

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE SWISS PROGRAMME ON CAPACITIES FOR TRADE POLICIES (C4TP) IN THE LAST YEAR OF IMPLEMENTATION

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This external evaluation report assesses performance of the Swiss Programme on Capacities for Trade Policies (C4TP), in the last year of its implementation, and has been commissioned by SECO. The evaluation covers the programme's performance, focusing on its relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, coherence, impact, and sustainability as per the OECD DAC criteria. The programme's objective is to provide targeted support to governments in developing and least developed countries (LDCs), enhancing their trade policy-making capacities to foster inclusive and sustainable trade.

The evaluation spanned 3 months, involving desk research, interviews, field missions, and surveys. In-depth understanding on the programme's performance was furthermore gathered through a case-study approach, with focus on three countries where the C4TP has been active: Serbia (full-fledged country programme), Indonesia and Bolivia (available in separate **annexes X for Indonesia and XI for Bolivia**).

It assessed the two main components of the C4TP:

- **Component on human capacity building**, implemented by external service provider GFA Consulting Group (GFA)
- **Component on trade data and Global Trade Alert database (GTA)**, implemented by the HSG (Swiss foundation St. Gallen Endowment for Prosperity).

Based on the quantitative and qualitative data gathered and analysed, the key findings can be summarized as follows.

Overall, this mid-term evaluation found that the performance of the C4TP is satisfactory, both for the human capacities and trade data component.

For the period 2021-2024, the C4TP has shown to offer a valuable and unique toolbox of trade-related guidance for Governments in target countries, and to more limited extent for private sector actors.

Given the dynamism and growing unpredictability in the global trading environment over the past years, this evaluation comes at a time in which Governments and business are challenged to redefine the value of trade policy. Trade policy has seen an expanded thematic coverage, with competitiveness, sustainability as well as resilience as variety of policy goals that Governments can strive to reach through combined use of various trade policy instruments.

This evaluation has shown that the next phase of the C4TP can be highly valuable. It offers also a potential to re-position the C4TP so as to be able to support beneficiaries to re-strategize and utilize trade policy in the changing global trading context and meet rising stakeholder expectations – in Switzerland and beneficiary countries.

The evaluation also served to identify certain weaknesses and areas for improvement, which currently hold back the full potential of the C4TP to provide the much-needed strategic and capacity building guidance, for Government and other trade actors.

The findings, based on 6 OECD DAC Criteria, can be summarized as follows:

- **Relevance:** Overall, the programme has shown to be conceptually relevant for beneficiary countries, and the target beneficiaries. Given the dynamism and growing unpredictability in the global trading environment over the past years, the C4TP can be considered to support the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy which recognizes 'that the global trading environment is challenged by a multitude of factors'. The C4TP has shown that it can deliver its potential to provide the much-needed strategic and capacity building guidance, for Government and other trade actors, to reposition and utilize trade

policy as a set of instruments that contribute to the broad(ening) set of economic growth and sustainable development objectives.

- For the **human-capacity building component (GFA Component)**, the programme showed high satisfactory levels of target beneficiaries in the full-fledged intervention countries, and moderate satisfaction levels in the fill-the gap and small interventions.
- **For the trade data component (GTA Component)**, the relevance is overall high for target beneficiaries. The relevance can be improved by customization to a 'non-expert' audience, to acknowledge capacity gaps in developing countries (C4TP target countries). The programme addresses essential needs in trade policy, particularly in light of the evolving global trade context marked by economic uncertainties and geopolitical tensions.
- **Coherence:** The programme's interventions are aligned with national priorities in beneficiary countries and SECO's international development cooperation objectives. Coherence with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy priorities, as well as between GFA and GTA components can be further improved.
- **Effectiveness:** The C4TP evaluation showed a satisfactory performance overall, with partial satisfaction in some areas. The human capacity building component showed that full-fledged programmes like the one in Serbia have been relatively successful, while smaller, fill-the-gap interventions can prove highly valuable but remain dependent on absorption capacity and strategic use of the knowledge and skills. Acquisition of new projects in smaller and fill-the-gap proved challenging; often due to the lack of awareness about the programme and how exactly the C4TP can support the Government (or business) to achieve its trade policy priorities. With regards to cooperation amongst trade policy stakeholders, there has been partial satisfaction, mainly due to the fact that in most partner-countries there is no structural and/or institutionalized public private dialogue (forum) on trade and investment.
- **Efficiency:** The programme demonstrated efficiency in implementing full-fledged interventions, but smaller interventions were less cost-effective due to administrative burdens and difficulties to engage beneficiary governments to express targeted interest in the programme. More concrete offerings that align with beneficiary country trade policy strategy may support acquisition in a next phase.
- **Impact:** The programme has contributed to improving trade policy capacities in some countries, notably in Serbia and Peru. The overall impact has been difficult to determine due to the short time-frame of implementation (2 year), and the challenges faced in successfully implementing small and fill-the-gap projects. For the trade data component, the impact performance points to the strong willingness of Governments to integrate high-quality trade data into everyday trade policy making, but accompanying capacity (skills, tools) may sometimes be lacking.
- **Sustainability:** The sustainability of C4TP's benefits depends in many countries on the capacity and commitment of the Government to embed the C4TP skills, tools and data into their existing trade policy making processes, systems and strategic approach. Efforts are needed to improve knowledge management and make programme materials more accessible for long-term use.

Recommendations following this external evaluation of the C4TP include inter alia:

- 1) **To refine the intellectual framing of the C4TP (narrative, theory of change, key concept definitions)** to fit the changing understanding on what constitutes successful trade policy in today's highly dynamic global trade environment, and in the context of changing stakeholder expectations in Switzerland and in beneficiary countries.

- 2) **To more closely align C4TP with the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy, as well as the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy¹ and EFTA negotiating agenda. Alignment could include thematic areas (digital trade, sustainability, other).**
- 3) **To enhance accessibility and stimulate accessibility of C4TP funds through a dedicated ‘fill-the-gap’ C4TP ‘vehicle’ of support, available for a broader group of countries based on request and fulfilment of criteria.**
- 4) To re-organise the set-up of C4TP with a **C4TP central component**, which can complement individual / country-specific guidance with more cross-country collective learnings and exchange of insights between countries on specific thematic and/or challenges.
- 5) **To further allow strengthening of the accessibility and usability of the GTA platform, as well as broadened scope of the thematic issues covered:** beyond WTO-only, to capture digital and sustainable trade themes, as well as subsidies and other ‘strategic trade policy’ themes.
- 6) To acknowledge that trade policy has become a strategic and sensitive area of policy and **reforms, requiring trust and confidence** between beneficiary institutions and implementing agencies (and SECO as donor agency). For this to work, consider reducing reliance on a commercial service provider for delivery of sensitive trade policy advisory services. Alternative options may be international organizations with a combined trade policy and capacity building experience.

Concluding remarks

The C4TP has demonstrated its value, both through its human capacity building and trade data component. However, adjustments in strategy, governance, and outreach are necessary to maximize its potential impact across all beneficiary countries. The programme has the potential to provide unique added value to beneficiary countries’ key trade policy actors to better navigate the complexities of global trade policy.

By addressing above raised issues and following up on the suggestions for improvement, a renewed C4TP will be fit for a next phase, to support beneficiary countries to successfully operate in the global trading environment. With an adjusted set-up and scope, the C4TP will also be able to align better with the Foreign Economic Policy goals and the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy and respond to stakeholder interests expressed at home and abroad (in beneficiary countries).

The evaluation findings in this report highlight the need for clearer programme narratives and priorities that better align with Swiss objectives in foreign economic policy and development cooperation.

These times of growing unpredictability and dynamism in the global trading environment, merit continued trade policy capacity building; to support Governments and stakeholders to the required redefining and repositioning of trade policy as a set of instruments, that can help to build resilience and seek progress in the context of the geopolitical uncertainties and changed expectations on the benefits of trade (for growth and sustainable development).

The next phase of the C4TP could inter alia step-up support to beneficiary countries to reflect on and define a more strategic positioning of trade policy (formulation, implementation, monitoring) as a set of tools that allow the country to advance on the path of a combined set of objectives; growth, competitiveness, sustainable development, resilience and ‘just transition’ through sustainable and inclusive trade.

¹ Alignment of C4TP Outcomes with the 3 priorities of the Swiss Foreign Economic policy (2021) three core components could be explored: 1) **Rules-based international system**, 2) **Access to international markets**, 3) **Sustainability in economic relations**. The ‘stakeholder collaboration’ (now outcome 3 of C4TP could be integrated across the board, similar to ‘strategic and evidence-based trade policy making’.

ACRONYMS

CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
C4TP	Capacity for Trade Policy Programme
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
ERP	Serbia Economic Reform Programme
ET	Evaluation Team
GTA	Global Trade Alert
GFA	GFA Consulting Group
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
LDC	Least Developed Countries
NPSC	National Project Steering Committee
MIFT	Serbian Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade
PMT	Programme Management Team
SECO	Economic Affairs of the Swiss Government
SCCI	Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
SCO	Swiss Cooperation Office
TF	Trade facilitation
TFA	Trade Facilitation Agreement (of the WTO)
WTO	World Trade Organisation
NPSC	National Project Steering Committee

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose and objectives of the evaluation

Commissioned by SECO, this external evaluation (EE) has as its primary objective to assess the performance of the C4TP in the last year of implementation (2024). As per the programme document of the C4TP, the programme offers on-demand targeted support to governments of developing and least developed countries (LDC) to improve their capacities in trade policy making'. More particularly, the Terms of Reference for this mid-term evaluation (in Annex) included a focus on the following criteria based on the OECD DAC: relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact, coherence and sustainability of the programme.

This evaluation aims to gather insights on the functioning of the programme against its objectives, through a solid review of the design, set-up and governance, as well as outcomes and impact of the activities undertaken as part of the various components. The evaluation assesses whether and how the needs of the intended beneficiaries are being served through the C4TP as part of the SECO-funded portfolio of development cooperation assistance, and whether the set-up and governance supports effective and efficient use of the allocated resources. The evaluation will also reflect on the coherence with other SECO programmes (notably in the area of digital trade), and whether the results are expected to contribute to sustainable impacts.

Ultimately the goal is to provide recommendations for a possible continuation of the programme or potential new programmes envisaged through a second phase of the programme.

In terms of the **evaluation team (ET)**, one International Expert and one Local Expert (Serbia) were contracted through Dalberg, DGDA Switzerland Sarl.

1.2 Scope and methodology of this evaluation

This evaluation covered the entire C4TP with the two programme's components and implementing agencies, the GFA Consulting Group (GFA) and Global Trade Alert (GTA). The evaluation activities (desk research, interviews, survey) took place over the course of 12 weeks, from 8 April until 4th July.

Scope of this evaluation

For the **capacity development component** implemented by GFA, the evaluation scope focused on beneficiary countries that participated in the three types of interventions, for which a case-study was prepared.

- As evaluation methodology, desk research and a total of 26 interviews were conducted including with GFA staff, SECO staff, project beneficiaries, stakeholders and partners in the 3 countries. One field mission to Belgrade (Serbia) was set-up allowing for physical interviews and fact-finding at local levels.
 - **Serbia** as beneficiary of a full-fledged programme (Case-study Annex IX)
 - **Indonesia** where a small project was discussed (Case-study Annex X)
 - **Bolivia** as beneficiary of a fill-the-gap intervention (Case-study Annex XI)

For the **Global Trade Alert database (GTA) component** implemented by the HSG (Swiss foundation St. Gallen Endowment for Prosperity), the evaluation scope comprised all services provided under the agreement.

- The evaluation methodology covered **desk research and interviews** with the Implementing Agency, beneficiary Governments and stakeholders (9 interviews), including during a field visit to Geneva and

Bern. In addition, an online **survey** was conducted with **14 completed questionnaires**. The Annex provides the questionnaire developed (SurveyMonkey).

Methodology of this evaluation

In terms of methodology, the team has adopted a mixed methods approach for this evaluation, combining quantitative and qualitative data. This included: stakeholder interviews, online survey, a meta-evaluation, and comparative case studies (3 countries), based on inter alia 2 field visits.

The evaluation approach built on qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods from a range of sources. The external evaluation was spread into four phases:

Evaluation phase	Explanation
Phase 1: Preparatory and desk review of relevant documents and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The preparatory phase consisted of desk review of documents and resources provided, as well as organisatory aspects for the primary data collection (phase 2). - Interview guidelines: for the physical and semi-structured interviews to be scheduled in Switzerland and Serbia, interview guidelines were prepared with key questions corresponding to the evaluation indicators. - Stakeholder mapping and outreach: With insights from the SECO project team and implementing organisations (GTA and GFA), a mapping of stakeholders was undertaken. - Organisation of physical interviews: Through targeted outreach, the representatives of the main direct beneficiaries of C4TP in Serbia and Switzerland were approached for physical interviews. The interviews were held with selected beneficiaries and stakeholders in Belgrade, Serbia (22-24 April), and in Geneva and Bern in Switzerland (2-3 May). - Inception report: The inception report was prepared and discussed with SECO. The report provided clarification and agreement on the approach, methodology, as well as planning and governance of the evaluation.
Phase 2: Primary data collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The data collection methods chosen included: analysis of primary and secondary documents, physical and online interviews, as well as an online questionnaire sent out to a broader list of stakeholders for the GTA data component. - A purposive sampling method was employed for the purpose of selecting interviewees and inviting beneficiaries and/or users of the C4TP to complete the online survey. - Physical (and online) interviews with key beneficiaries and stakeholders (see Annex for a list of interviewees) were held during two on-site field missions and online. Field-missions were held to Belgrade, Serbia (22-24 April 2024), and to Bern and Geneva in Switzerland (2-4 May 2024). - An Online survey of beneficiaries and/or users of the C4TP (GTA component) was developed and sent out to a selected group of beneficiaries of the GTA tools and instruments, especially targeting the GTA dashboard and workshops. Recipients of the online questionnaire were identified based on the participants lists of GTA conducted tools and workshops, registration to the data-bases and news-letters. A total of 14 respondents provided full completed online survey with valuable insights used for this evaluation.
Phase 3: Data analysis	<p>In-depth data analysis by the evaluation team served to triangulate information from diverse evaluation methodologies and data sources to evaluate against the 6 OECD DAC criteria.</p> <p>The evaluator assessed the programme’s performance for each evaluation criteria applying a rating system with four-point scale rating system, providing individual ratings for the evaluation criteria. The OECD DAC criteria are rated on a four-point</p>

	<p>scale, presented in a scoring matrix (see Annex 4.6), for the entire programme as well as country-specific programmes, as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly Satisfactory; • Satisfactory; • Unsatisfactory; • Highly Unsatisfactory • Not assessed. <p>The analysis of the data collected focused on the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review of the result-based monitoring (RBM) system to evaluate the project design, including Log-frames, to assess C4TP objectives and achievements for the current phase of the programme. - Assessment of the project performance based on data and insights from the desk review of project documents, interview minutes from meetings held, as well as answers from completed online questionnaires.
<p>Phase 4: Draft and final report-writing and review process</p>	<p>Based on the insights from the data assessment phase, prepared a draft evaluation report to present main findings based on the OECD DAC Assessment grid and evaluation questions. A first set of comments was received by the evaluator as basis for consideration and adjusting the findings and/or recommendations of the draft report.</p> <p>A strategic discussion with SECO WEHU team, as well as implementing agencies, served to present the draft discussions and as basis for their review process.</p> <p>The final report was prepared based on the review and comments received from SECO and implementing agencies further to the draft report discussed and reviewed. Dissemination of the final evaluation report will be prepared and undertaken by SECO WEHU team.</p>

Evaluation questions

A draft set of evaluation questions has been prepared as a basis for more precise and adjusted set of questions for the field mission meetings and online survey. The draft set of questions is prepared based on the OECD DAC assessment grid (Annex 4.7), and available in Annex 4.5.

