during the pandemic.

**Technical assistance and capacity-building**

The Executive Secretariat of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) updated members on EIF activities, including actions taken to mitigate the impact of the pandemic (see page 154). LDCs highlighted the importance of the current EIF programme for trade capacity-building and commended the EIF for taking measures during the pandemic to continue project implementation and activities under the programme.

The Secretariat of the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) noted that LDCs and other low-income countries benefited from 71 per cent of project funds in 2019, well above the STDF target of 40 per cent (see page 157). The LDCs underlined the important role played by the STDF in helping them to comply with sanitary and phytosanitary requirements to access international markets.

**Accession of LDCs to the WTO**

The WTO Secretariat briefed WTO members on the state of play of eight ongoing LDC accessions (Bhutan, Comoros, Ethiopia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Timor-Leste) (see page 32).

LDCs highlighted the importance of the LDC accession guidelines and technical assistance for facilitating the accession process.

**LDC graduation**

The WTO Secretariat briefed members on progress in the implementation of the EIF-WTO project on graduation from LDC status, including the publication of the report “Trade Impacts of LDC Graduation”. The project helps LDCs better comprehend the trade-related implications of graduation from LDC status.

The LDCs expressed appreciation for the WTO’s work in support of graduating LDCs. They also called on WTO members to be responsive to their demands for adequate transition periods to allow for a smooth transition from LDC status. Members underlined the importance of a smooth transition to help graduating LDCs integrate into the global economy.
Small economies

The Group on Small, Vulnerable Economies highlighted the challenges faced by small economies in attracting foreign investment, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Three WTO members presented steps they are taking to increase foreign direct investment.

The Committee on Trade and Development held a dedicated session on small economies in November at which members and international organizations highlighted the challenges faced by small economies in attracting foreign investment — particularly amid the COVID-19 crisis — and discussed ways to facilitate investment.

Members heard presentations from the International Trade Centre (ITC), the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the WTO on the opportunities and challenges for small economies in attracting investment.

Presentations were also made by three members of the Small, Vulnerable Economies (SVE) Group — El Salvador, Guatemala and Saint Lucia — on their initiatives to increase foreign direct investment (FDI) in order to expand trading capacity and support economic diversification. These initiatives included creating incentive packages, modernizing the delivery of governmental services through digitalization, collecting feedback from stakeholders, disseminating investment-related data and improving institutional coordination domestically.

Members of the SVE Group highlighted the negative impact of the pandemic on their economies. Some ideas were shared on what could be done to improve the position of small economies in dealing with the negative effects of the health crisis. The three countries expressed concern about rising protectionist measures and plummeting FDI as a result of the pandemic. They stressed the significance of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals and the WTO negotiations for an agreement on investment facilitation for development (see page 58).

Background

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.
Aid for Trade

The Committee on Trade and Development adopted the 2020-21 Aid for Trade Work Programme on “Empowering Connected, Sustainable Trade”. It subsequently extended it to 2022.

Global disbursements of Aid for Trade rose to US$ 45.1 billion in 2018 compared with US$ 43.4 billion in 2017.

A stocktaking event was held virtually on 23-25 March 2021 on members’ Aid for Trade needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic.

Aid for Trade financing

From 2006 to 2018, the total amount of Aid for Trade disbursed to developing countries reached US$ 455.5 billion. An additional US$ 356 billion was provided as part of other official flows, development finance that is provided at non-concessional rates.

The latest data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) show that global disbursements rose to US$ 45.1 billion in 2018 compared with US$ 43.4 billion in 2017 (see Figure 1). Commitments totalled US$ 57.7 billion in 2018, down from US$ 60.0 billion in 2017 (see Figure 2).

Disbursements increased for Africa, Asia and Oceania (see Figure 3). Disbursements to least-developed countries (LDCs) rose from US$ 12.8 billion in 2017 to US$ 13.5 billion in 2018. Increasingly, support for LDCs is taking the form of loans (58 per cent of disbursements in 2018) rather than grants, which raises debt sustainability concerns.

Background

Aid for Trade helps developing countries, and particularly least-developed countries, trade. The WTO-led Aid for Trade initiative encourages developing-country governments and donors to recognize the role that trade can play in development. In particular, the initiative seeks to mobilize resources to address the trade-related constraints identified by developing and least-developed countries.
Transporting the day’s catch from a fishing boat to the beach in Tanji, Gambia.

