

Inputs to the High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF) in 2025

Inputs from functional commissions of ECOSOC, other intergovernmental bodies and forums to the 2025 HLPF

1. Entity/ Intergovernmental body or forum

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4. Assessment of the impacts of the multiple and interconnected crises on the implementation of SDGs 3, 5, 8, 14 and 17.

Throughout 2024, rising geopolitical tensions and conflicts have deepened instability, disrupting the ability of many micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) to operate and flourish. At the same time, persistent inequalities—worsened by the climate crisis and uneven access to the internet and digital tools—continue to pose significant challenges. The global economic crisis has further exacerbated these issues, driving up costs and disrupting supply chains, making it increasingly difficult for MSMEs to sustain operations and achieve growth. As a result, more of the MSMEs that ITC serves are in fragile or conflict-affected situations.

ITC's flagship report, [*SME Competitiveness Outlook 2023: Small Businesses in Fragility: From Survival to Growth*](#), highlights challenges faced by MSMEs operating in fragile contexts, including higher costs of doing business, and increased informality. The research finds that MSMEs can increase resilience through firm-level actions like better financial management, structured hiring, and engagement with business support organizations (BSOs). However, these actions must be complemented by systemic reforms to create a supportive business environment. Regarding the goals under review at HLPF 2025:

SDG 5 - Gender Equality

ITC research indicates that women entrepreneurs in fragile settings face even greater exposure to security and economic risks. 41% of women-owned firms reported experiencing high fragility, compared to 31% of men-owned firms. Women also have more limited access to finance and face greater social barriers. Policy measures such as introduction of gender-sensitive financial products and increasing networking opportunities for women-led firms are important factors to overcoming these challenges. (*SME Competitiveness Outlook 2023*)

SDG 8 - Decent Work and Economic Growth

As we transition to a digital economy, the gap between the connected and unconnected is widening. The combination of pandemic-induced lockdowns, economic contraction and technological adoption by companies is quickly transforming tasks, jobs and skills.

ITC's [*SME Competitiveness Outlook 2022: Connected Services, Competitive Businesses*](#) found that value addition and jobs created in global value chains depend less on

manufacturing production and more on services. Services are increasingly supplied using digital technologies. Four types of “connected services” - financial services, ICT, transport and logistics, and business and professional service – are growing quickly, particularly in low-income countries. These connected services also contribute to overall competitiveness, as they make other companies more productive. The share of companies that export was 25 percentage points higher when there were competitive connected services firms nearby. Connected services also make our societies more equal. Through them, small businesses, and those led by women and young entrepreneurs, can integrate into international value chains. As we rebuild from crises, focusing on connected services can help countries leapfrog value chain restructuring, creating more and better jobs.

5. Three key areas where sustainable, inclusive, science- and evidence-based solutions for achieving the SDGs and leaving no one behind are being effectively delivered, especially related to the cluster of SDGs under review in 2025, also bearing in mind the three dimensions of sustainable development (economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection) and the interlinkages across the Goals and targets.

SDG 5 - Gender Equality & Women’s Economic Empowerment

SDG 5 on gender equality has cross-cutting accelerator effects on all the SDGs. In recognition that women’s economic empowerment is critical to achieving the SDGs, ITC launched the [SheTrades](#) initiative 10 years ago. Women-led businesses make up one-third of SMEs worldwide. Yet only one out of five exporting companies is owned by women. More exporting women-led businesses means more jobs, especially for women. Through SheTrades, ITC is committed to providing direct and indirect support to hundreds of thousands of women entrepreneurs to become more competitive in international markets. ITC partners with 300 ecosystems players such as trade promotion organisations, chambers of commerce and financial institutions, as well as corporates to increase women’s access to knowledge, resources and markets. ITC has also supported more than 60 countries with inclusive and gender-responsive trade policy reforms. To-date 18 national and regional SheTrades Hubs have been established, strengthening local ecosystems and facilitating women's access to trade opportunities.

SDG 8 - Decent Work in Global Supply Chains

The [Social and Labor Convergence Program \(SLCP\)](#) was established in 2019 to improve working conditions in global supply chains by eliminating audit duplication and inefficiencies in social and labor compliance assessments. The program provides a *Converged Assessment Framework (CAF)*—a standardized tool for assessing workplace conditions—allowing manufacturers, brands, and other stakeholders to collect, verify, and share credible social and labor data without redundant audits.

ITC plays a crucial role in the Social and Labor Convergence Program (SLCP) by developing, maintaining, and implementing the SLCP Gateway—an IT platform that enables the program's data-sharing ecosystem. ITC has provided the technical infrastructure that facilitates the adoption of the CAF across global supply chains, supporting over 14,000 garment and footwear facilities in more than 60 countries.