The operational performance of the C4TP will be assessed against **OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) evaluation criteria and guidance**. Its purpose is to help make results of evaluations more transparent and quantify them (transform the qualitative information in the evaluation reports into quantitative scores) in a standardized manner.

The OECD guidance *Applying Evaluation Criteria Thoughtfully* (2021) explains the principles and provides advice as well as examples for the use of the criteria.

- Relevance: Is the intervention doing the right things?
- Coherence: How well does the intervention fit?
- Effectiveness: Is the intervention achieving its objectives?
- Efficiency: How well are resources being used?
- Impact: What difference does the intervention make?
- Sustainability: Will the benefits last?

2 SETTING THE SCENE: A CHANGING GLOBAL TRADING CONTEXT AND THE ROLE FOR TRADE RELATED CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

2.1 Changing global trading context and role of trade policy

In times like these, characterised by economic uncertainty and geopolitical tensions, and where fundamental values are coming increasingly under pressure, international cooperation is more important than ever. SECO's mission to promote free trade and economic cooperation, and in this way to contribute to generating sustainable prosperity and peace, remains highly relevant.

Since the Covid19 crisis, the global trading context continues to undergo a variety of major shifts. These impact profoundly the scope and complexity of trade policy, and Governments' capacity to use trade policy instruments for the achievement of long-term growth and development objectives.

On the one hand, a **continued belief in the overall benefits of trade integration** is generally underpinning Governments' trade policy making (and donors' trade related technical assistance programmes). As emphasized by World Bank; 'trade remains an engine of growth that creates better jobs, reduces poverty, and increases economic opportunity²', and, with the underlying data confirming that 'trade liberalization increases economic growth'.

However, it is clear that **geopolitical tensions** (and indeed a trade war between US and China), continue to threaten existing commitments to trade integration. With a rise in protectionist measures, Governments are keeping an eye on the possible scenario of a period of de-globalisation with lowering trade and GDP growth further (similar to the 1930s). A rise in the use of domestic subsidies has been well documented by GTA, including in the dedicated (NIPO) tool, impacting negatively upon market access for LDCs and developing countries.

- For example, as shown by GTA research (with support from C4TP), LDCs are facing increased competitive disadvantages as result of state support for local firms provided by China, EU and US, which put market access for third countries at risk.³

On the other hand, **trade policy nowadays needs to serve a broader set of policy goals, such as serving the green, energy and digital transitions**. This is equally reflected in the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy with thematic priorities that refer to 'environment and social sustainability' and 'digital economy integration'⁴. Recognizing that trade policy creates 'winners and losers', **Governments are increasingly expected to formulate and implement trade policy and agreements in an inclusive and participatory manner**.

Nowadays, transparency on and participation in the FTAs' negotiations is expected by key stakeholders, and the practice of 'impact assessments' have become the norm as a basis for discussing benefits and challenges and positioning in trade policy negotiations. This 'multi-stakeholder trade policy making' trend is also reflected in the initiation of consultations on planned trade policy decisions by several actors such as the European Commission.

² See: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/overview>

³ Evenett, 'LDCs and the multilateral trading system'. See: <https://www.globaltradealert.org/reports/126>

⁴ See:

https://www.seco.admin.ch/seco/en/home/Aussenwirtschaftspolitik_Wirtschaftliche_Zusammenarbeit/aussenwirtschaftspolitik/aw/thematische_schwerpunkte_aws.html

As reflected in a growing body of literature, the terms and conditions for further trade integration are weighed more carefully, taking into account the benefits and challenges for domestic industries and job creation, consumers, access to (strategic) goods and services, as well as sustainability impacts.

2.1.1 Switzerland in the global trading system

Switzerland's trade policy priority on multilateral, non-discriminatory rules is complemented by a goal of continuous expansion and deepening of trade relations through regional and bilateral approaches, both with the European Union (EU) and with partners worldwide.

Similar to the EU and US, the Swiss Government has updated its foreign economic policy strategy (in 2021), with increased emphasis on maintaining and strengthening Switzerland's competitiveness in a fast-changing world, and including a focus on more 'assertive' measures while respecting the country's international commitments.

In November 2021 the updated Swiss Foreign Economic Policy was published⁵, around the same time as the C4TP document was published. It departs from three core components:

- **Rules-based international system:** strong reliance on the multilateral and reliable rules-based international system (WTO) for cross-border economic relations, especially to ensure legal certainty and stability.
- **Access to international markets:** improving access to international markets for selling exports as well as for procuring production inputs and benefitting from product diversity and lower prices.
- **Sustainability in economic relations:** contributing to sustainable development at home and abroad, through economic relations.

Based on analysis undertaken, the priorities of the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy (published November 2021) have evolved since previous editions (dating from 2004, 2009 and 2014). Compared to the 2014 Swiss Foreign trade policy, no fundamental changes in direction were included. Noticeable changes in emphasis include an **enhanced focus on Switzerland's interests**, as well as the ambition to **boosting resilience through diversification**, and **contributing to environment and social sustainability**.

⁵ See:

https://www.seco.admin.ch/seco/en/home/Aussenwirtschaftspolitik_Wirtschaftliche_Zusammenarbeit/aussenwirtschaftspolitik/ziele_aw-politik.html

3 DESCRIPTION OF THE C4TP

3.1 Context and current implementation

The C4TP was set-up by SECO with starting-date February 2021, for a period of 4 years (until February 2025). The rationale for the programme was very much developed with the COVID-19 pandemic fresh in memory, which inter alia led to supply chain shocks and rising unpredictability in trading conditions due to new trade measures.

Hence, the C4TP rationale is to be found in an attempt to continued commitment of the Swiss Government to open trade policies as essential drivers for economic and social development and of effective trade rules as bulwarks against the unilateral adoption of protectionist measures⁶. The C4TP rationale aligns with the overall objective of SECO economic development cooperation, which is ‘to promote economic growth and sustainable prosperity in its partner countries’⁷.

Anno 2024, there are C4TP interventions under implementation and/or discussion in 16 countries, including the two full-fledged projects in Serbia and Peru. Fill-the-gap interventions are currently underway (or discussed) in Bolivia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Liberia, Moldova, Mozambique, Mongolia, Montenegro, Tunisia, EIF, Ukraine. For 2024, the ambitions are to discuss and launch the fill-the-gap interventions in Mongolia, Tunisia, Ukraine, and explore projects based on needs expressed by countries through the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF).

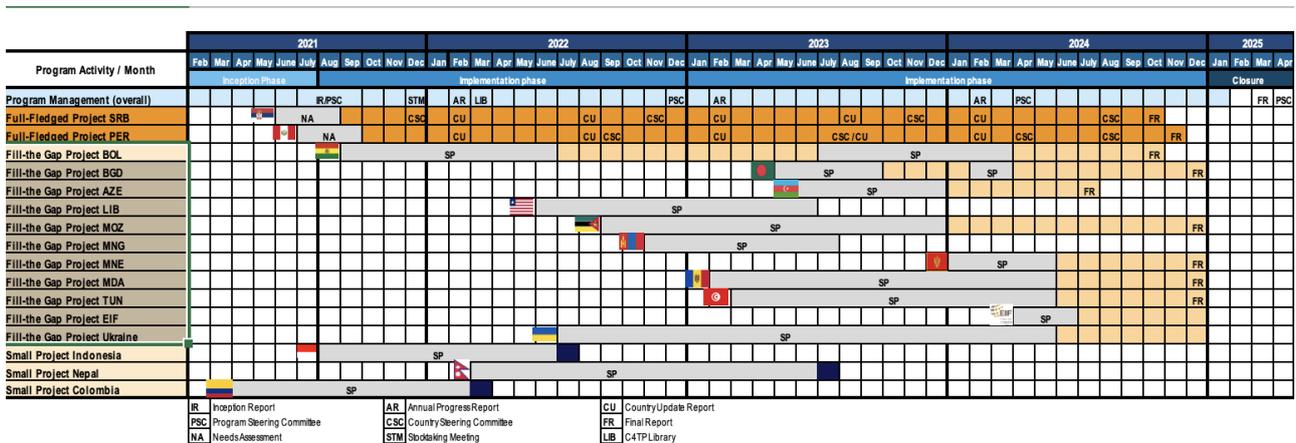


Figure 1: C4TP Workplan 2024 Overview (May 2024)

3.2 Rationale of the programme

The C4TP offers demand-driven support targeted to governments of developing and least developed countries to improve their capacities in trade policy making. With a needs-assessment phase for each country requesting support, the C4TP interventions aim at addressing concrete trade policy needs in the beneficiary countries. This support consists of human capacity building for trade policy, as well as high quality trade data that is used in the formulation or implementation of trade policy.

⁶ See: C4TP programme document

⁷ See: <https://www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch/secocoop/en/home/strategy/focus/objectives.html>

Focus themes in the support activities are a broad range of relevant trade policy matters, such as trade in industrial goods, agriculture, services, rules of origin, SPS/TBT, trade remedies, trade facilitation, intellectual property, public procurement or dispute settlement. The rationale and purpose of the intervention is described in the programme document.

- As an overall objective, the C4TP is aimed at **fostering more favourable framework conditions** in the beneficiary countries for inclusive and sustainable trade, contributing to economic growth and increased resilience.

The Log-frame (see Figure 2) reflects the C4TP rationale, which entails that by strengthening capacities of governments in trade policy making, favourable framework conditions can be supported to engage in inclusive and sustainable trade. This, in turn, will help to reap the benefits of trade and provide higher income and more opportunities to their people, which will contribute to reduce poverty and strengthen economic resilience.

To achieve its objective, the programme is based on a three-level structuring (impact, outcome, outputs). The Log-frame clarifies the ultimate impact, as well as the outputs expected from the programme activities.

- **Outcome 1:** Improvement of trade negotiations capacities with increased consideration on sustainability and inclusiveness issues
- **Outcome 2:** Implementation of **trade agreements and unilateral trade policy** facilitated, taking into account sustainability and inclusiveness concerns
- **Outcome 3:** Cooperation among **trade policy stakeholders** at the national and regional levels improved through existing cooperation networks

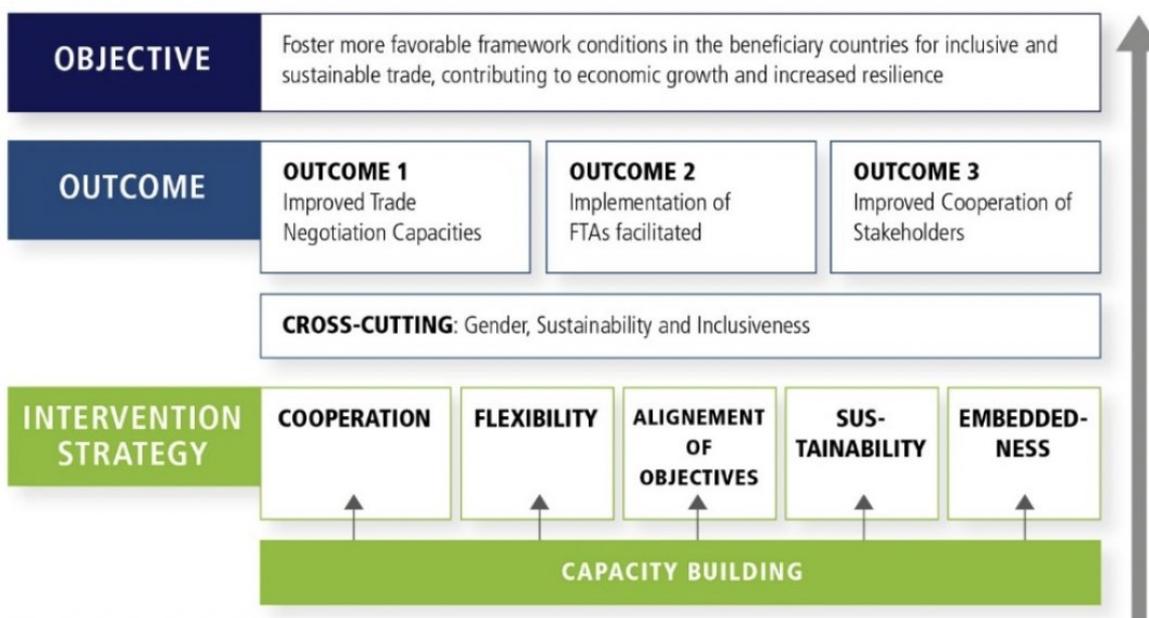


Figure 2: Log-frame of C4TP. Source: SECO C4TP programme document.

The underlying narrative of the C4TP is described in the Tender Documents and Credit Proposal, and has been elaborated upon by the Implementing Agency (GFA) in the C4TP programme document. As such, an elaborated Theory of Change has *not* been developed which could serve to clarify the linkages between impact, outcome and output levels.

Assumptions are elaborated upon in the C4TP programme document, making reference mostly to outcome-level and output-level assumptions. At impact-level, the C4TP objectives align with beneficiary country policy

objectives’ and assuming that overall there is sufficient capacity and (strategic and political) interest to receive support for ‘improved framework conditions for inclusive and sustainable trade contributing to economic growth and increased resilience’.

3.3 Types of intervention

With the objective to support government capacities in trade policymaking, the C4TP aims at ‘more favourable framework conditions in the beneficiary countries for the development of sustainable and inclusive trade, economic growth and increased resilience’. The intervention logic is explained in more detail, inter alia in the programme document prepared by the implementing agency (GFA).

There is no detailed definition of the concept of ‘favourable framework conditions’, but the SECO Credit Proposal refers more to ‘the importance of open and effective trade policies as a driver for economic and social development’ and the need for institutional and human capacities needed to formulate and implement those trade policies.

To address the capacity gaps identified in the needs assessment and further elaborated in the country project document, C4TP implements country activities under one of the following three types of intervention:

- Full-fledged project (three years support plan with a maximum budget of 700'000 CHF);
- Small project (two years support plan with a maximum budget of 300'000 CHF);
- Fill-the-gap intervention (targeted support not exceeding six months and with a maximum budget of 50'000 CHF).

With regards to the beneficiary countries of the C4TP, and intensity of trade related capacity building support allocated, these have been selected by SECO based on a combination of factors. On the one hand, a choice has been made to identify two priority countries (Peru and Serbia) which qualify for ‘full-fledged’ programme support. Both countries have been selected based on the existing EFTA FTA in place, as well as long-standing political, economic, scientific and cultural ties that have developed over the years.