**Figure 2:** Aid for Trade commitments and disbursements by category (in US$ billion, 2018 prices)

**Figure 3:** Aid for Trade disbursements by region (in US$ billion, 2018 prices)

Source: OECD-CRS, Creditor Reporting System.

**Work Programme**

The Committee on Trade and Development adopted the 2020-21 Aid for Trade Work Programme entitled “Empowering Connected, Sustainable Trade”. It subsequently extended it until 2022 when the next Aid for Trade Global Review will be held.

The work programme will focus on the opportunities that digital connectivity and sustainability offer for economic and export diversification and how Aid for Trade can help empower different economic actors to realize these opportunities. Members agreed to adapt the programme to reflect the economic impact of COVID-19.

An Aid for Trade stocktaking event was held virtually on 23-25 March 2021 on members’ Aid for Trade needs and responses to the trade-related challenges posed by the pandemic. The event had seven themes: COVID-19, debt and financing; promoting an inclusive, green recovery; digital connectivity and e-commerce; global value chains, supply-side capacity in times of pandemic;
promoting recovery among micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, including in tourism; adapting trade formalities, such as customs and conformity assessment procedures, to combat COVID-19 and future pandemic risk; and regional approaches to COVID-19 recovery.

Committee on Trade and Development

The Committee on Trade and Development held three sessions on Aid for Trade at which the negative impact of COVID-19 on the participation of developing countries in world trade and their access to trade finance emerged as key concerns. A number of members and international organizations updated the Committee on Aid for Trade activities, implementation and resource mobilization.

Thematic events

In 2020, the WTO held two Aid for Trade thematic events. The first was a workshop on the role of Aid for Trade in transforming and promoting rural economies through capacity building, financing programmes and multi-stakeholder dialogue. The second surveyed research on the economic and trade impact of COVID-19 (see page 76) and measures being taken to support the response to the pandemic and economic recovery.

WTO members expressed concern about the negative impact of COVID-19 on developing countries’ access to trade finance.
Enhanced Integrated Framework

Early in the COVID-19 pandemic, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) launched a business continuity plan to address risks and to maintain support for least-developed countries. The aim was to ensure the continued rollout of EIF projects.

In 2020, 28 new projects worth US$ 21.3 million were approved.

Support for LDCs during COVID-19

Early in the COVID-19 crisis, the EIF established a business continuity plan that identified and addressed risks and set out measures to maintain support to least-developed countries (LDCs). Ongoing EIF projects allowed swift analysis of the impact of COVID-19 on trade in the LDCs.

In Zambia, an EIF project implemented through the International Trade Centre (ITC) facilitated assessment of new challenges faced by women-led businesses and provided support, such as training in e-commerce. In Cambodia, the pandemic accelerated interest in e-commerce, resulting in the adoption of a national e-commerce strategy.

Background

The Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) is the only multilateral partnership dedicated exclusively to assisting least-developed countries in their use of 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. Together, they leverage collective know-how to tackle the world’s most pressing trade for development issues. The WTO houses the Executive Secretariat for the EIF.
A new e-commerce training programme will help hundreds of women entrepreneurs in South Asia become part of regional and global supply chains.

Developed by the EIF, in partnership with the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP), the training programme is helping women entrepreneurs across South Asia to better understand the challenges involved in implementing e-commerce. Workshops have already been organized in Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal, helping at least 100 female entrepreneurs sell their goods and services online and become part of regional and global supply chains.

An e-commerce portal is also being developed to host the online shops of women entrepreneurs participating in the programme. “The portal will assist women with digitizing and cataloguing their goods and services. It will provide a single payment gateway and it will give their businesses international exposure. This is all the more important for women entrepreneurs in this hour of crisis due to COVID-19,” said Rajan Sudesh Ratna from UNESCAP.

Thinley Yangzom, an entrepreneur in Bhutan, said: “Being able to sell online will make it possible for me to reach international customers, and will also make my products more affordable for local people. With the support provided by this programme, it will be faster and easier to grow my business than if I was to do it alone.”

Donor commitments reached US$ 141 million, with cumulative allocations standing at around 93 per cent of the total. The 2020 edition of the EIF’s Resource Mobilization Guidebook provides information on how COVID-19 can impact official development assistance (ODA) funding opportunities for LDCs.

