

The Impact of the Artistic Composition of the International Trade Center on Achieving Its Goal of Improving the Living Standards of Residents in Developing and Least-developed Countries

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Abstract:

Despite the fact that the World Trade Organization is not a specialized agency of the United Nations, it has managed, since its establishment, to maintain close relations with the UN and its agencies. This is due to the fact that improving the living standards of people in developing and least-developed countries is a priority for both organizations, and the International Trade Center serves as a representation of this cooperation.

This research aims to assess the role of the joint project undertaken by this center in supporting the economies of developing and least-developed countries, with a focus on one of the key pillars of these economies—medium and small enterprises—which reflect the predominant family-based economic structure in such nations. The International Trade Center has adopted a different approach compared to most international organizations, such as the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development and the World Trade Organization, which primarily focus on the economies of major countries. Instead, the center prioritizes direct engagement with the governments of developing and least-developed nations, providing hands-on training, consultancy services, and data analysis for medium-sized businesses, hosting forums, and establishing projects worldwide that have linked small enterprises and women-led businesses from these countries to global markets. This initiative has created job opportunities for displaced individuals, refugees, and those fleeing wars and conflicts, enabling them to secure a livelihood that prevents them from being drawn into further social unrest in its various forms. Based on the above, it is reasonable to question the effectiveness of the efforts made using the tools and mechanisms of the International Trade Center in raising the living standards of the populations in developing and least-developed countries.

Keywords: United Nations - World Trade Organization - International Trade Center - Developing and Least-developed Countries

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1- Introduction:

The World Trade Organization (WTO) has established cooperative agreements with several international entities, including the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)¹. Although the WTO is not a specialized agency of the United Nations, it has maintained close relations with the UN and its affiliated bodies since its establishment². This includes its collaboration with UNCTAD on a joint initiative known as the International Trade Center (ITC)³, which aims to support developing countries and transitional economies through the development of effective programs that enhance their trade, thereby contributing to the expansion of their exports and the improvement of their import processes⁴.

The increasing economic problems and crises in developing and least-developed countries are primarily driven by rising levels of indebtedness, which have turned their economies into a fiscal burden on the state. Moreover, these economies, which generally hold low credit ratings, remain trapped in a debt spiral with little prospect of escape in the near future. By the end of 2023, the average ratio of external debt to GDP in these countries had reached approximately 75%⁵. These economic challenges have been further exacerbated by the ongoing trade conflict among major global economies, which has recently manifested in the form of increased tariffs on each other's exports—tariffs that are inconsistent with the principles of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations⁶. If such trade disputes persist, they are expected to severely undermine the economies of developing and least-developed countries, potentially reducing them over time to failed states⁷.

The persistent economic crises faced by economically vulnerable countries necessitate the activation of all available international economic mechanisms, including those established through agreements among states within intergovernmental organizations. These tools aim to enhance the trade capacities of developing and least-developed countries by implementing developmental projects that support their pursuit of self-sufficiency to the greatest extent possible.

¹ P, Van den Bossche, 2005, *The Law and Policy of the World Trade Organization*, p98.

² The World Trade Organization and the United Nations." *World Trade Organization*. <https://www.wto.org>. Accessed 30 Apr. 2025.

³ International Trade Center.
<https://www.intracen.org/>

⁴ P, Van den Bossche, P, 2005, *The Law and Policy of the World Trade Organization*, op, p98.

⁵ N, Perevalov, K, Ayhan, and K, Philip. "A Silent Debt Crisis Sweeping Through Low-Credit-Rated Developing Economies." *World Bank Group Official Website*, 1 Feb. 2025.

<https://blogs.worldbank.org/ar/voices/azmt-dywn-samtt-tjtah-alaqtsadat-alnamy-dhat-altsnyf-alaytmany-aldyf>

⁶ United Nations Official Website. "Tariffs: A Double-Edged Weapon – How Do Countries Use Them?" *United Nations News*, 29 Apr. 2025.

<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2025/04/1140416>.

⁷ United Nations Official Website. "The United Nations Calls for Exempting Economically Weak Developing Countries from Reciprocal Tariffs." *United Nations News*, 29 Apr. 2025.
<https://news.un.org/ar/story/2025/04/1140416>.

Understanding the origins of the center contributes to recognizing the importance of collaboration between the two largest intergovernmental organizations in their efforts to support developing and least-developed countries. It also facilitates a clearer comprehension of the center's mandated roles in assisting these countries to make optimal use of their services.

2. The Establishment and Mandate of the International Trade Centre⁸

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is considered one of the most prominent international institutions dedicated to the economies of developing and least-developed countries. This status stems from the distinctive nature of the tasks assigned to it, making it a key institution that embodies the cooperative relationship between the two largest intergovernmental entities: the United Nations, on the one hand, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) of 1947 and its successor, the World Trade Organization (WTO). On the other. Examining the establishment and development of the Centre in parallel with the evolution of international—particularly economic—relations, in light of its assigned functions, serves as a valuable means of understanding the Centre's role and assessing its effectiveness.