3.4 Beneficiaries: countries and target beneficiaries

For the choice of **beneficiary countries**, the C4TP aligns with the SECO focus on selected countries, ‘where its projects, its knowledge and its network have the highest added value’⁸. Three criteria were applied in the 2021-2024 International Cooperation Strategy (‘IC strategy’), and will continue to be applied in the 2025-2028 IC Strategy⁹.

- The **needs of people in developing countries** (taking into account the humanitarian situation, the level of poverty, the capacity of countries to mobilise their own resources and the challenges in terms of sustainable development).
- The **added value of Swiss IC** (i.e. specific knowledge, skills, capacity for innovation and experience in the fields concerned and experience in the fields concerned).
- Switzerland’s **long-term interests** (i.e. peace, freedom, human rights, democracy, prosperity, sustainable development, and international security and stability are seen as essential to the Swiss prosperity).

Beneficiary countries for the programme were:

⁸ See: <https://www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch/secocoop/en/home/laender.html>

⁹ See: SECO IC Strategy 2025-2028, <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/fdfa/aktuell/dossiers/iza-strategie-2025-28.html>

- Two priority countries (Peru and Serbia)¹⁰
- Other beneficiary countries mentioned include: Colombia, Bolivia, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Morocco, Nepal, North Macedonia, South Africa and Tunisia

Second, for the choice of the *main direct beneficiaries of C4TP*, the programme in its 2021-2024 set-up focuses on the governments of developing and least developed countries, more specifically the country's **ministry of trade / commerce** as well as **other ministries and agencies** responsible for specific areas of international trade. However, other direct beneficiaries include private sector organisations as well as academic institutions.

¹⁰ For C4TP priority country **Serbia**, the sizeable diaspora living in Switzerland, as well as the wish to contribute to the complex transition process and reforms to align with European values and standards seem also to have played role. Serbia is equally a priority country of Switzerland's transition cooperation with Eastern Europe. For C4TP priority country **Peru**, which is a priority country of SECO's economic cooperation and development, the rationale for including the country as C4TP priority country seems to have been driven by Swiss economic interests, as well as the commitment to contribute to the large sum of economic development cooperation allocated to the country between 2021 to 2024 (a total of some CHF 75 million).

4 FINDINGS

4.1 Relevance

This section reviews the relevance of the C4TP, thus the extent to which the intervention objectives and design respond to beneficiaries, country, and partner/institution needs, policies, and priorities, and continue to do so if circumstances change.

Overall assessment on 'Relevance': Satisfactory

Overall, the programme was conceptually relevant for beneficiary countries, and the target beneficiaries (ministries of trade / commerce).

- For the **human-capacity building component (GFA Component)**, the programme showed high satisfactory levels of target beneficiaries in the full-fledged interventions and moderate satisfaction levels in the fill-the gap and small interventions.
- For the **trade data component (GTA Component)**, the relevance is overall high for target beneficiaries, but in the day-to-day work the relevance can be improved by customization to a 'non-expert' audience.

The Capacity for Trade Policy Programme (C4TP) was assessed as generally relevant, aligning well with the needs and priorities of beneficiary countries, particularly the ministries of trade and commerce. The programme's objectives and design are crafted to address the specific requirements of these ministries, ensuring that they remain relevant even as circumstances change.

The overall relevance of the C4TP has been rated as satisfactory. The programme is conceptually sound, with a clear focus on enhancing trade policy capacities in beneficiary countries. The programme's relevance is particularly pronounced in its ability to address the specific needs of the target beneficiaries, namely the ministries of trade and commerce in the beneficiary countries. The programme has been effective in tailoring its interventions to meet the demands of these ministries, ensuring that the support provided is both timely and appropriate.

However, while the programme's relevance is rated positively, there are areas where improvements could be made. These include better adaptation to changing global and local circumstances, and a more strategic approach to long-term impacts. The programme has demonstrated a strong ability to address immediate needs, but its focus on short-term outputs has, in some cases, limited its potential for achieving long-term, sustainable impacts. This challenge is particularly evident in the programme's Theory of Change, where missing linkages between outcomes and long-term impacts have been identified as a weakness.

GFA Component on human capacities

The GFA component of the C4TP, which focuses on building human capacities in trade policy, has received high satisfaction levels among beneficiaries in countries where full-fledged interventions were implemented. In these countries, the programme's interventions have been well-received, with beneficiaries reporting that the support provided has been highly relevant to their needs. The GFA component has been particularly effective in aligning with the trade policy-making priorities of the target beneficiaries, ensuring that the capacity-building efforts are directly responsive to the needs identified by the beneficiaries themselves.

- Between 2021 and 2024 a broad range of C4TP beneficiary countries were approached, C4TP was presented and in some cases led to actual interventions (see **Annex VIII** with a full overview provided by GFA in May 2024);
- two full-fledged projects were initiated and remain on-going, in Serbia and Peru
 - three small projects were initiated, in Nepal, Indonesia and Colombia. None of these were implemented.
 - Four fill the gap projects are on-going with some actions planned anno August 2024 (Bolivia, Azerbaijan, Bangladesh and Mozambique), with more interventions planned or under discussion in four other countries (Moldova, Mongolia, Montenegro, Liberia, and possibly Tunisia and Ukraine). Other countries where C4TP was presented but no interest was expressed include: South Africa, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana.

In contrast, satisfaction levels have been more moderate in countries where only smaller, fill-the-gap interventions were conducted. In these cases, the programme's impact has been somewhat limited, primarily due to the smaller scale of the interventions and the lack of comprehensive needs assessments. The fill-the-gap interventions, while valuable, have not always been able to achieve the same level of relevance and effectiveness as the full-fledged interventions.

One of the **key strengths of the GFA component** is its demand-driven approach. This approach is characterized by a high degree of participation from the beneficiaries, who are able to identify their own capacity gaps and request technical assistance that is tailored to their specific needs. This participatory approach ensures that the assistance provided is highly relevant and customized to the political and economic context of each country. The demand-driven nature of the programme allows beneficiaries to play an active role in determining the focus and scope of the interventions, ensuring that the support provided is both relevant and impactful.

Focus on short-term needs, demand-driven approach

However, the focus on short-term needs and outputs, while effective in addressing immediate challenges, has also limited the programme's ability to achieve long-term impacts. The programme's impact orientation has been weakened by missing linkages in its Theory of Change, particularly in connecting outcomes to long-term impacts. The programme has been successful in delivering outputs and achieving short-term outcomes, but the lack of a clear pathway to long-term impacts has limited its overall effectiveness.

- For example, in **Serbia**, the programme successfully addressed specific trade policy challenges through targeted interventions. The C4TP support in Serbia included assistance with CEFTA negotiations and implementation, the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA), and the bilateral trade agenda, including Serbia-China negotiations. Additionally, several activities were organized in cooperation with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (SCCI), including awareness-raising training on the benefits of Serbia's Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). While these interventions were successful in addressing short-term needs, there were missed opportunities to engage in more strategic, long-term support, such as in the stalled WTO accession negotiations. The programme's focus on short-term outputs limited its ability to contribute to Serbia's long-term trade policy goals, such as EU integration and the diversification of trade into Asian and Arab markets.
- In **Bolivia**, the lack of a solid needs assessment led to a misalignment between the support provided by the programme and the actual needs of the private sector. The programme's interventions in Bolivia were primarily focused on supporting the government's short-term needs, without adequately considering the needs of the private sector. This misalignment was due, in part, to the lack of a comprehensive needs assessment, which would have allowed the programme to better

understand the broader trade policy challenges facing the country. As a result, the support provided by the programme was less effective in addressing the long-term trade policy needs of Bolivia.

Importance of Needs Assessments

This evaluation found also that the importance of conducting thorough needs assessments cannot be overstated, as these assessments are crucial for ensuring that the programme's interventions are relevant and effective. Needs assessments play a key role in customizing programme interventions to the specific needs of beneficiary countries. By understanding the unique challenges and priorities of each country, the programme can tailor its interventions to address the most pressing trade policy issues.

However, the lack of comprehensive needs assessments, particularly for smaller projects, has limited the programme's relevance and effectiveness in some cases. The programme's approach to needs assessments has been inconsistent, with comprehensive assessments conducted only for full-fledged interventions. In contrast, smaller projects and fill-the-gap interventions have often been implemented without a thorough understanding of the local context and the specific needs of the beneficiaries. This has led to situations where the support provided by the programme has not fully aligned with the needs of the beneficiaries, reducing the overall impact of the interventions.

- For example, in Serbia, the programme's success in addressing specific trade policy challenges can be attributed to the comprehensive needs assessment conducted at the outset of the intervention. This assessment allowed the programme to identify the key trade policy issues facing the country and tailor its interventions to address these challenges. The programme's support for CEFTA negotiations, WTO TFA implementation, and the Serbia-China trade negotiations was highly relevant and effective, as it directly responded to the needs identified in the assessment. However, there were missed opportunities to address longer-term trade policy goals, such as Serbia's stalled WTO accession negotiations and its broader trade diversification strategy. These missed opportunities highlight the importance of linking short-term outputs to long-term impacts in the programme's Theory of Change.
- In Bolivia, the lack of a comprehensive needs assessment led to a misalignment between the support provided by the programme and the actual needs of the private sector. The programme's interventions in Bolivia were primarily focused on supporting the government's short-term trade policy needs, without adequately considering the broader trade policy challenges facing the country. This lack of alignment reduced the overall impact of the programme's interventions, as they did not fully address the needs of the private sector or contribute to Bolivia's long-term trade policy goals.

Limited engagement with Private Sector actors, Government leading demands and delivery

One of the key findings of the evaluation is the limited engagement of private sector stakeholders in the C4TP. While the programme has primarily focused on addressing the needs of government ministries responsible for trade policy, there has been less emphasis on engaging with private sector actors, who are also key stakeholders in the trade policy process. This limited engagement has implications for the programme's effectiveness in achieving its broader objectives, particularly in promoting inclusive trade.

The programme's objective of **promoting inclusive trade has not been fully realized**, particularly in smaller projects and fill-the-gap interventions. The implementation of the programme has shown a limited focus on inclusiveness, with activities primarily targeting government beneficiaries. This narrow focus has limited the programme's ability to engage with a broader range of stakeholders, including private sector actors, who play a critical role in the trade policy process.

- For example, in **Serbia**, private sector actors, such as small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), face significant challenges in understanding and utilizing trade agreements and policies. These challenges are often due to limited knowledge and understanding of the opportunities provided by trade agreements, as well as the complexities of trade policy implementation. The programme's limited engagement with the private sector in Serbia has reduced its effectiveness in addressing these challenges and promoting more inclusive trade outcomes.
- In **Bolivia and Indonesia**, there was minimal interaction between the programme and private sector stakeholders. In Bolivia, the programme's support was primarily channelled through the Vice Minister's Office in charge of trade, with little direct engagement with the private sector. This limited interaction reduced the programme's ability to address the broader trade policy needs of the country, particularly in relation to private sector development and trade competitiveness. In Indonesia, the programme's anticipated assistance was cancelled due to changes in government positions, and options to initiate collaboration with private sector actors were not explored. This lack of engagement with the private sector limited the programme's relevance and impact in both countries.

GTA Component on trade data: highly relevant but applicability to be further improved for developing-country context

For the trade data component (GTA Component), this evaluation found that overall, the high-quality trade data collected and disseminated through GTA is viewed by target beneficiaries and stakeholders as highly valuable in their trade policy making responsibilities.

The trade data provided by GTA is used by beneficiaries for a wide range of purposes, including monitoring trade policies, developing strategies, conducting impact assessments, and negotiating trade agreements. The relevance of the GTA component is particularly high for officials engaged in WTO matters and multilateral negotiations, where the data is used to support a variety of trade policy tasks.

However, the relevance of the GTA data could be further enhanced by making it more accessible to non-expert users, particularly in developing countries where there may be limited capacity to fully utilize the data. The current design of the GTA platform is tailored to advanced users with a high level of trade-related expertise. This design choice has made the platform highly valuable for experienced trade policy officials, but less accessible to those with limited expertise, particularly in developing countries and least developed countries (LDCs).

High quality trade data deemed highly valuable for Ministries of Commerce/Trade, with most frequent users often engaged on WTO and multilateral matters

Looking at the beneficiaries of the GTA component, based on analysis of the membership-data, it can be said that the member-base to date almost exclusively represents Government officials, with a majority based in Geneva (WTO Permanent Mission) as well as some Capital based officials. Indirect beneficiaries include also private sector representatives, which are slowly showing more interest based on assessment of Membership list provided (May 2024).

In your current role, how important or unimportant do you rate the access to high-quality data and information for your Government's trade policy making or implementing?

Answered: 14 Skipped: 0

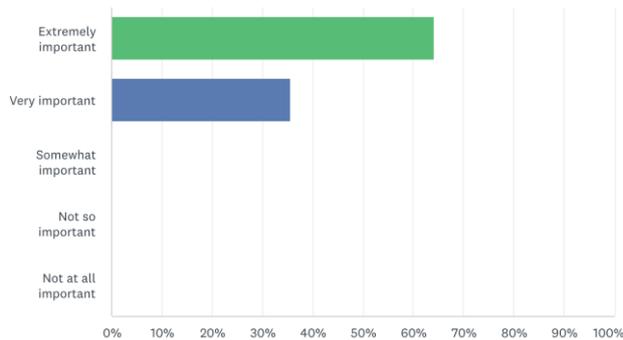


Figure 3: Visual presentation of online C4TP Evaluation survey answers to question #4

The GTA use-cases point to value of trade data throughout all phases of trade policy making, especially to monitoring unilateral trade measures worldwide, and as source for domestic trade policy making.

Looking at the use of the GTA trade data, users point to the importance of trade data throughout the different trade policy phases.

Whereas the C4TP does not distinguish between the various phases in the trade policy making cycle, the GTA in its current design has proven relevant in the continuous monitoring, strategy and conceptualization as well as design and evaluation phases of trade policy making. In the implementation phase, the GTA could in principle serve as a tool to research and benchmark how Governments develop and apply their trade instruments. Such a research-function could prove a valuable addition to the GTA services and tool, allowing for cross-functional research.

The GTA shows its relevance in a global trading context where Governments are pressured to reflect on the global protectionist trend. GTA thereby provides a solution to the fact that civil servants in relevant line ministries need to monitor unilateral trade measures worldwide, and their potential implications for domestic businesses.

Between May – July 2024, the Evaluation Team conducted an online survey, which was completed by 14 respondents, on the value and satisfaction of the Global Trade Dashboard. A full list of questions from the survey is presented in **Annex VIV**.

- For example, one official mentioned in the survey: ‘We have received complaints from the private sector about the discriminatory import licensing policy of [country X]. We then searched for this measure in the dashboard and found useful information. Coupled with a bilateral consultation with a colleague from the specific country, we have decided to drop the case in a WTO context’.

At the design phase of the dashboard a set of 12 specific tasks undertaken by trade policy officials were explicitly identified for the use of the trade data. These tasks are broad-ranging (see table), from trade policy strategy formulation, to preparation for meetings on WTO and bilateral trade relationships, monitoring market access challenges as result of new measures and promoting exports.