**Delivering results**

In Bhutan, an electronic auctioning system enabled potato farmers to overcome COVID-19-related restrictions. In The Gambia, over 300 women entrepreneurs and farmers were helped to adapt their businesses to the challenges of COVID-19, including moving into new areas of activity, such as the production of face masks. In Vanuatu, an EIF project ensured the continuation of biosecurity clearances critical for food products.

**Building human capacity through partnerships**

The EIF conducted several online training courses on topics such as monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), resource mobilization, risk management and EIF evaluations. An innovative secondment programme saw MEL staff from LDCs attached to the EIF Executive Secretariat, with the first secondees coming from Senegal and Tanzania. Partnering with the International Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, the EIF launched “Building Trade Finance Capabilities in LDCs”, under which LDC government officials are mentored to support their countries’ resource mobilization efforts.

**Global engagement during COVID-19**

With nearly 100 stories published on its Trade for Development News platform, the EIF became an important source of information during the pandemic, gathering more than 80,000 views.

The EIF launched a social media campaign, #PowerUpTrade, encouraging LDC businesses to share how COVID-19 was affecting their participation in global value chains. Contributions ranged from information on a coffee supply chain in Ethiopia to the impact of the pandemic on garment workers in Bangladesh. The EIF worked with international partners, including the ITC and the WTO, on the project, which reached over 318,000 users on Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

The EIF co-hosted four digital COVID-19 events on tourism, graduation, fragility and conflict, and foreign direct investment and innovating financing, with over 2,300 live participants and on-demand viewers.

**LDC graduation**

In May 2020, the EIF and the WTO published “Trade Impacts of LDC Graduation” looking at how graduation may affect LDCs’ participation in world trade, including their access to export markets and implications for their WTO commitments (see page 181).

**Delivering strong project systems**

Strengthened project evaluation guidelines were rolled out to support accountability and learning processes across EIF projects. Innovative monitoring mechanisms are being piloted, with increased linkages with local partners, to closely follow implementation in remote areas.
The new five-year strategy of the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) aims to strengthen its role as a global platform for dialogue and learning on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) capacity development.

Organizations implementing STDF projects as well as beneficiaries demonstrated flexibility and commitment in responding to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The STDF approved five project and seven project preparation grants (PPGs) totalling US$ 3.7 million. Africa continued to be the biggest beneficiary of STDF projects, which help traders in developing countries to meet international standards on food safety, plant and animal health and to access international markets.

New STDF strategy (2020-24)
The STDF launched a new five-year strategy, “Safe and Inclusive Trade Horizons for Developing Countries”, in January 2020. The strategy aims to expand the STDF’s reach and resources and strengthen its role as a global platform for dialogue and learning on sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) capacity development.

The STDF will continue to finance the development and implementation of collaborative and innovative SPS projects, with the potential to influence and catalyse SPS improvements. Members also adopted a new communications plan and monitoring, evaluation and learning framework to track progress in achieving results and provide feedback on the management of the STDF.

Ensuring continuity and results
The STDF Secretariat took action to mitigate and manage the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on STDF operations across the world. Members convened in virtual meetings and practitioner groups to identify and discuss new opportunities for collaboration on selected topics. These included:

- use of evidence-based approaches to inform and improve SPS planning and decision-making
- development of a practical checklist on good regulatory practice for developing countries to ensure SPS measures avoid creating non-tariff barriers
- promotion of public-private partnerships to facilitate safe trade
- use of electronic SPS certification.
The STDF organized several webinars to discuss the challenges posed by COVID-19 for SPS capacity development and to increase access to guidance materials and other resources available.

Electronic and digital solutions are playing an increasing role in keeping food and agriculture products moving across global supply chains. STDF projects on electronic SPS certification helped developing countries to improve transparency, reduce trade costs and speed up trade flows. Over 80 countries are currently using the “ePhyto” solution, developed with STDF funding, with more than 50,000 certificates exchanged every month.

**New project and project preparation grants**

The STDF approved five project and seven project preparation grants (PPGs) totalling US$ 3.7 million. Two projects will pilot the use of voluntary third-party assurance programmes (see page 86) to improve food safety in Africa and Central America. Other projects in Africa will enhance trade through biopesticide-based residue mitigation in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and promote food safety in the smoked fish sector in Mali.
Women farmers in India are improving their livelihoods thanks to a new STDF project supporting trade in spices. The project was launched in Kerala in February 2020, with the Spices Board India and the UN Food and Agriculture Organization, as part of five new projects aiming to boost the growth of trade in spices in India.