2.1. The Historical Foundation of the International Trade Centre

The foundation of the International Trade Centre (ITC) dates back to 1964, pursuant to an agreement between the United Nations—represented by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD)—and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT 1947). The Centre was mandated to coordinate assistance and cooperation activities aimed at promoting trade within the United Nations framework in support of developing countries⁹.

The ITC is a joint development agency of the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, specializing in providing support to developing and least-developed countries by strengthening the capabilities of their small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). The Centre's leadership envisions that poverty reduction, and the promotion of economic security can only be achieved through competitive SMEs, as the economies of many of these countries are predominantly family-based¹⁰.

The World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1994, ensured the continuation of its relationship with the United Nations in support of the International Trade Centre (ITC) in

⁸ International Trade Centre Official Website. "International Trade Centre, Accessed 1 May 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/>

⁹ United Nations General Assembly. "Resolution No. 2279, 22nd Session, 12 Dec. 1967, Related to the International Trade Centre." *United Nations Official Documents*

<https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/234/04/img/nr023404.pdf>.

The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is a permanent intergovernmental body established by the United Nations General Assembly in 1964. Its primary objective is to maximize trade, investment, and development opportunities for developing countries and to assist them in their efforts to integrate into the global economy on a fair and equitable basis.

¹⁰ United Nations Official Website. "UN System and the International Trade Centre." Accessed 30 Apr. 2025.

<https://www.un.org/ar/about-us/un-system>.

fulfilling its assigned responsibilities¹¹. Six ministerial conferences of the WTO¹² have further reinforced the organization's responsiveness to the specific needs of developing and least-developed countries. Notably, the 1996 Singapore Ministerial Conference emphasized the importance of integrating least-developed countries into the multilateral international trading system, in addition to the preferential treatment afforded to them under the exceptions provided by WTO agreements¹³.

This conference also endorsed enhancing investment opportunities within developing and least-developed countries and facilitating access for their products to global markets in collaboration with the International Trade Centre¹⁴. Furthermore, the Doha Declaration, issued at the WTO's Fourth Ministerial Conference in 2001, stressed the need to give preferential treatment in international trade to economically vulnerable and small economies. It also expressed full support for the vital work of the ITC and called for its strengthening¹⁵. Similarly, the statement adopted at the Sixth Ministerial Conference in Hong Kong in 2005 encouraged "all members to cooperate with the International Trade Centre, which complements the work of the WTO by providing a platform for businesses to engage with trade negotiators and by offering practical advice to small and medium-sized enterprises on how to benefit from the multilateral trading system"¹⁶.

The International Trade Centre is headed by an Executive Director¹⁷, who operates under the supervision of both the Director-General of the World Trade Organization and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Executive Director submits periodic reports to both officials detailing the Centre's completed activities and proposed future initiatives. In turn, each of these organizations appoints a senior staff member to support the Executive Director in fulfilling the Centre's mandated functions¹⁸.

The Centre is subject to the internal oversight procedures in effect within the United Nations¹⁹ system and relies heavily on the personnel and facilities of both the United Nations and the World Trade Organization. The appointment of new staff members at the Centre is carried out in coordination between these two organizations²⁰.

¹¹ P, Stoll, and S, frank. *WTO – World Economic Order*, World Trade Law. Springer, 2006, p. 26.

¹² The six conferences are: The Singapore Conference (1996), the Geneva Conference (1998), the Seattle Conference (1999), the Doha Conference (2001), the Cancún Conference (2003), and the Hong Kong Conference (2005).

¹³ P, Stoll, and S, frank. *WTO – World Economic Order*, World Trade Law. 2006, p. 647.

¹⁴ Ibid, p647.

¹⁵ World Trade Organization. *Ministerial Conference, Fourth Session, Doha, 9-14 November 2001*. <https://www.wto.org>.

¹⁶ World Trade Organization. *Ministerial Conference, Sixth Session, Hong Kong, 13-18 December 2005, NO WT/MIN (05)/DEC*.

https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/min05_e/final_text_e.pdf.

¹⁷ International Trade Centre. Structure and Management. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024. <https://www.intracen.org/about-us/who-we-are/structure-and-management>.

¹⁸ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Contracting Parties. Twenty-Fourth Session, 9-24 November 1967, NO. L/2890. https://www.wto.org/gatt_docs/English/SULPDF/90800166.pdf

¹⁹ World Trade Organization. *World Trade Organization and the International Trade Commission*. Accessed 18 Nov. 2024.

²⁰ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Contracting Parties. Twenty-Fourth Session, 9-24 November 1967, NO. L/2890. Op.

Additionally, the UNCTAD Board and WTO members establish a Joint Advisory Group composed of government experts, which meets annually to review the Centre's activities and provide necessary recommendations to its management²¹.