Based on the online survey inputs received from users (for which 15 answers were received), it can be said that the GTA Global Trade Dashboard is currently used in a variety of ways to support the different tasks in day-to-day trade policy making in beneficiary countries, including:

1. **Monitoring and evaluation of trade policy and trends;** GTA is used as a tool for continuous and overall monitoring and evaluation of trade policy and trends, as well as for specific preparation of specific meetings (such as WTO TPR, bilateral negotiations and coordination meetings).
2. **Impact assessments**
3. **Priority-setting and strategy development;** using GTA Trade Data on other countries' policies as basis for inputs into own policies to be developed.
4. **Building arguments and evidence for communication and stakeholder engagement**
5. **Develop positions and conduct trade negotiations;** in dialogue with trading partners, the GTA is used as information source to identify NTM's faced on exports (and/or imports).
6. **Formulation of trade policy and trade measures**
7. **Implementation of trade measures on imports, exports and FDI**

Annex XII presents a more detailed overview of Government (officials) trade policy tasks, mapped against the actual use of Global Trade Data (as indicated in the Online Survey).

Design relevance of the GTA points to a need to further strengthen the accessibility for 'non-advanced trade policy users' thus customizing to high-turn-over staff-rates in developing countries.

Looking at the design relevance of GTA as a trade platform, based on the interviews and survey results, it can be said that GTA has been developed for the advanced user with a relatively high level of trade-related expertise at hand. With a view to the intended target-beneficiaries (and indirect beneficiaries) of the C4TP which are situated in developing countries, this sometimes complicates the benefits. The accessibility and usability of the GTA seems in some occasions to be challenged by the capacity-constrained trade policy context in the developing countries and LDCs. This could be further improved by adding explanatory text on the functions of specific trade policy instruments (i.e. FDI restrictions), and how these could contribute to overarching trade policy.

In terms of the **applicability of the GTA data and tool** in the domestic trade policy making context, this evaluation pointed to the fact that GTA in its current set-up is built for the 'advanced trade policy' expert. Unfortunately, Government officials in C4TP beneficiary countries often do not have the required trade policy know-how and experience to make best use of the GTA database. On the other hand, once Government officials are 'trained' in the WTO Permanent Delegation, the GTA Database is found to be more valuable and they become 'advocates' of the GTA in the domestic context.

- For example, reflecting design choices in 2021, the current range of topics are primarily focusing on WTO Agreements. Anno 2024, interest has however shifted to trade measures applied (and solved) outside the WTO, as the WTO finds itself in a stalled situation when it comes to core functions of (multilateral) trade negotiations and dispute settlement. This means, currently a broad range of topics is not covered by the GTA.
- For example, in **Serbia**, the GTA platform was introduced to trade officials and private sector representatives, but it has not been widely utilized. Serbian trade officials have reported difficulties in using the platform efficiently, particularly given their limited time and resources for monitoring global trade measures. The GTA platform could be more valuable if it was designed to be more accessible to users with limited expertise, and if it included additional features to support research and benchmarking of trade measures. For example, **Serbia's** trade officials and private sector

received an introduction to the GTA, but currently do not utilize it. In the interviews held in Serbia, the civil servants in the Ministry of Internal and Foreign Trade mentioned they faced difficulties to utilize the GTA in a time-efficient manner. 'We have limited time to monitor the trade measures worldwide, and are not tasked with pro-actively monitoring. However, we use only ITC's Trademap in case we need to research trade data, volumes and tariffs faced in global markets, and GTA could be valuable if we need to research other import or export restrictions in target markets'.

At programme level, the GTA Component is highly relevant, but the narrow scope limited to WTO Matters misses out on new trade policy matters arising in the digital and sustainable trade themes (WTO-plus).

This evaluation found that the GTA Component in its current form (GTA Trade dashboard) holds a too narrow focus on WTO related scope of matters. This means it does not cover digital and sustainable trade themes, which have become a key part of Government and business representatives in their daily trade related tasks. This limits the relevance of the GTA Component for its users.

- For example, the **Serbia** case-study showed that businesses are pressured to comply with the EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) as well as new EU Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) also in the context of the EU Acquis and Accession negotiations. The Global Trade Dashboard currently does not cover a facility to compare, analyse, support reforms in these areas.
- Another example is the fact that Global Trade Dashboard currently does not support EFTA partner countries to monitor topics related to digital trade and sustainable development chapters. However, these are areas where EFTA partner countries often face most difficulties to align. For this purpose, the GTA Trade Policy Dashboard funded by C4TP is not relevant in its current shape, as digital and sustainability related measures are not covered. This could be reviewed in a next phase.

To improve relevance of the GTA Component, it can be considered to ensure broad coverage of the Global Trade Dashboard in terms of topics that reflect domestic reform trends and FTA chapters on digital trade and sustainable development. The guiding scope could reflect the challenges perceived by partner countries in implementing EFTA FTAs on digital and sustainable trade.

4.2 Coherence

This section reviews the coherence aspects of the programme, meaning the compatibility of the intervention with other interventions in a country, sector or institution.

Overall assessment on 'Coherence': (partially) satisfactory

This evaluation found the programme has been partially satisfactory in terms of aligning with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and beneficiary country trade policies, as well as other donor funded programmes.

GFA Component on human capacities: coherence through responsiveness to Government requests

For the Human Capacity component of the C4TP, this evaluation found that the programme full-fledged interventions show alignment with the interests of the beneficiary Government, and their trade policy strategy. However, this is implicit and based on responsiveness to requests from the beneficiaries rather than a strategic alignment with the long-term Government priorities on trade and development. Coherence with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy is not pursued in a pro-active manner.

The evaluation pointed to coherent programming to avoid duplication with other donor-funded initiatives.

Implementation of the C4TP well embedded in Swiss International Cooperation Strategy, but less coherence with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy

At the level of coherence with Swiss policy-framework, this evaluation looked at two key policies: the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy (2021-2024), and the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy.

As mentioned in the Tender documents, the 'implementing agency shall implement the programme in coherence with the Swiss foreign trade policy and beneficiary countries' trade policy strategies.

First, this evaluation found that the C4TP is well embedded in the Swiss International Cooperation Strategy (2021-2024), with objectives on poverty reduction and sustainable development. The geographic focus in the 4 priority regions is also reflected in the C4TP country selection. The thematic focus of 'inclusive and sustainable trade' aligns well with the thematic focus areas of the strategy.

Second, this evaluation found that there has been partial coherence with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy throughout the GFA and GTA components. The 2021 Swiss Foreign Economic Policy is built on three pillars: the rule-based international trading system, access to markets, and a sustainability component. Good coherence was achieved for the first two pillars of the policy, and less coherence on the third component (sustainability).

- For example, the case-study on the Serbia full-fledged C4TP found that the intervention shows partial alignment with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy. In absence of a Serbian comprehensive trade policy strategy, interventions were found to be in coherence with the Government trade policy priorities laid down in Economic Reform Programme (ERP) for the period 2021-2023. This is the country's most important strategy document, which foresees reforms aimed at deepening economic integration, such as the continuation of the WTO accession process, the implementation and future negotiations within the CEFTA framework in line with CEFTA strategic documents as mentioned above, as well as NTFB activities. Targeted interventions were organized that align with all three components of the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy, but especially the first two components; to enhance participation in the WTO and improve market access. This included training and advisory services in the areas of trade remedies, tariff negotiations and services negotiations and trade facilitation as well as dispute settlement. On the third component (sustainability), the demand for support also included preparation to comply with (EU) sustainability legislation. As a result, workshops were organized in collaboration with the private sector on a particular EU legislation, namely the Carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM). However, this was more a result of the request from the beneficiaries than a conscious planning decision.

Implementation of the C4TP well embedded in Swiss International Cooperation Strategy, but less coherence with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and beneficiary countries trade policy strategies.

Third, this evaluation also found that there has been partial coherence with the beneficiary countries trade policy strategies. Focus of the programmes were often developed based solely on the requests provided by the target beneficiary organisations, and to limited extent steered by the C4TP implementing agencies. Needs assessments were only conducted for the full-fledged interventions (Peru, Serbia), and limited 'concept notes' prepared for other countries did not entail structural 'gap assessment' or approach to understand where key priorities or needs may be to focus support on.

- Based on the case-study on the **Serbia** full-fledged C4TP, it can be said the programme took a good balanced approach in supporting trade negotiations and implementation thereof at all levels; international multilateral (WTO), bilateral (EU, China, Egypt) and regional (CEFTA), SAA.

On the other hand, there have also been missed opportunities in the Serbian C4TP to align with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy objectives, for example by building on the three components and thematic priorities as well as the EFTA-Serbia FTA which is applied since 2010. For example; no interventions were dedicated to advancing the WTO accession talks of Serbia that have been stalled. This could normally be considered a priority aspect to advance the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy objective of the first component 'a functioning rule-based trading system'.

- For example, in **Indonesia** the SCO mentioned that had there been an overarching narrative and more direct alignment with the Government trade policy strategy, there would have been better chances of kickstarting the programme.

Implementation of the C4TP happened in partial coherence with beneficiary countries trade policy strategies

Hence, the rather limited intellectual guidance by the implementing agency (GFA) and SECO have resulted in a programming approach that appeared at times too reactive and lacking the overall connection to the beneficiary country needs and trade policy priorities to arrive at an agreed 'job to be done'. This was especially the case for fill-the-gap and small projects, where there was very limited intellectual guidance and customized framing of the C4TP in communication with the targeted beneficiaries.

To achieve improved coherence with beneficiary countries trade policy context and strategies, a solid understanding of the context as well as capacity gaps and challenges is needed, often gathered through needs assessments. In-depth needs assessments were conducted only for full-fledged programme interventions in Serbia and Peru. However, the Implementing Agency in the interviews pointed to the value of preparing basic 'trade policy profiles with priorities and challenges', based on desk research. This would help to target the discussions in the acquisition phase, and also improve the design phase of the programme. The evaluation also points to the lack of needs assessments for all but the two full-fledged interventions. This hampers the customized planning as well as building trust with beneficiaries.

- In the interviews held with GFA staff, the GFA Programme Managers mentioned that 'if there would have been (budget to conduct) country-specific needs assessments on trade policy priorities, issues and bottlenecks of the country (and in relation with Swiss / EFTA trade relations) as a starting point, this could help to kick-start the discussion and raise appetite of target beneficiary Government entities to establish a customized intervention'.
- For example, the interviews with Serbian beneficiaries and stakeholders found that the programme activities align with the country's strategic economic and trade priorities, primarily EU accession process and harmonization with acquis, trade negotiations within CEFTA framework, and continuation of WTO accession. Serbia does not have a strategy on foreign trade. While the integration in the EU single market and WTO membership remain Serbia's strategic objectives, the country's liberal trade policy allows to expand the negotiation of FTAs with other world markets that supports the country's competitiveness and spurs economic growth. Serbia's main trading partners are the EU and the CEFTA Parties, but Serbia is a party to FTAs with EFTA States, with the Eurasian Economic Union and its Members States, UK and Turkey. Given Serbia's opportunity to access major markets under preferential conditions (like USA and Japan), exports retain a significant growth potential.

Close cooperation with other donors' related interventions.

The collaboration with other donor projects is seen as highly satisfactory. Overlaps are avoided already at the design stage and opportunities for collaboration identified and followed up upon. During the diagnostic phase, existing donor funded projects in each of the respective FFIs were contacted and their interventions

mapped if related to trade facilitation and/or customs services. During the implementation, the PMT maintains dialogue with key donor projects and participates in coordination meetings. The NPM also coordinate between donors where necessary, such as in Serbia where GIZ and the programme cover the same output area.

The programme has been successful in cooperating with other projects at output level, including:

- In **Serbia**, the GIZ German Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF) and the project AEO outputs complement each other; GFA, GTA and SIPPO worked together to provide export promotion support to targeted EU markets; in addition, the programme collaborated with USAID EDGE project and WBG Trade Facilitation Support Programme in co-organizing regional events for knowledge exchange and discussion on regional trade facilitation issues.
- In **Uzbekistan**, the WCO and the WBK jointly implement the TRS workshop and study – albeit with the WBK receiving more visibility for their contribution.
- In **Peru**, the project complements the FMI Smart Border project with the output in coordinated border management. The FMI focuses on equipment and practice whilst the project supports the strategic planning and methodology.

Visibility is a limiting factor for more intensive collaboration with some bilateral donors. For example, in Bangladesh USAID's concern about visibility lead them to finance a separate TRS rather than collaborating. Furthermore, many donors perceive the collaboration with WCO as difficult outside existing Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) or programmes with shared fundings. This perception does however not apply to the programme and its PMT, which is highly appreciated for its transparency and collaboration.

Value added of the programme

The programme has distinctive value added for the beneficiaries. First, it is a customs-to-customs support, and all the beneficiaries feel very confident that their needs are understood, and non-biased advice provided. Second, the combination of OD and TF outcomes is unique. The programme was able to address areas of organisational development, which CAs commonly do not open for external assistance. Third, it allows strengthening capacities in areas that were already notified as category C to the WTO, which many donors exclude. And fourth, it benefits from the WCO approved resources and expertise which is much trusted by the CAs.

GTA Component on trade data: over-all coherence with domestic trade priorities but limited skills in developing countries stand in the way of actual use

For the trade data component (GTA Component), this evaluation found that overall, the high-quality trade data collected and disseminated through GTA is very coherent with the overall need to monitor trade policy measures worldwide and use data in preparation of trade negotiations or reforms. However, for many countries where GTA Global Trade Dashboard is offered, the WTO Permanent Delegation in Geneva is well informed of its value (also for WTO TPR's which is promoted), but the capital civil servants seem to have difficulties to use it.

Several reasons are found; use of (WTO-specific) technical trade terms, and overall lack of human capacities (and focus) in the country to pursue evidence-based trade policy making.

Linkages with domestic trade policy setting are offered the GTA Global Trade Dashboard, but lack of skills in developing countries often stands in the way of leveraging that linkage.

Looking at the beneficiaries of the GTA component, based on analysis of the membership-data, it can be said that the member-base to date almost exclusively represents Government officials, with a majority based in Geneva (Switzerland) working at the Permanent Representation of their country to the WTO.

Lack of alignment between the two components of the C4TP (GFA-led human capacities component and the GTA Global Trade Dashboard)

This evaluation also pointed to the fact that the C4TP rationale of combining human capacity of trade policy with access to relevant high quality trade data is not automatically a successful combination. Whereas the collaboration between GFA and GTA for the implementation of C4TP has been formalized in a letter of intent, and progress on the collaboration is reported upon by both agencies, this collaboration only partly materialized.

- During the acquisition phase, GFA and GTA both took part in the presentation of the C4TP. Unfortunately, the assistance on human capacity and high-quality data were presented as two separate components.
- The needs assessments were conducted by GFA, but the value of trade data (or the lack of) for trade policy formulation or implementation was not really taken into account. For example, the Serbian needs assessment only mentions 1 time the GTA, to prepare export promotion information for businesses.

During the implementation phase of full-fledged or other programme interventions, GFA and GTA could not realize a structural collaboration. For example, in Serbia, the full-fledged programme did not leverage on GTA Global Trade Dashboard in the entire year 2023.