At the launch, India’s Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Som Parkash, said the new projects have the potential to double the incomes of spice farmers, integrate them into global value chains and allow them to compete in the world market. Women are heavily involved in spices in India, from sowing to harvesting and pre-processing. The project, which will run over three years, will help women farmers to produce higher-quality products and obtain higher prices, improving their social and financial status.

"The project is expected to help boost incomes of small-scale farmers, empower women and other marginalized communities, and support efforts to reduce poverty in the selected project areas in India."

Ramesh Babu Natarajan, a scientist at the Spices Board India

In Latin America, a project was approved to improve coordination and support management of cadmium levels in cocoa. Through PPGs, projects will be developed to:

- enhance seed trade in the Asia-Pacific region
- assess the impact and viability of mobile food-safety testing laboratories in the SADC region
- promote the use of biopesticides for residue mitigation in Latin America.

Other proposals focus on strengthening biosecurity and food safety in Bhutan, establishing an Avian influenza-free zone in Egypt and conducting a feasibility study on aquaculture zoning in Peru. A regional PPG in the Caribbean will help Caribbean Community members in SPS planning and decision-making.

STDF projects mostly benefit Africa, followed by Asia-Pacific and Latin America and the Caribbean (see Figure 4). Since its founding in 2004, the STDF has provided US$ 56.8 million to strengthen the SPS capacity of producers, traders and governments in developing countries to meet international standards for food safety, plant and animal health and access international markets (see Figure 5). Of these funds, over US$ 37.5 million have been allocated to projects in least-developed and other low-income countries.
Technical cooperation and training

- The WTO Secretariat developed national, regional and global virtual seminars to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. It conducted some 80 technical assistance activities between April and December.

- The number of e-learning courses rose by more than 20 per cent to 106.

- Approximately 13,500 participants benefited from national, regional and global activities, including new e-learning courses.

- Africa remained the region with the highest participation (38 per cent) in e-learning courses.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the WTO Secretariat designed and implemented national, regional and global virtual seminars and workshops, including three-month regional trade policy courses. This made it possible to conduct around 80 technical assistance activities between April and December.

While the number of face-to-face activities fell considerably due to their abrupt suspension from March 2020, the number of remotely delivered activities rose sharply compared with 2019. The number of e-learning courses offered by the Secretariat also increased by more than 20 per cent to 106. In 2020, approximately 50 per cent of all participants accessed their training through e-learning on the WTO’s online platform.

The WTO Secretariat undertook 217 technical assistance activities in 2020 – remotely, face-to-face and through e-learning – to help government officials gain a better understanding of WTO rules and the

Background

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.
Faced with unique challenges and circumstances due to COVID-19, the 2020 experience has been an extremely transformative year for all the Young Professionals. Not only have we developed skills and expertise in the field of international trade policy, we have also learned how integral trade is to global economic growth and a stable economic recovery.

The broad experience and practical knowledge I have gained during my tenure here is invaluable and will serve me for many years to come. I look forward to applying the knowledge I have acquired at the Secretariat to my future career in international trade policy.”

Maryam Aldoseri, a Young Professional from Bahrain

Seven women and five men were recruited for the Young Professionals Programme in 2020.

multilateral trading system. Approximately 13,500 participants benefited from these national, regional and global activities, including new e-learning courses. Compared with the previous year, the number of activities was 22 per cent lower and the number of participants about 7 per cent fewer, mostly due to the suspension of face-to-face activities as a result of the pandemic.

Of the total e-learning courses undertaken, Africa remained the region with the highest participation (38 per cent), followed by Asia-Pacific (25 per cent). Thirty per cent of e-learning courses were undertaken by participants from least-developed countries (LDCs).

The WTO’s 2020-21 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, consistent teaching methods and regular evaluation of all WTO technical assistance activities.

In November, the WTO launched new electronic dashboards to help members, donors and others track the implementation of WTO technical assistance and training programmes. They display the level of training provided, the objectives, the nationality of participants and the gender breakdown.

Most of the activities implemented in 2020 (68 per cent) were “global” activities aimed at...
There are a lot of key subjects that I learned on the course: I enhanced my knowledge in different areas, especially tariffs and the set of rules and regulations governing trade. I was also introduced to the new concept of online courses through the WTO’s platform.

I have already started applying what I have learned in my daily work. Furthermore, on a personal level, I found it a thrilling experience to meet new colleagues with whom I can share knowledge in order to make the best out of the course in the long run.”