This arrangement reflects a distinctive form of collaboration between two fundamentally different international entities: one primarily focused on promoting international peace and security and the other deeply embedded in complex economic and financial objectives. As will be discussed later, this duality has significant implications for the Centre's effectiveness and the role it is expected to play.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) works toward the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)—a set of eight goals adopted by United Nations member states to be pursued globally. These goals include eradicating extreme poverty and hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality and empowering women, reducing child mortality, improving maternal health, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, ensuring environmental sustainability, and developing a global partnership for development²². The ITC makes significant efforts to implement projects aimed at supporting least-developed countries (LDCs), landlocked developing countries (LLDCs), small island developing states (SIDS), countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, post-conflict states, and other economically vulnerable nations²³. For instance, the Centre has launched agricultural projects in the Central African Republic, a country that has suffered from civil war. These projects contributed to rebuilding trust among the diverse components of the population by uniting them in pursuit of a shared goal: poverty reduction²⁴.

In coordination with and with the support of the World Trade Organization (WTO), the International Trade Centre (ITC) collects data on business, trade, and markets to identify the companies it will support. It engages directly with businesses to explain the positive impacts of multilateral trade agreements on national economies, thereby enabling these enterprises to understand, participate in shaping, and benefit from global trade rules. Through these efforts, the Centre contributes to the development of key export sectors and promotes entrepreneurship opportunities—particularly for women, youth, and vulnerable communities²⁵.

2.2. The Functions of the International Trade Centre

The International Trade Centre (ITC) is distinguished by the diversity of its support tools offered to businesses and populations in developing and least-developed countries. These tools

²¹ Ibid.

²² World Health Organization. Millennium Development Goals and the International Trade Centre. Accessed 20 Nov. 2024. www.who.int/topics/millennium_development_goals/about/ar/index.html.

²³ International Trade Centre. Priority Countries. Accessed 19 Nov. 2024. <https://www.intracen.org/our-work/regions-and-countries#priority-countries>.

²⁴ International Trade Centre. Farm Co-Ops Mend Communities in the Central African Republic. Accessed 28 Feb. 2025. <https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/news/farm-co-ops-mend-communities-in-central-african-republic>.

²⁵ World Trade Organization. World Trade Organization and the International Trade Commission. Accessed 18 Nov. 2024. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/coher_e/wto_itc_e.htm.

are embodied in the wide range of functions entrusted to the Centre, which may be summarized as follows:

– In accordance with a resolution adopted by the United Nations Economic and Social Council in 1973²⁶, the ITC is designated as a central hub for activities related to technical assistance and cooperation in trade promotion within the framework of the United Nations system of assistance to developing countries.

A recent example of such activities is the launch of the "Fast Track Tech Africa" program in 2019, aimed at accelerating digital entrepreneurship across the continent. This initiative supports technology start-ups and digital entrepreneurs in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, Mali, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Zambia, equipping them with digital and managerial skills needed to establish, grow, and export their businesses and services²⁷.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) provides a range of services, including technical support for export promotion projects funded through United Nations technical cooperation programs. It also supplies developing countries with market intelligence to identify suitable export destinations for their products, assists them in marketing these products, and provides training for individuals involved in marketing activities²⁸. Furthermore, the Centre supports developing and least-developed countries in the manufacturing and export of goods, drawing on the full range of knowledge and expertise available within other United Nations agencies, such as the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO), particularly in matters related to product marketing.

When necessary, the ITC makes arrangements to implement joint projects between the World Trade Organization and the United Nations. These may include organizing joint field missions or conducting training programs in collaboration with other UN entities, such as the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the International Labour Organization (ILO), UNIDO, and the UN regional economic commissions²⁹.

For example, in 2019, the ITC joined the Women's Entrepreneurship Accelerator, a global initiative implemented in partnership with UN Women, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the ILO, the UN Global Compact, and the United Nations Office for

²⁶ United Nations Economic and Social Council. Implementation of the International Development Strategy, Resolution No. 1819LV, 1973.

<https://documents.un.org/doc/resolution/gen/nr0/617/54/img/nr061754.pdf>.

²⁷ International Trade Centre. Fast-Tracking Digital Entrepreneurship in Africa. Accessed 27 Feb. 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/fast-tracking-digital-entrepreneurship-in-africa-phase-1>.

²⁸ International Trade Centre. *Memorandum from the Director-General of the International Trade Centre, 1967. Document No. L/2890.*

https://www.wto.org/gatt_docs/English/SULPDF/90800166.pdf.

²⁹ General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, Contracting Parties. Twenty-Fourth Session, 9-24 November 1967, NO. L/2890. Op.

United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO): A specialized agency of the United Nations headquartered in Vienna. The organization works to promote inclusive and sustainable industrial development and to accelerate economic growth with the aim of improving living standards while simultaneously ensuring environmental sustainability.