Through the interviews held, this evaluation pointed to a structural lack of understanding between the two partners of the programme. At a more structural level, the C4TP takes as assumption that human capacity and trade data are key challenges for trade-policy focused Government institutions (and other stakeholders') in beneficiary countries. This assumption is correct – as the country case studies confirmed. But high-quality trade data appears only to be valuable if the human capacity skills are built alongside, building on an overarching narrative whereby success-factors of good trade policy making, including data for evidence-based trade policy making, are presented in a way that is relevant to the beneficiary country.

4.3 Effectiveness

This section reviews effectiveness of the programme, meaning the extent to which the intervention achieved, or is expected to achieve, its objectives, and its results, including any differential results across groups.

Overall assessment on 'effectiveness'

Rating: Satisfactory

Overall, the effectiveness of the C4TP interventions is satisfactory.

For the human-capacity building component (GFA Component), the programme showed good effectiveness. The technical skills and competencies acquired through the programme have resulted in improved trade negotiations capacities of target beneficiaries, and supported implementation of trade policy. However, in the result-area (3) on cooperation amongst trade policy stakeholders, there has been partial satisfaction, mainly due to the fact that in most partner-countries there is no structural and/or institutionalized public private dialogue (forum) on trade and investment. With limited budgets available, the C4TP also did not

prioritize enhancing (human or institutional) capacity of the non-Government stakeholders to effectively engage with Government equally.

For the trade data component (GTA Component), the effectiveness of the improved access to data for trade policy making (and accompanying technical assistance), through the GTA dashboard, have allowed evidence-based trade policy making if and when policy-makers and stakeholders avail over the skills needed to use these (This has in many cases been lacking).

GFA Component on human capacities: partial effectiveness in raising interest in the C4TP solutions, good effectiveness in implementation

Trade negotiations capacities of target beneficiaries were improved for selected trade policy themes.

The programme has been effective in prioritizing those trade policy matters that were on the agenda of the Ministry in charge of the programme. This has been the case for the GFA-led human capacities component, as well as for the GTA-component on trade data.

For the small and fill-the-gap interventions, the absence of a needs assessment also means that capacities and/or institutional set-up of target beneficiaries have not been assessed prior to the discussion, planning or start of the activities. On the other hand, the programme document mentions that ‘for full-fledged and small country projects, the implementing agency will use capacity development tools to map processes of the trade policy cooperation ecosystem and conduct a solid stakeholder analysis in the countries assessed’. This has not been undertaken.

The lack of interest in small and fill-the-gap interventions has been holding back the programme spending. The reasons for lack of interest remain guessing.

The reasons mentioned by GFA include; ‘the relatively small size of the fill-the-gap project offered (up to 50 work days) resulting in limited interest toward C4TP and readiness to commit the resources necessities (staff).’ However, this evaluation also pointed to a lack of overarching narratives, no ‘modular’ approach with solutions offered, and the lack of trust in a ‘commercial party’.

In the full-fledged-programme (Serbia and Peru), there was equally room for addressing matters requested by private sector actors. In the small and fill-the-gap projects, the prioritization of trade policy themes was primarily decided by the Ministry in charge, and hence the design of the programme was done with limited engagement of private sector actors. As a result, the impact on ‘inclusive’ trade policy is mixed.

- For example, in Serbia, the teams addressed through workshops, studies and legal support covered a broad range of topics, including:
 - Trade negotiation component (1): tariff concessions (EU-China negotiations), trade remedies, trade in services
 - Implementation of trade policy commitments (2): SPS and quality infrastructure, Rules of origin and PEM convention implementation
 - Stakeholder cooperation (3): trade facilitation, EU Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism legislation (CBAM), market research, trade fair participation and other export promotion support.
- Moreover, the Serbia case-study has showed that the full-fledged programme allowed to take on a highly tailor-made and multi-faceted approach to capacity-building of Ministries’ staff. This proved to be effective. Through a combination of training, mentoring, negotiation simulations, coupled with

analytical work done by experts to prepare the country negotiation positions, yielded effective results.

Looking at the effectiveness of the acquisition of C4TP interventions, this evaluation has shown that the C4TP Implementing Agency had difficulties in generating sufficient requests for C4TP projects in the number of countries envisaged.

In the project acquisition phase, substantial resources were invested by GFA to develop new projects in beneficiary countries, by establishing contact with potential target beneficiaries, explaining the C4TP and possible benefits, and liaising towards a possible collaboration. Whereas the C4TP aims at **addressing trade policy capacity gaps** often found in developing countries, there has not been a structural needs assessment done for all countries where interventions took place.

Unfortunately, after the presentations were held, these did in many instances not lead to any concrete outcome of a C4TP project to be launched. (see Figure in Annex VIII providing an overview of all activities under the GFA Component funded by C4TP, as well as GTA membership for those countries).

- For example (See Annex VIII) no implementation of a small project was agreed and succeeded in all 3 countries envisaged: Indonesia, Nepal and Colombia.

In a dynamic (and sometimes politicized) trade policy environment, trust and relation-building are key success factors to launching and maintaining trade-related capacity building through C4TP

In the C4TP design phase, successful implementation happened where solid relations with local beneficiaries and Swiss Cooperation Office (SCO) were established. For new countries, it proved challenging especially for fill-the-gap and small projects to maintain the interest from programme beneficiaries.

- o The **Indonesia** case-study, showed that despite substantial preparatory work for a small programme intervention envisaged, including the preparation of a Memorandum of Understanding, insufficient buy-in was generated to maintain the cooperation. By decision from the target beneficiary (Ministry of Trade), the cooperation was discontinued in 2022. The Ministry decided that the budget was to be allocated to other priority activities related to the Ministry of Trade.

Lack of an overall trade narrative that fits the current dynamic trading environment, may have been an underlying reason for limited interest from target beneficiaries for the C4TP support

This evaluation pointed to the fact that, in the dynamic and geopolitical global trade context, Governments in developing countries and LDC's are in search of a strategic trade policy narrative, serving a broad range of economic growth, societal and environmental objectives.

In its current format, the C4TP has not been developed to provide the comprehensive narratives that may serve as guidance or inspiration to a repositioning of trade policies in the domestic context. The GFA Implementing Agency approach remained true to the C4TP initial set-up by responding to targeted requests that fit the Log-Frame outcomes on trade negotiations, implementation and stakeholder collaboration. In some countries, offering a strategic broader debate on the merits of the WTO, FTAs and the changing global trading system, could have supported thinking around other, more specific, challenges that required support.

This evaluation pointed to the *strategic* challenges of Governments and private sector actors, which would merit an *overarching type of assistance* provided for by the C4TP; to interpret the implications of the dynamic global trading context for their (group of) countries, to explain the value of trade policy in this context, its broader functions, as a set of instruments that can serve a multitude of policy objectives, from economic growth to sustainable development, resilience, energy and digital transitions, and industry development.

- In **Serbia**, Government officials mentioned that their day-to-day operations were not guided by an overarching trade strategy, and remained ad-hoc in nature. During the interviews, the interest was expressed by the Ministry to work towards a more inclusive and impact-oriented trade policy dialogue mechanism. However, the capacity resources and funds were lacking. The C4TP supported the national Trade Facilitation Body, and through that a more inclusive trade policy making. The broadening of the scope of the TF Body to cover ‘framework conditions for inclusive and sustainable trade’ was mentioned in the evaluation interviews, but not addressed during the C4TP.

At impact-level, the C4TP objectives align with beneficiary country policy objectives’ and assuming that overall there is sufficient capacity and (strategic and political) interest to receive support for ‘improved framework conditions for inclusive and sustainable trade contributing to economic growth and increased resilience’.

In terms of design, the linkages in the Logframe between impact and outcomes are not sufficiently defined

The objectives of the programme have been adequately defined in the programme document, namely ‘to **foster more favorable framework conditions in the beneficiary countries for inclusive and sustainable trade**, contributing to economic growth and increased resilience.’

The C4TP programme document sets out the Theory of Change: Trade policies are central to foster economic development and ensure trade resilience in times of crises but policy makers in developing countries often lack access to the technical knowledge and capacities to develop them.

Whereas the objectives of the intervention are adequately defined in the programme document, this review found that the underlying concepts as well as the causal pathways and linkages (between outputs, outcomes and impact) are not sufficiently defined. This has resulted in the programme lacking a comprehensive and integrated approach. In addition, this review found that the C4TP interventions are often activity-oriented, with limited linkages between outputs and outcomes, and/or outcomes and impact.

The 3 outcomes defined on trade negotiations, implementation and coordination, do not articulate measurable and verifiable outcome indicators specifying ‘inclusive’ or ‘sustainable’ trade, as anticipated impact of interventions.

As a result, this review found that the C4TP interventions are often activity-oriented, with limited focus on the overall objectives (impact), and limited linkages between outcomes and impact. Hence, whereas *in theory* the C4TP intervention logic is well defined, *in practice* it was difficult to achieve impact-level results.

In times of geopolitical dynamics, Governments worldwide are reassessing the goals and overall value of their trade policies and with it the applicability of trade policy instruments available. For the C4TP to be effective, as well as to ensure its ‘context relevance’, there needs to be clarity around the meaning of the underlying concepts, and based on that a comprehensive framing of the overall objectives of the C4TP.

Whereas the narrative in the C4TP programme document describes the overall logic of the intervention, the causal pathways and links remain to be clarified. The overall logic of the intervention is described in the SECO Credit Proposal:

The programme will support government capacities in trade policy making in developing and least developed countries. Through this support, beneficiary countries will be better placed to provide favourable framework conditions to engage in inclusive and sustainable trade, thereby contributing to economic growth and greater resilience.

The understandings of what constitutes ‘favorable framework conditions’ (C4TP purpose), and what constitutes ‘inclusive and sustainable trade’ (C4TP overall objective) remains undefined. And, compared to 2021, these concepts have been shifting as result of changing political priorities and dynamic global trade context. Besides the programme document (d.d. 2021, prepared by GFA Implementing Agency), the C4TP did not generate additional guidance or research papers (or refer to existing ones) that clarify these concepts of ‘favorable framework conditions’ or ‘inclusive and sustainable trade’. Apart from the narrative in the SECO Credit Proposal and (GFA prepared) programme document, the linkages between impact, outcomes and outputs are not defined in a Theory of Change.

On the one hand, this is related to the design of the C4TP, whereby the distinction between three types of projects (small and fill-the-gap projects, as well as ‘full-fledged projects’) does not realistically allow for each project to contribute to the ambition of ‘improved framework conditions’.

GTA Component on trade data: Effective in responding to changing needs of trade policy actors in Government and private sector

For the trade data component (GTA Component), this evaluation found that overall, the high-quality trade data collected and disseminated through GTA are responding to the growing need of Governments to monitor and respond to (unilateral) trade measures worldwide.

GTA performance shows effectiveness in covering broad range of topics, which proves useful for all types of actors monitoring a global trading context where behind-the-border measures take all forms and shapes

In terms of **relevance of the scope of measures** covered, the GTA Trade Policy Dashboard in its current format allows to research trade policy measures by third countries in **broad range of categories**.

In the online survey, users pointed to broad range of topics they are interested in, particularly in their role to monitor new policy measures by trading partners which facilitate or restrict trade for businesses. Below table shows responses to the question: ‘Using GTA dashboard and news updates as a source for improving trade policy monitoring and making in your country, in which of the following new policy measures are you particularly interested in?’. See below table showing results from the survey answers received.

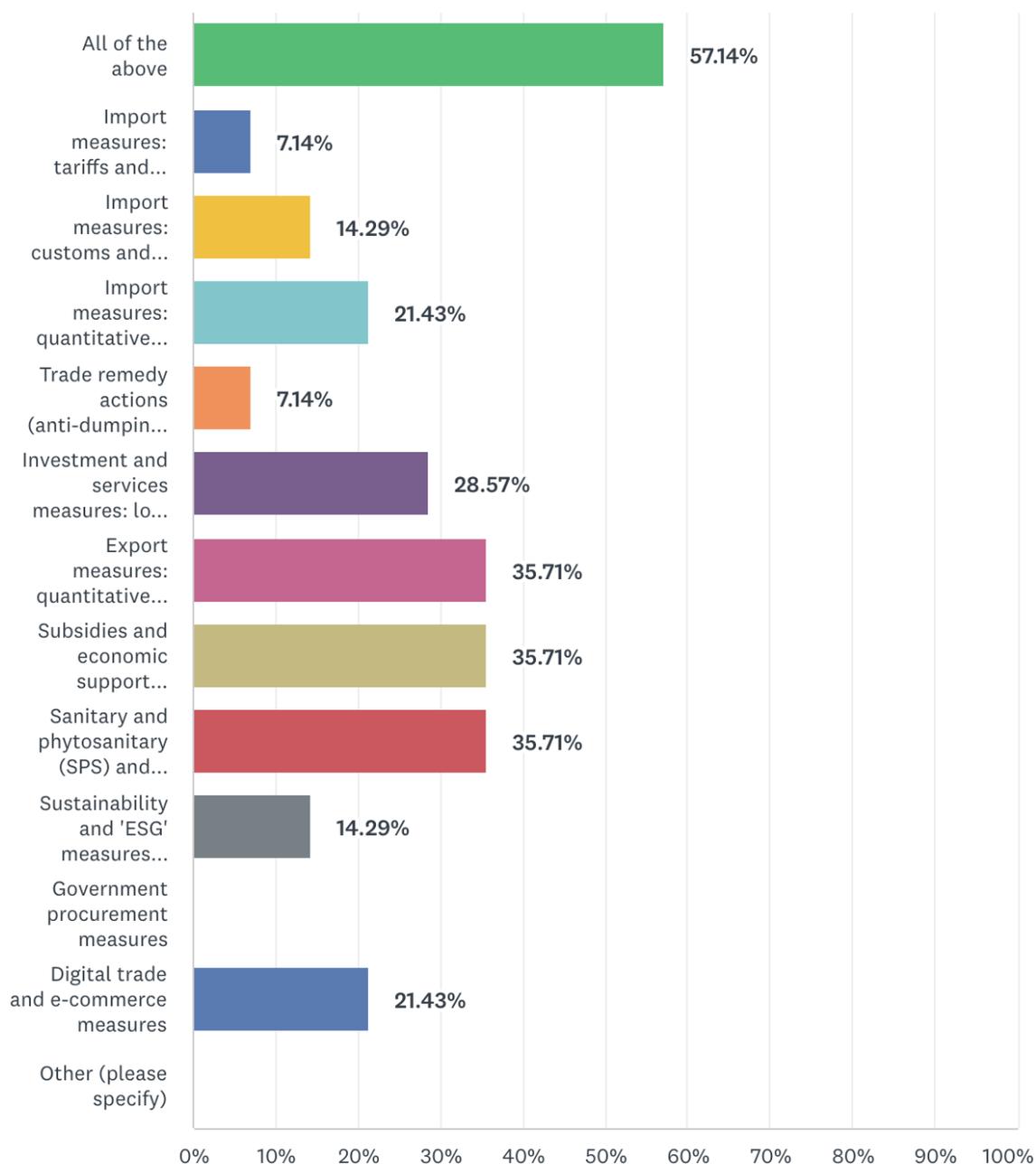


Figure 4: Online survey results to question 'Using GTA dashboard and news updates as a source for improving trade policy monitoring and making in your country, in which of the following new policy measures are you particularly interested in?'

