

## **Norway**

### **ITC Joint Advisory Group, 2 November 2021**

Thank you Chair,

Executive Director, Deputy Executive Director, Excellencies, and Delegates.

In December last year Norway signed a new multi-year grant agreement with ITC. The new agreement allows ITC and Norway to continue a long-standing collaboration across inclusive and sustainable trade, women's economic empowerment and poverty reduction. Norway's contributions will be made to Window I of the ITC Trust Fund.

As underlined by several speakers before me, and so eloquently expressed by the Executive Director, the Covid-pandemic affected us all in 2020, albeit differently. It is still very much ongoing and continues to threaten to reverse years of development progress, impacting SMES and their value chains and trade, disproportionately harming the service sector, women and young entrepreneurs, as also shown in the data produced by ITC. We must remind ourselves that the pandemic pushes millions into poverty. ITC has a leading role in giving MSMEs the tools to become more competitive and connect to international markets and thus to help people regain their livelihood through trade.

Norway very much acknowledges and appreciates how the ITC have been able to respond and delivered adapted solutions in these times of crisis. As the Executive Director writes in the 2020 Annual Report, ITC has «pivoted with purpose».

Sustainability is a consistent consideration in Norway's development policy. ITC's SME Competitiveness Outlook 2021 confirms that resilient companies were five times less likely to lay off employees during the pandemic. The Outlook focuses on rebuilding small businesses from the pandemic in a way that prepares them for the looming climate crises. ITC's GreenToCompete strategy supports developing countries in leveraging trade to seize the opportunities of the green economic transition. We fully subscribe to the pivot to sustainability and resilience.

Norwegian international development policy is focused on the poorest and most vulnerable groups. For Norway, this means a strong commitment to the least developed countries and sub-Saharan Africa. The share of LDCs in ITC's region-specific interventions are therefore an important consideration for Norway.

The pandemic has hit women disproportionately. Harvesting the benefits of inclusion and gender equality must be at the forefront in our work. We must ensure that we apply a gender lens on all efforts within Aid For Trade. We are therefore pleased that the Executive Director have ensured us that inclusion will be a high priority for ITC in the years to come.

Thank you for your attention,