Partnerships. The program aims to support women entrepreneurs worldwide by providing them with access to the funding necessary to launch and grow their businesses³⁰.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) leverages advancements in digital technologies and the growing use of e-commerce platforms and artificial intelligence by integrating digital components into all of its development projects³¹. For example, the Centre launched the EcomConnect program, which aims to enhance the digital capabilities of small businesses and improve access to e-commerce in developing countries in order to foster inclusive and sustainable growth³².

- The International Trade Centre (ITC) provides trade-related assistance and supports negotiations between various countries and the World Trade Organization (WTO) with the aim of facilitating their accession. To this end, the WTO and the ITC have jointly launched a coordination group to deliver technical assistance and promote the exchange of information throughout the accession process³³.

The ITC places a strong focus on initiatives that create opportunities for women, youth, and other vulnerable groups, including the poor, refugees, internally displaced persons, persons with disabilities, and other marginalized populations. The Centre also supports environmental entrepreneurs as well as micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) in developing and scaling up environmentally friendly innovations and products. These enterprises benefit from a range of services provided by the ITC, including access to information, training, legal and financial consultancy, and marketing support³⁴.

The International Trade Centre (ITC) provides policymakers, business support organizations, investors, and small enterprises with unique resources, including research and data derived from surveys and academic studies, which are essential for enhancing the performance of small businesses in both domestic and international markets. Additionally, the Centre offers small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) a wide range of multilingual e-learning opportunities, covering topics from improving competitiveness in creative industries to trade finance and collaboration with foreign trade representatives³⁵.

³⁰ International Trade Centre. "United Nations Official Website, Department of Economic and Social Affairs." Accessed 27 Feb. 2024.

<https://sdgs.un.org/un-system-sdg-implementation/international-trade-centre-itc-24518>.

³¹ International Trade Centre. "Who We Are: Building Trade-Led Growth for a Fairer World." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 19 Nov. 2024.

<https://www.intracen.org/about-us/who-we-are>.

³² International Trade Centre. "E-Solutions." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 27 Feb. 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/e-solutions>.

³³ World Trade Organization. "Technical Cooperation, Development Section." World Trade Organization Official Website, Accessed 20 Nov. 2024.

https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/itc_e.htm#:~:text=The%20goals%20of%20ITC%20are,export%20performance%20in%20sectors%20of.

³⁴ International Trade Centre. "Impact Areas and Core Services." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 30 Apr. 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/our-work/impact-areas-and-core-services>.

³⁵ International Trade Centre. "Resources." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 23 Apr. 2025,

<https://www.intracen.org/resources>.

The ITC carries out its mandate through seven technical programs: strategic and operational market research, trade consulting services, trade information management, export training capacity development, sector-specific product and market development, trade in services, and international procurement and supply chain management³⁶.

For any international organization or institution to effectively fulfill its mandate and achieve its intended goals, sufficient financial resources are required—particularly when the projects it undertakes are expected to contribute to the economic recovery of countries.

3. Financing of the International Trade Centre

The financing of international institutions and projects is a matter in which inter-institutional relations play a critical role, and the International Trade Centre (ITC) is no exception. The Centre's activities are funded through two main mechanisms:

- The first mechanism is the regular budget, which is equally funded by assessed contributions from the member states of the two parent organizations. Both the United Nations and the World Trade Organization agree on their internal budgets on a biennial basis, with each determining its annual share in financing the Centre³⁷. The proposed budget for the ITC for the year 2025 amounts to \$21,723,500 USD, reflecting no change in the level of resources compared to the approved allocations for 2024³⁸. However, this amount represents a significant decrease compared to previous years.

The chart below illustrates the continuous rise in member contributions to the core fund supporting ITC projects between 2018 and 2023. Contributions increased from \$36.3 million USD to \$41.1 million USD before declining again in 2024 and 2025.

³⁶ World Trade Organization. "Development Section: Technical Cooperation." World Trade Organization Official Website, Accessed 19 Nov.

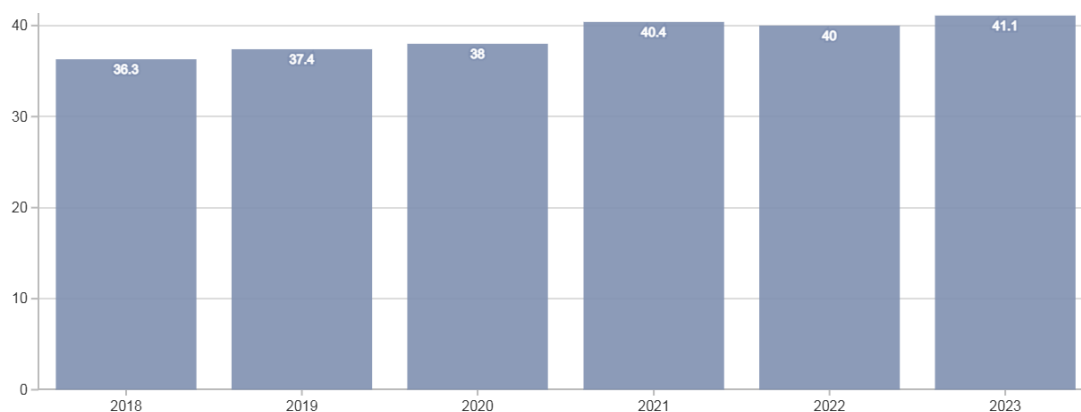
2024, https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/devel_e/itc_e.htm.