Data available in GTA not always utilized in most effective way to support day-to-day trade policy formulation and implementation

- Looking at the effectiveness of the GTA Trade Policy Dashboard for trade policy actors in Government and private sector, this evaluation pointed to the high relevance, but -to date- underutilization by direct and indirect target beneficiaries.
- As appeared from the interviews, Governments are increasingly impacted by third country (unilateral) trade measures, and as response challenged to formulate their own strategy. The same counts for business and other stakeholders; constructive trade policy engagement demands relevant information and data to advise and/or guide Governments on improved trade policy design and implementation.
- Looking at the effectiveness of the C4TP in stimulating its existing and new users to make best use of the data, the evaluation has shown that there are still steps to take to optimize the actual use of

the database and resources. As the interviews and survey show, the relevance is not disputed, but the actual use may need to be limited due to a variety of reasons. The following underlying reasons may be the cause of under-utilized trade data provided by GTA:

- Dashboard remains highly technical and difficult to navigate.
- Highly technical language, often referring to WTO terms (example 'TRIMs' versus 'investment related measures').
- Limited explanation available beyond PDF guidelines.
- Beneficiaries are too time-constrained and look for 'ready-made' reports.
- Beneficiaries lack of know-how and skills to use the trade data in their roles.

Other C4TP findings on effectiveness

The long-term effects of the C4TP interventions on the implementation of trade agreements and trade policy and domestic law remain unclear

Under Component 2 (Implementation of Trade Policies and Trade Agreements) the programme support to private sector utilization of FTAs, was designed through capacity building training activities, that brought about results on the output level. All these topics were addressing companies' immediate needs to allow them unimpeded export. E.g. training on new EU directive on CBAM was translated in knowledge on reporting on this new requirement, thus ensuring access to EU markets of their export products. However, topics are demand-driven and thus cannot produce consistent effects. A wide range of other topics that would help private sector be competitive in international markets, particularly using the opportunities within FTAs, should be strategically planned.

Without existing public-private dialogue mechanisms in-country, moderate effectiveness in improving coordination of trade policy stakeholders

Third pillar of the programme 'coordination of trade policy stakeholders' shows moderate effectiveness, as the results of this dialogue do not fully translate into trade facilitation reforms. In the absence of strategically chosen, evidence-based topics broached by the private sector, civil society and academia the NTFB-led national meetings have limited effects on the trade implementation efforts. The Output of this Component "Strengthening public-private dialogue on trade policy and negotiations" is measured only by the No. of organized and implemented capacity building activities for the private sector and the No of participants in these activities, which does not demonstrate the full effects of the dialogue, e.g. I number of actions and initiatives taken as a result of the discussion.

4.4 Efficiency and management

This section reviews the **Efficiency and management** aspects of the programme, meaning the extent to which the intervention delivers, or is likely to deliver, results in an economic and timely way.

Overall assessment on 'Efficiency and management'

Rating: Partially satisfactory

The programme efficiency was overall performant, especially for full-fledged programme interventions ran by GFA. The efficiency and management were less performant for fill-the-gap and small projects, also due to the resources spent unsuccessfully on acquisition phases. For the GTA component, the efficiency and management has improved due to partnering with an implementing partner (IISD).

Overall design of the capacity building component of the C4TP is cost-efficient for full-fledged programmes, less for small and fill-the-gap interventions.

With an (estimated) total budget of CHF 10 million for 12 years of operations (not including the local contributions which would mobilize 10% of relevant country project budgets), the C4TP intended to spend the budget in three phases of 4 years.

For the capacity building component (implemented by GFA), the allocation of the budget for the first phase of February 2021 until January 2025 has been set at CHF 2'999'700. After 2 years (in December 2023), the budget spent for the total C4TP interventions implemented by GFA reached 34 %, or CHF 1'022'029. **Overall**, a total of CHF 1 million has been allocated to GFA in the first phase of the programme, with additional support for the second and third phase to be considered based on the end of each phase evaluation.

At country-level, it is clear that fill-the-gap projects once requested, are fit for purpose to provide short-term solutions to specific requests. These are generally efficient in their performance and management.

- The **Bolivia** fill-the-gap project, with a dedicated budget of 40'533 to be spent over 26 months between June 2022 to August 2024 has to date spent 75 % of the budget.

With the set-up in three intervention types, the maximum budget for full-fledged projects was set at CHF 700'000, for small projects CHF 300'000 and for fill-the-gap interventions CHF 50'000.

In general, the implementation modalities show cost efficiency when it comes to actual implementation.

Country-level implementation efficient, but no efficiencies sought between country-projects

For the specific country-level interventions that were ran through the implementing agency GFA, the performance has generally been cost-efficient once the implementation phase could start.

Based on the case-study evaluation of the Serbia full-fledged project, this has generally shown a cost-efficient performance.

- Looking at the budget and expenditure of the Serbian project, the level of impact and benefit to beneficiaries justify the inherent expenses. The programme spent around 62% of the budget at the time of evaluation. Several factors contribute to this level of spending: absence of a field office, understaffed local implementing team, cost share of training for companies by SCCI, non-execution of several activities.
- Activities were planned timely, and execution was in line with schedule. Results and activities were delivered within the intended timeframe. There have been delays in implementing certain activities, some of them outside the programme's control, and when that was not the case, the team rescheduled it following the agreement reached at the Steering committee meetings.
- In terms of management of the programme, the local programme management support has been evaluated as highly satisfactory in terms of communication, motivation, coordination, and technical support. For specific requests received, the follow-up of the GFA HQ team and Global programme Manager is equally functional and timely.

Overall, this evaluation points to the fact that all resources for C4TP human capacities component have been **spent for in-country projects, without a 'central' component** (apart from GTA which is trade data specific). A central component that would provide overarching research and insights, as well as 'best practices' in successful trade policy making has been lacking, which could have also ensured C4TP investments (research, white papers) to be leveraged for several countries.

Limited efficiencies sought by implementing agencies to rise above country-level outputs and outcomes

For both components led by GFA and GTA, the programme interventions were targeting individual countries' target beneficiaries and stakeholders. The programme did not foresee in a component where a more holistic approach would be stimulated (and implemented) to leverage on country-level insights and/or general lessons learnt for the broader group of C4TP beneficiary countries (or even beyond).

- On the other hand, the Serbia programme has not performed much beyond allowing for short-term ad-hoc interventions requested.
 - Recommendation: It is recommended that SECO (with support of the EFTA negotiating team and local SCO's) takes up a more pro-active role in ensuring a more strategic and coherent framing to stimulate the implementing agency in engaging with target beneficiaries towards a programming that is impact-oriented and rises beyond the short-term requests received.
- Flexibility and adaptability of the programme to the needs and priorities of beneficiaries and changing trade conditions/new requirements has been the prevailing feature of the programme approach. Though this approach contributes to achieving immediate results, for all outputs and outcomes to be achieved, a more impact-orientated work plan - aligned with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and country trade objectives - could have been devised and pursued.
- The Serbia case-study further has shown that the presence of a **local (GFA) programme manager** has contributed to a successful (effective and efficient) design- and implementation phase. Benefits include the possibility to leverage on local network, building of trust with beneficiary and partner organisations, and short collaboration lines with service providers, implementing agencies, donor organization (including the SCO office) and hence efficient planning and implementation that contributes to the over-all efficiency. At the same time, the technical (trade policy) competencies of the local GFA Project Manager have only modestly been leveraged upon, due to the fact that this person was often occupied with organisation and logistic matters, and was not located at the premises of the Target Beneficiary (Ministry of Internal and Foreign Affairs). Had the Local Programme Manager been supported by an administrative resource person, she could have been more fully utilized as a resource person directly benefiting the (daily) operations of the Ministry.

In general, the reliance of technical experts for short-term missions and even virtual or home-based advisory support has proved highly cost effective, and providing overall good satisfaction.

- In the case of the **Bolivia** small programme, the interventions have so far entailed 20 workdays by International STE's, 20 workdays by local experts, and 20 workdays by the GFA global and other PMs between January and end May 2024.

When it comes to overall programme management, cost-efficient structures were provided for both the GFA Component and the GTA Component.

Inefficient acquisition phases lays bare structural challenges in over-all set-up of C4TP

With 13 target beneficiary countries in-scope of potential C4TP support¹¹, this evaluation has shown that structural challenges hamper efficient project acquisition at country-level. Unfortunately, based on the review of the country-specific assistance provided, the project acquisition and design phases of the C4TP show high rates of 'failure' and thereby relatively high inefficiency rates.

¹¹ Serbia, Peru, Colombia, Bolivia, Egypt, Ghana, Indonesia, Mozambique, Morocco, Nepal, North Macedonia, South Africa and Tunisia.

As mentioned by GFA in the Progress report (2023), GFA saw two key reasons for the lack of interest; first the lack of a local resource person, and second the limited number of days / budgets for small and fill the gap projects (up to 50 workdays).

- This evaluation pointed to other reasons possibly underlying the lack of interest; including lack of overarching narrative, too much 'demand-driven' and lack of concrete offerings of support, as well as the lack of trust in a commercial party (GFA) as opposed to a non-profit or international organization.

Based on discussions, the pool of C4TP countries has been opened up slightly beyond the original indicative list, based on the list of SECO / SDC priority countries, subject to SECO's approval on a case-by-case basis (e.g. Mongolia and Azerbaijan). This evaluation points to the fact that relatively much resources are spent on acquisition phases for each country individually, but without central 'promotion activities'.

The evaluation has shown that the demand-driven approach is not a guarantee for trade-related technical assistance requests to come in. On the one hand, solutions need to be framed in a context-sensitive manner; customized to the local context and institutional capacity to ensure that the capacity building and/or know-how provided also is perceived as relevant and appropriate.

In its set-up, the C4TP *assumed* interest from Government target-beneficiaries for short-term trade related capacity building. What was underestimated was the fact that **Governments are typically sensitive to partnering with organisations that have a trusted reputation** in a given expertise area, and which can remain valuable beyond the end of a 'project'.

In the case of the C4TP, the choice for relying on a corporate consultancy practice (GFA) from the acquisition to the implementation phase has meant that the required trust and buy-in became at risk. As mentioned by GFA: 'Our relatively unknown consultancy organization does not have the same credibility as SECO or SCO, or EFTA Secretariat or even a WTO or UN organization, and hence it took longer to build the required trust needed to submit a request for C4TP assistance'.

4.5 Impact

This section reviews the impact aspects of the programme, meaning the extent to which the intervention has generated or is expected to generate significant positive or negative, intended or unintended, higher-level effects.

Overall assessment on 'Impact'

Rating: partial satisfactory

The programme has achieved positive outcomes, especially in enhancing professional skills at individual levels, but the long-term impact (especially at institutional level) remains difficult to demonstrate.

Two underlying reasons can be identified for this partial performance on outcomes and impact:

- o First, the mid-term nature of this evaluation, and the fact that the start-up of the programme has been slow.
- o Second, the institutional and individual capacities were improved, but the programme activities have only in *few cases* (mainly full-fledged programmes) been designed with the objective of 'inclusive and sustainable trade policy' objective in mind.

The programme managed to generate positive outcomes for individual trade negotiation and implementation capacities, and support trade policy negotiations progress, reform implementation progress and improved stakeholder dialogue (in some instances). At the same time, due to the very short-term nature

of the interventions, and the missing links in the log-frame especially between outcome and impact, the C4TP contribution to the over-all objectives is not verifiable. In some countries, such as Serbia, the increase in trade volumes is noticeable, but whether the improved (outcomes) on trade negotiation and implementation capacities or stakeholder dialogue contribute to that objective, remains difficult to say.

The reasons for mixed progress in overall impact are to a certain extent identifiable.

GFA Component on human capacities: Clear linkages between outcomes and impact key to impact-oriented programming

Looking at the C4TP design, including the log-frame, the causality between the outcomes and the impact do not seem well defined. Clearly, the log-frame of the programme included an ambitious impact expectation towards 'more favourable framework conditions for *inclusive and sustainable trade*, contributing to economic growth and increased resilience'.

- The **impact indicators** reflect a focus on 'increased trade', but do not refer to the direct objectives of 'inclusive and sustainable trade' of the programme.
- The **indicators at outcome level** (i.e. improved trade negotiations capacity, trade agreements implemented and stakeholder cooperation) refer to enhanced capacities for technical trade policy making, but not to the extent to which the trade policy takes into account the benefits or challenges towards inclusive or sustainable trade at national level.

At outcome level, positive impact was achieved especially in the full-fledged programme interventions. The interviews and desk research found that as result of the C4TP interventions, improved trade negotiations capacities were realized in full-fledged programme evaluated (Serbia). However, there has not been much outcome in the area of 'increased consideration on sustainability and inclusiveness issues', which received limited attention.

- The **Serbia** case-study showed that the Capacity building of private sector for better utilization of FTAs opportunities (an activity conducted under Outcome 2 "Improved implementation of trade agreements and unilateral trade policies, taking into account sustainability and inclusiveness concerns") have brought certain effects. However, longer term impact is difficult to anticipate because of two reasons: firstly, the topics were demand-driven and ad-hoc selected, and without the strategic plan aggregate short-term successes will not translate into long term impact. Second, there is no mechanism for evaluating benefits of FTAs on private sector and economy at large, thus providing no evidence on the viability and impact of the programme interventions.

Limited impact-oriented programming, also due to lack of underlying strategic narrative of the C4TP rationale.

This evaluation pointed to the fact that Governments worldwide are in search of a new strategic trade policy narrative as a basis for impact-oriented and evidence-based trade policy formulation and implementation. However, the C4TP narrative relies on the assumption that improved trade policy capacities for negotiations, reforms and implementation and coordination will lead to the achieved impact (i.e. improved framework conditions for inclusive and sustainable trade needed for growth and development'). Without an overarching narrative, the C4TP could itself not sufficiently respond to the strategic challenges, even if in the basis it was drawn up as a solution-oriented vehicle to support Governments in their task to improve the domestic conditions for inclusive and sustainable trade' objectives.

The programme focused its resources on responding to specific requests, without investing in intellectual guidance and/or reference literature that clarifies the result chain. Questions that remain unanswered include inter alia;

- ‘What is understood by favourable framework conditions’? What is inclusive and sustainable trade, for economic growth and resilience, and how can (a mix of) trade policy (instruments) contribute to those goals?

At Government-level, alignment with national objectives and institutional responsibilities and priorities (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Trade) is key for partnering in any given policy theme. A comprehensive narrative of the C4TP is currently missing which explains the value of trade policy in the context of changing global context and especially customized to the varying expectations at domestic levels.

Stakeholder cooperation essential component for inclusive and sustainable trade; would merit overall integration.

The C4TP has identified stakeholder cooperation as a separate and third Component of the C4TP, complementing the two others on trade negotiations and trade policy implementation. In practice, the implementation of this component in C4TP country-programmes has often resulted in programming as a complementary effort, rather than an intrinsic part of the trade policy making processes. The C4TP log-frame defines as indicator for stakeholder cooperation: the number of institutional coordination and consultation measures put in place or improved.