Additionally, ITC collaborates with organizations like ILO Better Work to align CAF with international labor standards and supports compliance with emerging regulatory frameworks such as the EU’s Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive. The impact of this work is

significant, with more than \$50 million in savings from reduced audit duplication and over 6 million workers covered under SLCP.

Digital Transformation and New Technologies for MSMEs

Aligned with the *Global Digital Compact* adopted by UN Member States in September 2024, ITC enables MSMEs to access and compete in the digital economy, supports digital entrepreneurship particularly among women, youth, and other underrepresented groups, enhances digital public goods and infrastructure, and supports MSMEs to adopt new and emerging technologies like artificial intelligence. For example, ITC launched [TradeAI App](#), an AI-powered online trade policy advisory application that provides policymakers with quick, free access to policy solutions for common trade challenges. ITC also published *Living with the Genie – AI in Content Creation for Small Businesses* ([Report](#)) and is integrating AI into its existing tools such as [Global Trade Helpdesk](#) and popular courses in the [SME Trade Academy](#).

6. Three examples of measures to accelerate progress towards SDGs through well-coordinated actions in key transitions to bring progress to scale (food security, energy access and affordability, digital connectivity, education, jobs and social protection, climate change, biodiversity loss and pollution), building on interlinkages between SDGs to ensure cohesive progress.

1. Recognising the importance of operating across different SDGs, ITC launched [Alliances for Action \(A4A\)](#), an initiative aiming to transform agricultural value chains and promote sustainable food production by honouring the value that smallholder farmers contribute to agri-food value chains. By working all along the value chain, from lead firms to government and small farmers and producers, A4A aims not only to improve financial wellbeing and food security for stakeholders, but also to promote equity and inclusion and climate-smart and sustainable practices throughout these food systems.
 2. ITC and the World Trade Organization (WTO) launched the [Women Exporters in the Digital Economy \(WEIDE\)](#) Fund in 2024, a groundbreaking initiative designed to empower women entrepreneurs by enhancing their access to finance, skills, markets, and networks. By providing women with the necessary resources to thrive in international trade and the digital economy, WEIDE plays a crucial role in advancing SDG 5 on gender equality while also fostering innovation and digital inclusion.
- Under its Green Trade Moonshot, ITC is prioritizing climate action for MSMEs because these businesses are both major contributors to global emissions (40-60%) and highly vulnerable to climate change impacts. Supporting MSMEs in the green transition is crucial for sustainable development, economic resilience, and achieving global climate goals. MSMEs play a key role in global supply chains that need to decarbonize to meet sustainability targets and regulatory requirements. Ahead of a September 2025 deadline, ITC [released](#) at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, detailed guidance for how trade could be incorporated more directly in these 'NDCs 3.0,' and how MSME perspectives could be integrated effectively. ITC also released a [Green Performance Toolkit](#) that helps MSMEs monitor and evaluate their environmental sustainability effort

7. Follow-up actions and measures being undertaken by your intergovernmental body or forum to support implementation of the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration and the outcomes of the 2024 Summit of the Future, to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

ITC is implementing the outcomes of the 2023 SDG Summit Political Declaration and the 2024 Pact for the Future through our programmatic priorities: green trade, inclusive trade, and digitally empowered trade. ITC is also participating in four of the six UN Working Groups on Pact for the Future Implementation (Youth, SDG Acceleration, Digital and Emerging Technologies, and International Financial Architecture) and engaging in relevant intergovernmental processes such as: CSW69 / Beijing+30 and the 4th International Conference on Financing for Development in Seville (June 2025). This engagement reflects ITC's commitment to working with UN partners, Member States and other stakeholders to achieve the global goals and deploy innovative solutions such as enhanced data strategy and AI, in line with UN 2.0.

8. Recommendations and key messages to be considered for inclusion in the Ministerial Declaration of the 2025 HLPF

- Reaffirms the *Global Digital Compact* commitments:
 - enable MSMEs to access and compete in the digital economy
 - support digital entrepreneurship particularly among women, youth, and other underrepresented groups and in developing countries
 - enhance MSME access to digital public goods and infrastructure
 - support MSMEs to adopt new technologies like artificial intelligence
- Commits to ensure that women and girls reap the economic benefits of the digital revolution.
- From climate change to conflict, MSMEs face challenges that threaten their survival. Their role in providing—and pioneering—solutions must be recognized. Not only are these MSMEs responsible for the goods and services that society relies on, but they also generate many of the new ideas that can help move the SDGs from ambition to lasting change. These small businesses must be consulted in any decisions that affect them, and the same applies for the business support organizations that can be a lifeline for many MSMEs.
- At a time where public budgets are increasingly under strain, governments must also look at how to work together more closely, including under donor coordination structures. International agencies, for their part, should pool their collective expertise, experience, and networks to develop cohesive responses to the challenges we face.