³⁷ United Nations, General Assembly, Administrative arrangements for the International Trade Centre, Report of the Secretary-General, 2004, no A/59/405.

<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/532674/?v=pdf&ln=en>

³⁸ United Nations, General Assembly, Proposed programme budget for 2025, International Trade Centre, Doc A/79/6 (Sect. 13), p11.

<https://www.intracen.org/file/proposedprogrammebudgetfor2025pdf>



This chart was published on the official website of the International Trade Centre in 2025³⁹.

<https://www.intracen.org/about-us/funding#scroll-to-section-grant-agreements>

- The second funding mechanism consists of extra-budgetary resources, which are voluntary contributions made to the Centre's fund by member and non-member states of the two parent organizations, large commercial enterprises, multilateral financial institutions, non-profit organizations, regional organizations, the United Nations and its affiliated agencies⁴⁰.

This mechanism includes two categories, referred to as "two windows"⁴¹:

The first window comprises core voluntary contributions that are not earmarked for specific projects. The Centre is thus able to allocate these funds according to its commercial and developmental priorities, including its core services and investments in innovation, to effectively meet the needs of its clients⁴².

The second window consists of earmarked voluntary contributions, whereby donors fund specific projects within defined geographical areas, targeting particular beneficiary groups⁴³.

The chart below shows the contributions made by countries under the first window, amounting to USD 87.5 million, and under the second window, amounting to USD 551.5 million, during the period from 2018 to 2023, according to statistics published on the Centre's official website.

³⁹ International Trade Centre. "Funding Section." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 1 Feb. 2025.

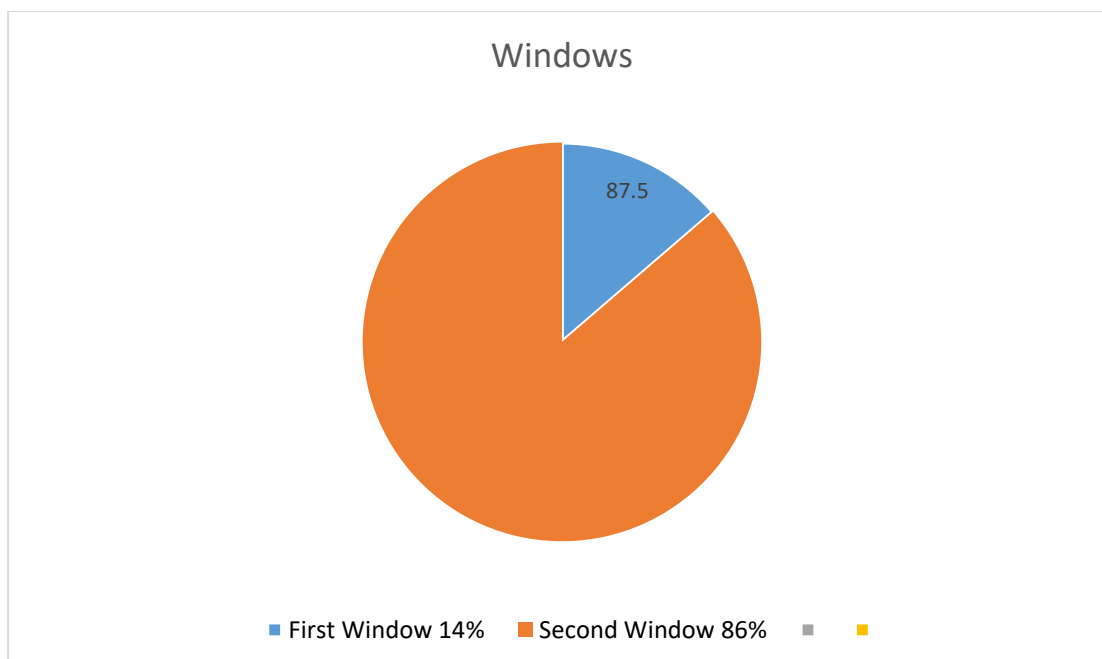
<https://www.intracen.org/about-us/funding>.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid.



This chart was published on the official website of the International Trade Centre in 2025⁴⁴.
<https://www.intracen.org/about-us/funding#scroll-to-section-grant-agreements>

It is evident from the above that voluntary contributions by states exceed the assessed contributions allocated through the Centre's regular budget.