The stakeholder cooperation for trade policy remains a relatively new practice in most countries. However, inclusive trade is all about continuously engaging stakeholders (be it business, civil society, academia, media or parliamentarians) in all trade policy making processes; from preparatory impact research, to negotiating, implementation and reform processes, or the monitoring and evaluating processes.

- In the European Union, civil society and stakeholders are encouraged to feed into this process on a regular basis. The Commission holds several public consultations per year on trade-related issues whereby stakeholders can express their views and provide data.
- EFTA maintains a dedicated Parliamentary Committee (PC) and EFTA Consultative Committee (CC) which meets with the Swiss State Secretary for Economic Affairs, representing the EFTA Ministerial Chair, to take stock of ongoing and prospective EFTA trade processes and horizontal initiatives¹². As part of FTAs stakeholder dialogues are organised on frequent basis.
- In the EU and United Kingdom, Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) with representatives from both FTA parties and including different stakeholders, are set-up to monitor and discuss progress of the FTA¹³.
- The Serbia case study (see expanded description in **Annex IX**), showed that the C4TP interventions under Outcome 3 “Improved cooperation among trade policy stakeholders at the national and regional level” was focused especially on the Trade Facilitation body. The impact of the interactions is not verifiable. The consultations and/or recommendations of such dialogue are not systematically and institutionally embodied in the trade policy making or trade implementation, which limits the impact of this intervention.

¹² <https://www.efta.int/media-resources/news/parliamentarians-and-social-partners-give-momentum-efta-trade-agenda>

¹³ See for example: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/trade-and-sustainable-development-domestic-advisory-group-documents>

GTA Component on trade data: through Government assessment of trade data provided, GTA may contribute to introduction of adjustment measures and/or new trade policy instruments that could impact on trade, growth and development.

For the trade data component (GTA Component), this evaluation found that the GTA Component has the potential to generate significant effects that may impact beyond the period of intervention.

As the Government officials and stakeholders use GTA Trade data for assessing and benchmarking the effects of (unilateral) trade policy measures worldwide, the tool equally serves to develop arguments for new adjustment measures or trade measures with potential long-term impact on trade and jobs.

- Most concretely, Governments may decide to implement adjustment measures or adopt similar policies based on the information gathered through the GTA Dashboard on trade policy measures used by foreign countries. Governments may hence use the GTA Dashboard information to benchmark and assess the use of trade policy instruments as a basis for developing similar tools which could impact upon imports, exports, FDI and ultimately the enable or restrict trade which impacts upon jobs and government revenues.
- For example:
 - In August 2023, the European Commission using data from the GTA database to research exporting markets and export trends of Tungsten exported by China as a basis for fact-finding before deciding to impose a definitive anti-dumping duty on imports of tungsten carbide¹⁴. The anti-dumping duty will likely have improved the competitiveness of local tungsten carbide producers in the EU, by allowing domestic businesses to source the local tungsten carbide at a cheaper rate due to tariffs imposed on imported goods.

4.6 Sustainability

This section reviews the Sustainability of the programme, meaning the extent to which the net benefits of the intervention continue, or are likely to continue.

GFA Component on human capacities: sustainable interventions for full-fledged programme interventions, less for short-term interventions

For the Human Capacity component of the C4TP, this evaluation found the GFA and GTA interventions in principle allow for lasting effects. The evaluation also pointed to the vulnerability of the long-term net benefits of the intervention, which appears very dependent on the institutional capacity of the beneficiary organizations. Overall, the C4TP could do more to support beneficiaries in creating the conditions to leverage on the knowledge and skills for net benefits to last, or more likely to last.

Increased politicised context for trade policy making and tendency towards unpredictable (unilateral) trade measures risks to impact negatively on sustainability of the programme interventions

In the current geopolitical context, trade policy is becoming increasingly politicized, and a general 'soul-searching' is underway in many (developing) countries with regards to the national trade policy directions. On the one hand, continued (and sometimes fast) market access opening is sought by most C4TP beneficiary Governments through an expanding network of bilateral and regional trade agreements that equally cover a broader range of themes. Second, a tendency is visible whereby Governments are pursuing more ad-hoc

¹⁴ European Commission Implementing Regulation (EU) 2023/1618 imposing an anti-dumping duty on imports of tungsten carbide from China. See <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32023R1618>

unilateral trade measures, including sometimes protectionist measures that lack a thought-through rationale. Whereas the C4TP allows to take a highly responsive approach to programming, the lack of a long-term trade policy in partner countries and growing unpredictability complicates a sustainable programming with lasting effects.

- For example, in **Serbia**, the Ministry officials mentioned there is no trade-strategy as such. Priorities 'are 'known' and defined by the President on a rolling basis and according to the negotiating agenda that is made up of priority countries (including for example Egypt, China and UAE as well as EU and CEFTA).

Institutional capacities needed to continue benefiting from C4TP differs strongly per beneficiary country

The NPMs in Bangladesh, Bolivia, Colombia, Guatemala and Peru stressed that their respective administrations are highly motivated to continue the initiated reforms and that political support has increased as a result of the success of the projects. The customs services state that they now have better tools and capacities to progress. Strategic plans, KPI, leadership and management skills and HR plans are the basis for continued modernisation and facilitation.

It is very likely that the services in these countries will continue efforts in the same areas or in new areas. Nevertheless, individual customs services may not have the resources needed to continue by themselves. In Bolivia for example, HR training and management will remain a challenging factor due to frequent staff and management changes. In Guatemala, the RKC accession has raised awareness on gaps that now need to be filled. In Uzbekistan, the SCC is highly motivated to continue their reform as part of the transformation of the country and the WTO accession and are under pressure to deliver and show concrete results. They do however face gaps and needs in fundamental areas of customs control that limits their ability to advance on facilitation.

GTA Component on trade data: lasting benefits dependent on extent to which users are able to integrate information into their work

For the trade data component (GTA Component), this evaluation found that the C4TP support provided by GTA is contributing to benefits that are likely to last – when the institutional capacity is sufficiently developed to leverage those data for improved trade policy making. The evaluation also pointed to the conditions required for those sustainable effects of the GTA component; Governments and stakeholders need to have the necessary skills, as well as policies and processes (!) that allow for evidence-based trade policy making (and evaluation). These conditions are not always met in the beneficiary countries, which limits the lasting effects.

Here, the C4TP also has steps to take, to ensure beneficiaries are able to integrate the trade data into (strategic) trade policy formulation and implementation.

Without the trade policy skills, strategies and processes to integrate high-quality trade data offered by GTA, the tool is of limited value and long-lasting impact is held up.

- **In principle, this evaluation found that the set-up of the GTA 'Global Trade Dashboard' allows for lasting effects, due to its important inputs into decision-making.** The review of the GTA component has confirmed that evidence-based trade policy making is highly relevant in a world where trade measures and policies have become diverse in shape, more fragmented in application and often less predictable due to their unilateral nature. The high-quality data offered by GTA component of the C4TP allows to evaluate and review trade policy measures at home and abroad, as a basis for adjusted trade policy making.

- Based on the review undertaken, the limited number of users utilizing the GTA impacts negatively on the sustainability, and points to several challenges faced. Several underlying reasons may contribute to this matter; First, the complexity in terms of technical nature of the content, which demands relatively high level of expertise needed which reduces the number of trade policy officials / businesses that are 'ready' to use the GTA. Second, the fact that the Global Trade Dashboard Third currently does not cover topics 'in vogue' including digital and sustainable trade measures (covered under the 'digital trade alert' produced by GTA). Third, difficulties encountered in navigating the dashboard equally complicates the expansion to broader range of users.

5 CONCLUSIONS AND EMERGING LESSONS ON SUPPORT TO TRADE POLICY CAPACITY BUILDING

Overall, this mid-term evaluation found that the performance of the C4TP is satisfactory, both for the human capacities and trade data component.

In the current period of highly dynamic and uncertain global trade environment, the SECO-funded C4TP is unique in its kind and more relevant than ever. This evaluation has shown that the C4TP has realized positive outcomes for Governments and stakeholders in the formulation and implementation of trade policy. The evaluation pointed to some in-built weaknesses in design and operational modes of delivery, that can be addressed for a next phase of the programme.

Looking forward, allow the C4TP to transition into a next phase – with some adjustments – can support beneficiary Governments to re-position the overall set-up and objectives of trade policy in the dynamic trading context. With additional emphasis on relevant themes, possibly more aligned with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy, and with adjusted implementation modalities.

Furthermore, the following lessons-learnt can be drawn from this mid-term evaluation.

5.1.1 Dynamic trading context, changing trade policy objectives; the need for a narrative that suits today's context

This evaluation showed the importance of customizing a technical assistance narrative around trade policy to the changing global context, as well as (shifting) national objectives on trade policy. In the situations evaluated, the narrative for the C4TP has not sufficiently been translated to convince Government institutions of the value added to meeting institutional responsibilities and priorities (i.e. Ministry of Foreign Trade). Without improved explanations on the concepts underlying the C4TP, such as 'favorable framework conditions', 'inclusive and sustainable trade' and 'growth and resilience', the value of improved trade policy capacity building provided will remain difficult to 'buy in'.

- An important insight from this evaluation is that the question needs answering how C4TP can contribute to an effective use of trade policy strategies and instruments in the domestic context and instruments in the current global trade context, characterized by growing unilateralism, a continued support for trade integration and multilateralism (by most countries), more focused (industrial) policies aiming for resilience and competitiveness at sector-level and varying expectations to ensure 'value added' of trade at domestic levels?

As proved from the interviews held with beneficiaries; responding to the needs and priorities in a highly dynamic global trade environment (and sometimes politicized trade policy strategy), demands a flexible approach of the programme.

The C4TP beneficiary Governments remain dedicated to trade integration at large. However, anno 2024, beneficiary country Governments and businesses are operating in a highly volatile and dynamic global trading context. With a general trend towards increased unilateral trade measures taken, the pressure on Government officials is high to interpret and/or respond to 'sudden' trade policy measures from third countries that impact upon business' capacity to trade that impact on market access.

In addition, this evaluation showed that Governments and business focus on new themes arising linked to transition-thinking, and the wish to translate trade effects into meaningful impacts for sustainable and societal benefit and growth. The current C4TP lacks a **thematic focus** that aligns with beneficiary country interests and challenges, as well as with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy, both in the human capacity building

and supported by enhanced scope in the (GTA) trade data component. The **digital and sustainable trade** trends appear however relevant themes that demand enhanced human and data capacities for better trade policy making. Hence, for a future C4TP, (sub-) themes could be added for specific countries, reflecting challenges in meeting EFTA FTA implementation requirements, and the priorities of the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy.

- The **Global Trade Alert (GTA)** has appeared instrumental in identifying and making sense of unilateral trade measures that impact upon countries' abilities to trade. For Government civil servants, this trend demands sometimes swift analysis and drafting of recommendations to advise their political leadership on possible responses and/or advise to domestic actors on how to cope with these barriers.
- Based on the interviews held, the C4TP has on numerous occasions received demands to support beneficiary country Governments and stakeholders to improve understanding of new types of trade policy instruments, such as in the area of **sustainability related trade measures or digital trade measures**. In Serbia, workshops on carbon border measures were organized, but no interest was expressed in the fill-the-gap projects.

Overall, however, as this is a new trend and topic, matters such as sustainability and digital trade policy could be more effectively 'sold' if wrapped into a 'module' or concrete offering.

Presenting the C4TP against the backdrop of the 2024 global trade reality, in which national trade policy objectives need to suit the unique country trade portfolio, development context and trade relations (including EFTA FTAs in place or under negotiation), would allow for a more customized debate and convincing acquisition phase.

5.1.2 Redefine success factors for evidence-based and impact-oriented trade policy making; from trade data, to strategy, human capacities and stakeholder coordination.

In an era where business and Governments are re-assessing the value of trade policy and work processes are further digitized, the success factors for trade policy making are equally shifting even if objectives do not change much, i.e. to serve multiple purposes in a dynamic global trading environment. The C4TP focuses on trade policy making as a set of 3 actions; negotiating, implementing and coordination with stakeholders. Furthermore, the cross-cutting themes of gender, sustainability and inclusiveness are identified.

This evaluation also pointed to the fact that the C4TP rationale of **combining human capacity of trade policy with access to relevant high quality trade data is not automatically a successful combination**. Whereas the collaboration between GFA and GTA for the implementation of C4TP has been formalized in a letter of intent, and progress on the collaboration is reported upon by both agencies, this collaboration only partly materialized.

In the current set-up of the C4TP, the logic of intervention recognizes that **human and institutional capacities** (provided by GFA), as well as **trade data accessibility** (provided by GTA) are key to conduct overall trade policy making tasks needed to 'enhance framework conditions needed for sustainable and inclusive trade, needed for growth and resilience'. However, in terms of interventions, the C4TP focuses on only 3 out of 7 trade policy tasks / steps and assumes these contribute to the impacts identified.

Furthermore, what actually constitutes 'good stakeholder cooperation' in the context of trade policy making is not defined in the programme. The KPI mentioned is 'the number of institutional coordination and consultation measures put in place or improved'. The implementation of this Component is entirely left to the GFA Implementing Agency.

Whereas stakeholder cooperation for trade policy remains a relatively new practice in most countries, it is an essential and continuous 'input' needed for discussing trade issues and irritants, and also to guarantee an inclusive approach to trade policy making. Hence, rather than organising ad-hoc activities to engage stakeholders (be it business, civil society, academia, media or parliamentarians) integration of stakeholder dialogue is nowadays part of all trade policy making processes (such as in EU and US); from preparatory impact research, to negotiating, implementation and reform processes, or the monitoring and evaluating processes.

In a next phase of the C4TP, it is recommended to consider an update of the Intervention Logic with a more elaborate and comprehensive explanation of how improve human capacities and trade data can improve the (trade policy) framework conditions needed. A strong narrative on the role and functioning of trade policy, also in relation to growth- and impact-driven trade policy is equally to be invested in. The implementing agencies are to be challenged and stimulated to communicate in full awareness of the trade policy roles and functions in today's complex global trading environment.

5.1.3 Challenges in result measurement

This evaluation pointed to the challenges in measuring performance of the C4TP. Two aspects contribute to that insight. First, the fact that the narrative and underlying Theory of Change do not provide sufficient links between impact and outcomes. The impact indicators of the C4TP have been defined in a rigorous manner, with the general impact indicator referring to 'increased trade volumes' as well as Increased trade in EGS ("Sustainability"), Increased export diversification ("Resiliency"), Decreased number of harmful state interventions.

The overall objective of the programme encompasses several concepts that would merit improved explanation, including on the underlying assumptions which may have changed since the programme was developed (in a Covid context).

Second, given the fact that global trading context (as external factor) and societal expectations on trade policy in the national context have changed tremendously, the C4TP has to prove its value-added in a more political context. Compared to 2021, when the C4TP narrative was developed against the COVID backdrop, target beneficiaries of the C4TP (Governments and other stakeholders) are operating in a national context where trade policy as a set of instruments;

- Trade policy anno 2024 operates in a context of high geopolitical uncertainty, and has become a more politically sensitive set of instruments that serves broader and overarching domestic policy objectives. These differ strongly per country; Governments around the globe are in the process of re-assessing and re-positioning their trade policies, thereby taking into account economic growth and competitiveness, industrial development and food security, resilience, security and social development considerations.
- Governments over-all maintain a commitment to deeper economic integration, at the regional and bilateral levels, with an increasing number of preferential trade agreements (PTAs) being negotiated and implemented. The number of PTAs in force has approximately doubled from less than 150 in 2005 to more than 350 in 2022, with more than half of all trade agreements in force go beyond tariff concessions, to cover services and behind-the-border measures¹⁵.

