

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals

Global partnerships for sustainable development

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development recognizes international trade as a critical engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction. SDG 17 specifically calls for strengthening the means of implementation and revitalizing the global partnerships for sustainable development. The WTO remains committed to fostering innovative partnerships that advance sustainable development across multiple dimensions, with particular emphasis on promoting women's economic empowerment.

This section highlights key examples of how the WTO is leveraging innovative partnerships to achieve the SDGs, particularly SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals): the Women Exporters in the Digital Economy (WEIDE) Fund and the "Partenariat pour le Coton" initiative with FIFA. Both partnerships demonstrate the WTO's commitment to inclusive development, with significant contributions to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) as well.

The WEIDE Fund: An innovative partnership model

Launched in February 2024 by the WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC), the WEIDE Fund represents a multi-stakeholder partnership designed to empower women entrepreneurs through international trade and digitalization. The Fund exemplifies the transformative potential of strategic partnerships between international organizations, governments, development banks, philanthropic foundations and the private sector.

The WEIDE Fund actively engages diverse partners from both public and private sectors, creating a comprehensive ecosystem of support for women entrepreneurs. The Fund's design incorporates input from women entrepreneurs and business support organizations in developing economies, ensuring that interventions are tailored to address real-world challenges. By combining the WTO's trade policy expertise with the ITC's implementation capabilities, the Fund leverages the complementary strengths of both organizations to maximize impact.

The WEIDE Fund serves as a powerful example of how effective partnerships can drive sustainable

development. By bringing together diverse stakeholders from the public and private sectors, the Fund mobilizes significant financial resources for developing countries. This collaborative approach facilitates knowledge sharing on technology and innovation, particularly through its focus on digital skills and technology adoption that bridges critical knowledge gaps for women entrepreneurs.

The Fund enhances international support for capacity-building in developing countries through technical assistance and training programs that help women navigate complex trade regulations and access global markets. The Fund's diverse partnership structure encourages effective public, public-private and civil society collaborations that build on the experience and resourcing strategies of other successful initiatives, demonstrating how targeted partnerships can create meaningful impact across multiple development dimensions.

Beyond its direct contributions to SDGs 17 and 5 (Gender equality), the WEIDE Fund generates positive spillover effects across multiple sustainable development goals. The Fund contributes to poverty reduction (SDG 1 – No poverty) by increasing women entrepreneurs' incomes through expanded participation in international trade, creating pathways out of economic vulnerability. By supporting the growth and expansion of women-led businesses, the Fund promotes job creation and economic growth (SDG 8 – Decent work and economic growth), multiplying its impact beyond the direct beneficiaries to include employees and value chain participants. The Fund's emphasis on digital adoption fosters innovation and technological upgrading (SDG 9 – Industry, innovation and infrastructure), helping businesses modernize their operations and increase competitiveness in global markets. In addition, by addressing gender-based inequalities in trade participation, the Fund contributes to more equitable outcomes in economic opportunity and resource distribution (SDG 10 – Reduced inequalities), demonstrating how targeted interventions for marginalized groups can advance broader equality objectives.

Since its launch in February 2024, the WEIDE Fund has made significant progress in its implementation journey. The Fund has successfully selected four pilot beneficiary economies – the Dominican Republic, Jordan, Mongolia and Nigeria – through a competitive call for proposals that assessed commitment to women's economic empowerment and potential for impact.

Within these economies, the Fund has launched business plan competitions to identify women entrepreneurs with high growth potential, creating pathways for targeted support.

The WEIDE Fund's implementation has already generated valuable insights for other partnership initiatives in the sustainable development sphere. The Fund's experience demonstrates that addressing specific barriers faced by women entrepreneurs, such as limited access to finance and digital technologies, yields more effective results than general support programmes that fail to account for gender-specific challenges. Engaging local business support organizations has proven essential for ensuring that interventions are contextually appropriate and sustainable beyond the project lifecycle, creating lasting institutional capacity for women's implication in the global economy.

The “Partenariat pour le Coton” Initiative: Transforming value chains through strategic partnerships

The joint WTO-FIFA (International Federation of Association Football) Partenariat pour le Coton (Cotton Partnership) initiative stands as another exemplary model of innovative partnerships for sustainable development. Launched in February 2024 following the signing of the WTO-FIFA Memorandum of Understanding in 2022, this initiative aims to help African cotton-producing countries, particularly the Cotton-4+ (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Côte d'Ivoire) group, move up the cotton value chain and play a greater role in transforming cotton into textiles and clothing.

The Partenariat pour le Coton brings together a coalition of partners across sectors and geographies, creating a comprehensive support ecosystem for the cotton value chain in Africa. International organizations including the WTO, FIFA, ITC, United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) and the International Cotton Advisory Committee (ICAC) contribute their specialized expertise and convening power.

The joint declaration signed by representatives from the AFC, ITFC, ITC, UNIDO and the WTO affirms their cooperation in investing in and supporting the WTO's cotton value chain development projects, exemplifying multi-stakeholder partnerships for sustainable development (SDG 17) and demonstrating how coordinated action can accelerate progress toward shared goals.

Since its launch in February 2024 during 13th Ministerial Conference (MC13), the Partenariat pour le coton has made significant strides in advancing the cotton value chain across West and Central Africa. The following month, the “Cotton-to-Clothing” session at the Global Aid for Trade Review at the WTO showcased the progress being made in value addition and job creation, particularly for women and youth in the region. On the sidelines of the event, key financing partners – including the Islamic Trade Finance Corporation, the African Finance Corporation and Afreximbank – joined UNIDO, ITC, and the WTO in signing a joint declaration. This declaration reaffirmed their commitment to providing both financial and technical support to accelerate the sustainable transformation of the cotton sector in West Africa and beyond.

During these discussions, stakeholders from the private sector, development finance institutions and development partners explored innovative ways to mobilize finance for sustainable infrastructure and international market opportunities. Public-private partnerships – bridging governments, financial institutions and the private sector – alongside blended finance models involving impact investors, were identified as key mechanisms to unlock capital for technological upgrades and capacity expansion.

Conclusion

The WEIDE Fund and the Partenariat pour le Coton initiative exemplify how innovative partnerships can drive progress across multiple SDGs, particularly SDG 5, SDG 8 and SDG 17. By bringing together diverse stakeholders, mobilizing significant resources and implementing targeted interventions, these initiatives demonstrate the WTO's commitment to inclusive and sustainable development.

As the global community approaches the final five years of the 2030 Agenda, partnerships such as these offer promising models for accelerating progress. The WTO remains committed to expanding and deepening such partnerships, ensuring that international trade serves as a powerful engine for sustainable development that leaves no one behind.

These initiatives show that when international organizations, governments, and the private sector join forces with a clear focus on empowering marginalized groups and developing sustainable value chains, transformative change is possible. This model of innovative partnership will continue to inform the WTO's approach to contributing to the achievement of the SDGs in the years ahead.