There appears to be a significant disparity between the size of the Centre's budget and voluntary contributions and those of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)⁴⁵, whose budget is entirely dependent on voluntary contributions from member states. The Executive Board of the UNDP projected that its budget would amount to 28.1 billion USD⁴⁶ for the period 2022–2025. This substantial difference may help explain the limited impact of the ITC's activities on national economies. The Centre may allocate a portion of its approved budget to organizing various forums and conferences aimed at discussing different strategies to support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and assisting them in addressing the challenges they may encounter.

4- Forums and Conferences as a Means for the International Trade Centre to Fulfill Its Role in Developing Trade in Developing and Least-developed Countries.

⁴⁴ International Trade Centre. "Funding Section." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 1 Feb. 2025.
<https://www.intracen.org/about-us/funding>.

⁴⁵ The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is the UN's leading agency for international development, supporting countries and communities in their efforts to eradicate poverty, implement the Paris Agreement on climate change, and achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
<https://www.undp.org>.

⁴⁶ Report of the Administrator, UNDP integrated resources plan and integrated budget estimates, 2022–2025, DP/2021/29, p1.
<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3933449?ln=en>

In its efforts to enhance the competitiveness of trade in developing and least-developed countries, the International Trade Centre (ITC) organizes forums that address various topics, such as supporting women's trade, reducing poverty, and lowering harmful industrial emissions. These activities are an important means of raising global awareness among donors and beneficiaries about the role of vulnerable groups in supporting their countries' economies. This is achievable if these groups can escape the cycle of poverty, stimulate employment, and reduce unemployment, or at least mitigate its spread. Some of the key activities include:

4-1- Conference of Global Trade Promotion Organizations.

This conference focuses on supporting trade-based growth, where trade organizations provide solutions and information to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) connect their products to international markets. The conference offers ideas to support innovation and marketing, addresses risk management challenges that SMEs may face, and evaluates companies' plans for business continuity and their competitiveness in markets⁴⁷.

The conference introduces businesses to the commercial trends required by major markets, where entrepreneurs share their perspectives on these markets and their requirements. The event emphasizes exploring opportunities for global trade and investment⁴⁸. During the conference, an award ceremony is held to honor individuals and organizations that have contributed to the success and enhanced competitiveness of exporting companies or those who have made a significant and positive impact toward achieving this goal⁴⁹.

4-2- "She Trades" Conference.

This conference is an annual event that was first organized in 2011. The initiative focuses on empowering women to participate in international trade and creating a more equitable and inclusive business environment. The Centre assists women in overcoming the obstacles they face in their trade and identifying areas that require urgent assistance. The conference gathers female entrepreneurs who own export-oriented businesses from various countries, offering them a unique opportunity to connect with buyers, investors, and potential partners⁵⁰.

The successive editions of this conference have yielded several direct positive outcomes. Between 2018 and 2021, three million women were linked to the international labor market⁵¹, and support was provided to thirty thousand women-owned businesses, generating returns of 250 million USD. Furthermore, the conference facilitated the provision of the necessary

⁴⁷ International Trade Centre. "Trade Promotion Organizations Conference." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 2 May 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/itc/events/tpo-network-world-conference-and-awards>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ International Trade Centre. "SheTrades Global Conference." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 2 Jan. 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/events/shetrades-global>.

⁵¹ ITC, Annual Report 2021 Building an inclusive and sustainable recovery, p8.

https://www.intracen.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/Annual%20Report%202021_ENG.pdf.

technical expertise to ease their integration into the global economy. A global network of 350 partner organizations from sixty-five countries has been established, in addition to partnerships with both private and public sectors to develop services for women and build an enabling ecosystem for their trade while promoting gender equality⁵².

4-3- Conference on Small and Medium Enterprises in E-Commerce.

The conference serves as a platform to discuss the real challenges faced by small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in developing countries within the framework of the digital economy. The conference provides solutions to several issues, such as facilitating electronic signatures, paperless e-commerce, and trust-building measures like consumer protection and personal data protection. The regulations concerning these important topics for the digital economy are expected to benefit consumers and citizens, while also contributing to an increase in the sales of businesses⁵³.

4.4 – The Trade for Sustainable Development Forum (T4SD)⁵⁴.

The Trade for Sustainable Development Forum is a prominent global event organized by the International Trade Centre (ITC), focusing on sustainable supply chains. The forum brings together key stakeholders, including policymakers, business support organizations, sustainability standards groups, and representatives of the private sector in developing and least-developed countries, including small enterprises⁵⁵.

At the session held in Bern, Switzerland, on 12 September 2024, participants discussed the evolving needs of small businesses in contributing to sustainable development amidst current geopolitical and regulatory challenges. Stakeholders presented various solutions aimed at advancing the forum's objectives, including the engagement of and capacity-building for the private sector to foster collective action toward a more sustainable future⁵⁶.

The ITC has positioned these forums as global platforms contributing to the enhancement of trade in developing and least-developed countries. These events have produced several positive

⁵² World Trade Organization. "Report on the Women's Empowerment in Trade Initiative." Accessed 21 July 2021. https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/womenandtrade_e/16july21/item_3.3_itc.pdf.