¹⁵ UNCTAD 'Key statistics and trends 2023', see: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditctab2024d2_en.pdf

5.1.4 Demand-driven trade capacity-building requires buy-in from beneficiaries and context-sensitive approach

The evaluation has shown that successful C4TP interventions, delivering satisfactory results, include some of the following ingredients:

- good level of trust between targeted beneficiary organization, the implementing agency representatives and (preferably) SECO SCO, to ensure the political commitment required to advance the trade policy agenda with support from Swiss Government;
- local programme manager with trade policy expertise and able to provide both technical and organisational support
- involvement of the Swiss Government (SCO) as partner in the programme (or alternatively EFTA or other established organization with a trade policy expertise)
- A next phase of C4TP could involve SECO posing 'conditions' to full-fledged country support under C4TP and also takes up a more strategic role in implementation, to include for example: expression of Government commitment to develop and implement a strategic trade policy, and dedicated funds to ensure (human) resources to implement that policy. A revised format of the MOU could reflect a more strategic approach and partnership whereby SECO (and SCO) serve as partners for financial means and strategic guidance through trade-related expertise.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations were made by the Evaluation Team to SECO with regards to a possible continuation of the C4TP into a next phase; to successfully continue its support to Governments (and other stakeholders in trade policy making in developing and least developed countries, 'to engage in inclusive and sustainable trade, thereby contributing to economic growth and greater resilience'.

6.1.1 In a dynamic global trading context, redefine the narrative and objectives of the C4TP

This evaluation has shown the value added of the C4TP for beneficiary countries' Governments and stakeholders, as well as Switzerland as a highly integrated economy in the global trading environment.

Leveraging on the insights of this evaluation, a next phase of the C4TP is recommended albeit with some thematic and programme design adjustments to **refine the intellectual framing** and fit the changing understanding on what constitutes successful trade policy in today's global trade environment.

A next phase of the C4TP would merit a redeveloped narrative that aligns with the changing global trade reality, as well as clarifying the definitions of key C4TP objectives such as 'inclusive and sustainable trade'. With a clear narrative, combined with a set of thematic focus 'pillars', the C4TP services offering could be of more direct value which may facilitate Government interest to be expressed (especially for small/fill-the-gap interventions).

For a next phase of the C4TP this could mean:

- Consider clarifying the **C4TP intellectual framing including objectives, links with outcomes, and the over-arching narrative** that provides an interpretation of the current dynamic global trading environment with its symptoms and consequences for (developing) countries.
- For a next phase, it is recommended that SECO invests in the building of a **theory of change** that spells out the various elements:
 - Analysis of context: How can C4TP be developed in a way that it responds to the changed global trade context? Does the objective and narrative still make sense given the changed context, and with a view to the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy?
 - Clarify the hypotheses of change: Explain the causal pathways, especially from the outcome to impact level to repair the missing links. Spell out the assumptions that underlie the theory of change, including about causal links, implementation, context and external factors on trade conditions at global and local levels.

6.1.2 At programme level, add thematic focus that aligns with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy (and EFTA) priorities, as well as beneficiary country interests and implementation challenges

This evaluation has proved that Governments and business in today's trading environment are challenged to **redefine the value added and use of trade policy, in general**, as well as in the context of 'transitions' in the area of **digital and sustainable trade**. These thematic areas of work demand enhanced human and data capacities for better trade policy making, but are currently not covered in the programme.

This evaluation has shown that continued relevance of the C4TP demands a recognition of the changing global trading environment and the implications for trade policy making by Governments and business implementation thereof. For developing country governments and their stakeholders, their buy-in is increasingly conditional on achieving the right alignment with domestic trade policy objectives. As such, it

would be advisable to integrate more attention to strategizing trade policy for long-term impact. This could support governments and other stakeholders in ensuring that trade policy is approached with a view to meeting the country's broader economic and sustainable development objectives.

Whereas the C4TP has been left to focus capacity building on themes that are requested on ad-hoc basis by beneficiary countries, to be reviewed and approved by the service provider, the next phase could take a more pro-active role in programming themes through targeted modules.

For a next phase of the C4TP this could mean:

- Consider re-framing the C4TP is **to more closely align with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy¹⁶ and EFTA negotiating agenda, implementation bottlenecks and priority themes**. This may support the solution-finding for the challenges found in relation to C4TP interest and acquisition which appeared from this evaluation¹⁷.
 - o Relevant thematic areas could include those captured in EFTA FTA SDT Chapters, such as; inclusive economic development, Sustainable supply chains, Sustainable management of natural resources, etc.
- In **practical terms**, this could mean that a next phase of the C4TP would:
 - o 1) Allow for the **Human Capacity Building component** to develop thematic 'modules' with combined strategic advice and training support on **digital and/or sustainable trade**. This would facilitate new requests, and allow more targeted thematic support in line with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and EFTA FTA priorities. For example;
 - Strategic and data-driven trade policy making
 - Trade and digital policy
 - Trade policy and responsible business conduct (including human and social and governance)
 - Trade and environment
 - o 2) Allow for **GTA Dashboard funding** to cover digital and/or sustainable trade thematic that are currently not covered due to limited scope to WTO matters. This would support EFTA partner countries to implement the commitments in these areas (WTO-plus), and also align their trade policy capacity with Swiss and European market access requirements. As the current GTA Component 'Global Trade Dashboard' is limited to the WTO covered matters, this risks reducing its relevance and impact. This evaluation pointed to the value of high-quality trade data on all topics relevant in today's trade negotiations, from tariffs, to non-tariff measures including on digital and sustainable trade.

¹⁶ Alignment of C4TP Outcomes with the 3 priorities of the Swiss Foreign Economic policy (2021) three core components could be explored: 1) **Rules-based international system**, 2) **Access to international markets**, 3) **Sustainability in economic relations**. The 'stakeholder collaboration' (now outcome 3 of C4TP could be integrated across the board, similar to 'strategic and evidence-based trade policy making'.

¹⁷ For example, the C4TP objectives and indicators on 'inclusive' and 'sustainable' trade could very well leverage on the focus themes identified in EFTA FTAs with partner countries and more particular the Trade & Sustainable Development chapters¹⁷ and/or technical cooperation chapters thereof. As monitoring of the TSD chapters is undertaken by EFTA.

- 3) Ensure trade-data from GTA are leveraged upon as part of '**strategic and data-driven trade policy**' module (combined research, training, strategic advisory approach) in the Human Capacity Building component.

6.1.3 In terms of design, streamline the set-up of the C4TP to enhance efficiency and effectiveness

The findings on efficiency and effectiveness in this evaluation have found that stand-alone country-specific interventions would merit a complementary component to exchange, share best-practices and seek optimisation of the resources.

This study pointed to underlying difficulties including; programme interventions re-invented for each country demand (no cross-linkages between countries), lack of trust of beneficiary organizations in a commercial party (GFA) compared to a non-profit organization, no broader trade policy expertise and programme narrative offered by commercial party (GFA), limited knowledge on C4TP by beneficiary governments.

A future C4TP could be adjusted to establish cross-linkages on trade policy challenges and facilitate exchange on best-practices between different countries. An adjusted approach could entail concrete offerings that can allow several countries to collectively enjoy the benefits and exchange insights / best practices, as well as research or briefing notes developed in a central organisation to allow to showcase available experiences and insights in beneficiary countries.

In practical terms, this could mean:

- In terms of **programme design**, hence, this evaluation's findings point to the opportunity to streamline the current structure of C4TP. By reorganizing the intervention types from three to two categories—**full-fledged programmes and fill-the-gap interventions, plus a central component**—the programme could improve its efficiency and effectiveness.
- For full-fledged and fill-the-gap interventions, **develop concrete set of offerings, to complement ad-hoc requests**, including for example on: strategic trade policy making, data-driven trade negotiations and reforms, training, and capacity-building support in selected priority themes that align with the Swiss Foreign Economic Policy and EFTA FTA's and digital and sustainable trade chapters.
- Consider allocating targeted C4TP budget for a **central component of human capacity building** support, that allows to develop and deliver relevant materials and know-how that can be used in country-specific context. This component could 'nurture' both the full-fledged and small/fill-the-gap component of projects with know-how and expertise materials.
- Consider to house the budget for a **central component of C4TP human capacity building** under the roof of a **dedicated agency / (non-profit) organisation**¹⁸ which could equally implement the fill-the-gap projects. Such an agency would need to offer: 1) trade policy expertise grounded in an impact-perspective, and 2) reliable partner that supports trust-building from the outset, not a commercial and short-term consulting firm, and 3) capacity and experience in implementing trade related capacity programmes at country-level, including through a network of international and local experts.

¹⁸ Possibilities for consideration include: SIPPO (depends on interest and possibility to add trade policy related assistance into their mandate), EFTA (idem), ITC (good reputation, but high overhead costs and relies on external experts for implementation), or IISD (good reputation, solid experts, already implementing partner with GTA component), or to consider regional secretariats such as AfCFTA, CEFTA and ASEAN Secretariats.

- Consider adjusting the **Steering arrangements** with more pro-active involvement of SECO trade negotiating unit (and/or EFTA Secretariat), especially in the start-up and programming phase of the C4TP in-country Programmes. In addition, SCO could continue a pro-active role to leverage on diplomatic relations established.

6.1.4 Re-consider the beneficiary countries and target beneficiaries

This evaluation has pointed to the fact that the value added and success of trade related capacity building programmes (such as C4TP) is highly dependent on the ability to provide relevant solutions that are fit for purpose in a given context. Indeed, trade policy decisions remain unique to country context and Government objectives that allow to pursue a balanced approach between economic growth and sustainable development objectives.

With a view to the recommendation to seek improved alignment with Swiss Foreign Economic Policy, this may equally imply a reconsideration of the beneficiary countries.

Second, this evaluation pointed to the limited engagement with private sector and other actors (such as thinktanks or academia), and a rather dominant role for Government in determining and benefiting from the C4TP. This accounts both for the GFA and GTA component. This means the 'inclusive trade' as part objective of C4TP has proved limited in its performance.

To address the above, in practical terms the following could be taken into account for a 2nd phase of the C4TP:

- Re-consider the choice for **full-fledged beneficiary countries**.
 - *Current* full-fledged countries Peru and Serbia would merit discussion. Peru: Switzerland will phase out all support. Serbia: Reconsider continuation, also with a view to strong EU support, a stalled WTO process and rapprochement with China (including Serbia-China FTA).
 - *Future* full-fledged countries to be considered could be based on the EFTA FTAs negotiated and/or under negotiation with partner countries.
- Re-consider the **choice for small / fill-the-gap beneficiary countries**:
 - Consider opening up the small and fill-the-gap interventions to all SECO beneficiary countries and LDC's, and provide support based on interest expressed, pre-conditions fulfilled.
- Re-consider what 'inclusive trade' means, and re-think the set-up **whereby C4TP support can equally be taken advantage of by private sector actors** (sector associations, TSI's) and other actors (academia, thinktanks, journalists, parliament etc).
- In **practical terms**, this could mean to request Government or stakeholder organisations that request support to complete a '**trade policy self-assessment**' and **complemented by desk-research by the service provider as basis to review and approve requests**.

6.1.5 For the trade-data component (GTA), expand to cover broader scope in topics of interest and relevance for today's trade policy making functions

This evaluation pointed to the value of high-quality trade data on all topics relevant in today's trade negotiations, from tariffs, to non-tariff measures including on digital and sustainable trade. With regards to the trade data component, this evaluation pointed to the need to improve the relevance and usability of the GTA platform, as a next phase in the Global Trade Dashboard.

In practical terms, this could mean:

- Consider broadening the **scope of the GTA platform** to include emerging trade topics such as digital trade and sustainability. These topics are increasingly important in global trade policy, and their inclusion would make the platform more relevant to current trade policy challenges and trends.
- Explore ways to improve the **accessibility and usability of the GTA platform** for non-expert users, particularly in developing countries. Methods to include could be; adding explanatory text on the functions of specific trade policy instruments and providing additional training and support for users with limited expertise. By making the platform more user-friendly and accessible, the programme could increase its value and effectiveness for a wider range of beneficiaries.
- In a next phase of the C4TP, it is recommended that **GTA Component develops a strategy towards ‘data-driven trade policy making: institutional and human skills and capacity strategy’** to enhance actual use and applicability by policy makers and capacity building experts of the GTA Global Trade Dashboard.
- It is recommended **to keep the GTA component under the C4TP**, with expanded scope of topics and countries, and improved ‘embedding’ of trade data for evidence-based trade policy making. It is advised that the E-Commerce and the Digital Economy (ECDE) Programme could equally benefit from the GTA Digital Trade Alert, in the event policy-related objectives and outcomes are foreseen. In the event the ECDE Programme equally aims to support quality of (digital) policy-making, access to the GTA Digital Policy Alert¹⁹ is to be considered for funding (or otherwise C4TP could have dedicated digital trade policy and sustainability related trade policy ‘modules’).

6.1.6 Improve the knowledge-management of the C4TP to allow for materials and insights to be made available for sustainable impact.

The Programme has to date generated a plethora of materials and insights, mainly relevant in the context of the specific beneficiary countries. The sustainability strategy of the Programme has partly been to strive for making available online trainings developed by the implementing agency beyond project duration, and to allow open-access of research outputs published. At country-level, only full-fledged programme Serbia currently benefits from materials made available by the implementing agency (GFA).

-> It is recommended that the **knowledge management strategy and implementation thereof** of the Programme could be improved, at country- and programme level. This includes allowing access of relevant materials on a dedicated C4TP website, or through the implementing agency (GFA) or funding organisation (SECO)²⁰. It also could include adding a section on Knowledge Management in the Country Annual Progress Report.

6.1.7 Engage in SECO (and/or EFTA) promotional activities to improved awareness and facilitate interest of beneficiary countries about (the reframed and next phase of) the C4TP

The Programme had difficulties to generate substantial interest from partner countries. The evaluation has shown that a (commercial) implementing agency may not have sufficient leverage and lacks the basic trust at Government level to engage in (sometimes sensitive) discussion related to challenges faced around implementation of trade policy including capacity challenges.

-> It is recommended that the start of the next phase of the (repositioned) C4TP starts off with a ‘Outreach and acquisition strategy’, building on a more elaborate intellectual framing of the C4TP and including a range of promotional activities led and/or supported by SECO staff. These could include for example, a dedicated

¹⁹ www.digitalpolicyalert.org

²⁰ Limited information available on GFA nor SECO websites on the C4TP, nor the deliverables generated. See: https://www.gfa-group.de/projects/Swiss_Program_on_Capacities_for_Trade_Policies_C4TP_3957840.html

session at WTO Public Forum, presenting C4TP best practices and exchange of insights with beneficiaries during a C4TP country beneficiary meeting or side-meeting during the EFTA conference, etc.