Violette Abi Abboud (Lebanon), who took part in the online Regional Trade Policy Course for the Arab and Middle Eastern region from December 2020 to March 2021

Participation in technical assistance activities

Women represented 45 per cent of participants for all WTO technical assistance activities. Roughly 52 per cent of technical assistance activities (including e-learning courses) were delivered in English, 20 per cent in Spanish, 17 per cent in French and the remainder (11 per cent) with interpretation.

Technical assistance continued to be provided for countries seeking to join the WTO (see page 32), with several government officials from acceding countries participating in face-to-face and remotely delivered technical assistance events.
I was thrilled to learn about the new series of courses released in 2020 by the WTO e-learning unit. I had high expectations of both the content and structure, and I was not disappointed. I completed eight courses covering WTO subjects such as trade in services, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, trade and development, the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) and intellectual property rights. All of the courses were relevant. The SPS course has guided me in policy discussions at work while the TFA course helped me to propose policies aimed at reducing bureaucratic procedures at our ports. This will help The Gambia have better access to production inputs and support companies’ participation in global value chains.

I have recommended this course to my colleagues because it is perfect for busy working professionals in terms of the time needed to undertake it and the content.”

Kutubo Jarju, Economist in The Gambia’s Ministry of Trade
Trade and women’s empowerment

The WTO continued its work on understanding how trade can create opportunities for women entrepreneurs and examined how COVID-19 has impacted women’s ability to trade.

The WTO launched a joint report with the World Bank on “Women and Trade: The role of trade in promoting gender equality”.

The WTO Trade and Gender Action Plan 2017-19 was extended to 2020, with work continuing on its four key objectives: raising awareness on the link between trade and gender; facilitating WTO members’ actions on trade and gender; generating new data and research on the impact of trade on women; and providing training on these issues.

Background

In 2017, the WTO appointed a Trade and Gender Focal Point to lead 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.

In July, the WTO and the World Bank published a joint report on “Women and Trade: The role of trade in promoting gender equality”. It was launched by the then WTO Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, and World Bank Managing Director Mari Pangestu. “The report comes out at an opportune time. The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked the deepest economic recession of our lifetimes. Recent WTO analysis shows that women risk losing some really hard-won progress towards greater gender equality because of this crisis,” DG Azevêdo said.

Building on new analysis and data broken down by gender, the report aims to identify ways that trade can improve the lives of women. It shows how trade and trade policy can affect men and women differently – in terms of wages, consumption and welfare and in the quality of jobs available to them. The new analysis suggests that expanding trade can act as an impetus for countries to improve women’s rights and boost their participation in the economy.

A WTO Secretariat information note (see page 77) issued in August – “The economic impact of COVID-19 on women in vulnerable sectors and economies” – showed
that women are likely to be harder hit than men by trade disruptions caused by the pandemic. The risks are particularly acute in developing countries.

The WTO, the International Trade Centre and the UN Conference on Trade and Development organized a webinar on "Applying a gender lens to WTO". Presentations were made by experts on defining the concepts behind a "gender lens" – the examining of all aspects of work from a gender perspective. Presentations included how to apply a gender lens when implementing WTO rules and agreements. Over 100 representatives of WTO members and observers attended the event.

International Women’s Day has become a highlight in the WTO Secretariat’s calendar. The 2020 international women’s day campaign put the spotlight on “Generation Equality: Realizing Women’s Rights”. The then Director-General, Roberto Azevêdo, told a special WTO event on 6 March: “Promoting women’s empowerment and gender equality is a moral imperative as well as an economic one.”

In 2020, the WTO continued its work on understanding how trade can create opportunities for women entrepreneurs.

Together with partners, it conducted a survey in Latin America, complementing data collected in similar surveys in 2019 in South Asia and East Africa. Over 350 women entrepreneurs were surveyed. The findings confirmed results of the previous surveys that lack of knowledge about trade rules and procedures is an important barrier to women entrepreneurs in integrating into international markets.

The WTO evaluated 20 training programmes of regional and international institutions, including the private sector, finding that none adequately address lack of knowledge about trade rules among women entrepreneurs. During 2020, the WTO also conducted interviews with women entrepreneurs in South Asia to understand how COVID-19 impacted their businesses, trade and lives. The WTO has gathered this information into a database.

A report issued by the WTO and the World Bank in 2020 aimed to identify ways in which trade can improve the lives of women.