⁵³ International Trade Centre. "Small Business, Big in E-Commerce—High-Level Event." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 2 May 2025. <https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/events/small-business-big-in-e-commerce-high-level-event-in-the-margins-of-the-12th>.

⁵⁴ H, Hdywa, & K, Raad. The Malaysian experience in sustainable development, Damascus University Journal of Economic and Political Sciences, 2024, 40(2), p-p 222-239. <https://journal.damascusuniversity.edu.sy/index.php/ecoj/article/view/12244/2610>

Sustainable development is defined as "a transformation within society aimed at enhancing individual well-being from one generation to the next, with the goal of expanding opportunities in health, education, and income, as well as broadening freedoms and avenues for effective participation in society."

⁵⁵ International Trade Centre. "Trade for Sustainable Development (T4SD) Forum." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 23 Nov. 2024. <https://www.intracen.org/news-and-events/events/trade-for-sustainable-development-t4sd-forum>.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

outcomes, including supporting producers—particularly women—in connecting their products to international markets, offering solutions to overcome barriers to global trade, and advancing e-commerce through practical responses to its associated challenges.

In addition to its forums and conferences, the ITC's country-level projects in developing and least-developed nations represent one of the core instruments through which the Centre carries out its mandate to enhance trade in these economies.

5-1 Refugee Employment Project: Building Solutions for Somali Refugees in Fragile and Protracted Displacement Contexts

This project, launched in 2017 and aimed at Somali refugees, seeks to promote stability and address the root causes of irregular migration and displacement in Africa. The project spans a three-year period and is funded by the European Union Trust Fund⁵⁷.

The primary objective of the initiative is to create an enabling environment for income generation by improving access to both formal and informal employment opportunities, enhancing freedom of movement, providing financial support, and strengthening market linkages⁵⁸. The project has yielded several tangible benefits, including the creation of employment opportunities for women and youth in sectors such as online freelancing and home décor. Refugees received 100 interview requests for potential online employment, resulting in the hiring of 46 individuals. Moreover, four co-working spaces were established across three camps, equipped with computers, headsets, and high-speed internet to support refugees in accessing online income-generating and employment opportunities⁵⁹.

5.2 Building Economic Resilience for Conflict-Affected Individuals and Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Ukraine

This project aims to strengthen the economic resilience of Ukrainian communities impacted by war by providing support to individuals—particularly internally displaced persons (IDPs), women, and other vulnerable groups—helping them improve their incomes and gain access to employment opportunities. The project also seeks to enhance the capacity of local government institutions and business support organizations to access essential market information that links small enterprises with domestic and international markets.

⁵⁷ International Trade Centre. "Refugee Employment and Skills Initiative: Building Solutions for Somali Refugees." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 21 Nov. 2024.

<https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/refugee-employment-and-skills-initiative-building-solutions-for-somali-refugees>.

The European Union Emergency Trust Fund for Stability and Addressing Root Causes of Irregular Migration and Displaced Persons in Africa was established to tackle the underlying causes of instability, forced displacement and irregular migration, while also contributing to better migration management. The Fund's programs are implemented in partnership with 26 countries across three regions of Africa: the Sahel and Lake Chad, the Horn of Africa, and North Africa.

⁵⁸ International Trade Centre. "Projects Section." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 21 Nov. 2024. Ibid.

⁵⁹ Oxfam. "E-Motive Project." Oxfam Official Website, Accessed 21 Nov. 2024, <https://www.emotiveprogram.org/solution/the-refugee-employment-and-skills-initiative-resi/>.

One of the key components of the project was the establishment of a comprehensive virtual learning space at the community level, which leveraged digital platforms to foster innovation and promote digital transformation in the Ukrainian economy. This approach has played a significant role in enhancing adaptability in the face of wartime disruptions⁶⁰.

The beneficiaries of the project include individuals acquiring vocational and digital skills, Ukrainian businesses seeking entry into new markets, and support organizations that have become more agile in adapting to evolving economic conditions. Notably, the project contributes to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as outlined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development⁶¹.

5-3. Project: Connecting Women-Owned Businesses to the Global Home Décor and Gift Market in Central America

Launched in 2018, this project by the International Trade Centre (ITC) aimed to support women-led enterprises in Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Panama in accessing international e-commerce opportunities. Funded by the European Union, the project sought to strengthen the export and competitive capacity of women-owned businesses in Central America. In addition to improving product design and quality, the initiative prioritized the creation of new employment opportunities through the use of e-commerce⁶².

Implemented from 2018 to 2021 by ITC in collaboration with the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration (SIECA) and in partnership with national organizations from the target countries, the project achieved multiple positive outcomes. Women-owned businesses across the region experienced significant growth in their export management and online marketing skills. Their products and services improved in design, quality, and alignment with market trends and customer demands. Furthermore, these enterprises developed high-quality digital and promotional materials, enhanced their online presence, and established connections with international business partners. They also acquired the technical know-how required to meet the needs of e-commerce buyers⁶³.

5.4. Project: Enhancing Prosperity through the Caspian Sea Transport Corridor

⁶⁰ International Trade Centre. "Ukraine: Building Economic Resilience for Conflict-Affected Individuals and SMEs." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 3 May 2025.

<https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/ukraine-building-economic-resilience-of-conflict-affected-individuals-and-msmes>.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² UNCTAD eTrade for All Initiative. "Strengthening Women-Owned Businesses in Central America—Online Market Potential." eTrade for All Official Website, Accessed 22 Nov. 2024.

<https://etradeforall.org/news/itc-strengthening-women-owned-businesses-in-central-america-online-market-potential/>.

⁶³ International Trade Centre. "Central America: Linking Women Business Enterprises (WBEs) with the Global Gifts and Home Décor Market." International Trade Centre Official Website, Accessed 22 Nov. 2024. <https://www.intracen.org/our-work/projects/central-america-linking-women-business-enterprises-wbes-with-the-global-gifts>.

Scheduled for implementation in 2025, this project aims to strengthen the relationship between the European Union and Central Asian countries by improving the operational efficiency of the Caspian Sea transport corridor and promoting the internationalization of businesses in the region. The initiative seeks to facilitate cross-border procedures in Central Asia to attract sustainable trade and investment while also enhancing regional coordination among the participating countries to improve trade connectivity and the flow of goods. Furthermore, the project will aim to boost the competitiveness of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) and facilitate their access to regional and EU markets⁶⁴.

A broad range of stakeholders in Central Asia will be involved in the project's activities, including government bodies such as relevant ministries, border regulatory agencies, customs authorities, as well as local business support organizations⁶⁵.

In reviewing some of the key projects undertaken by the International Trade Centre, it becomes evident that they form an integrated chain of efforts that align with the Centre's strategic objectives. These initiatives reflect a model of effective international cooperation involving countries, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Nevertheless, the impact of these projects remains limited to certain regions or population groups, largely due to the limited financial resources allocated to them.

Conclusion:

Despite the considerable efforts exerted by the International Trade Centre (ITC) in its mission to improve the living standards of populations in developing and least-developed countries and to support the trade activities of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) within these nations, the impact of such efforts remains relatively limited when compared to other agencies dedicated to trade development. This limitation is primarily attributed to the constrained financial resources allocated to the Centre. Therefore, it is essential that both the World Trade Organization and the United Nations encourage their member states—particularly the major economic powers—to increase their financial contributions to the ITC. Doing so would enable the Centre to implement a greater number of projects, thereby fostering increased growth in this critical sector of trade in developing and least-developed countries.

Results:

1. Despite being the product of a joint initiative between the United Nations and the World Trade Organization—and benefiting from their financial and administrative support—the International Trade Centre (ITC) suffers from limited autonomy, particularly in the recruitment of personnel. The strong influence of both organizations in staffing decisions deprives the Centre of the opportunity to hire individuals with specialized expertise

⁶⁴ Ibid.

The countries that will benefit from this project are: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

aligned with the nature of its projects and the complex political, economic, and social contexts of the target countries. Additionally, political and economic considerations may result in the imposition of certain candidates over others.

2. There is a significant discrepancy between the two types of voluntary contributions received by the ITC. Donor entities tend to contribute more generously when allowed to select the specific countries where projects will be implemented, as opposed to providing unearmarked funds that allow the Centre to allocate resources at its discretion. This donor preference is often driven by historical colonial ties, as well as political, cultural, and economic interests. Consequently, recipient countries—particularly post-conflict and highly aid-dependent nations—are more vulnerable to political pressure from donors seeking to exert influence over development priorities.
3. Several ITC-led projects have contributed positively to enhancing the export competitiveness of specific products, particularly agricultural goods in targeted countries. These initiatives have also created employment opportunities for refugees and individuals residing in conflict zones, supported the integration of women-led businesses into global trade networks, and raised awareness among nations regarding the importance of joining the World Trade Organization.
4. Despite ITC's concerted efforts to boost exports from developing and least-developed countries, its overall impact on their economies remains limited. This is particularly concerning given that many of these nations possess abundant natural resources that play a substantial role in global trade. The Centre's interventions appear inadequate in addressing the local development needs of these populations, and the nature of its projects often seems more promotional than transformative.
5. Although this study does not directly address the operational challenges faced by the ITC, it is important to acknowledge that widespread corruption, favoritism, and bureaucratic inefficiencies in some partner countries negatively affect the success and sustainability of the Centre's initiatives.
6. While the ITC's impact on stimulating economic development in target countries may be limited, its projects play a crucial role in mitigating the risk of social unrest by offering economic alternatives to vulnerable populations and discouraging their involvement in violent activities amid rising global instability.

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