

LDC success stories

FOURTH EDITION

Disclaimer

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Foreword



**Ambassador Ib Petersen of Denmark
and Chairperson of the Sub-Committee
on LDCs.** © Permanent Mission of Denmark.

The world's least developed countries (LDCs) are home to one billion people, yet they have been able to capture only a one per cent share of global trade. Their exports remain concentrated in a few commodities. And they face structural challenges which have held them back from tapping opportunities offered by the global trading system.

While WTO members have taken important steps to support LDCs in realising their trade potential, the global trading landscape is shifting fast. New technologies are emerging, actions on climate loom

large, and uncertainty is rising. LDCs have been working with development partners to identify possible solutions as new challenges arise, while also exploring fresh ways to boost LDC trade.

The LDC Sub-Committee serves as a platform to share experiences on topics of interest to LDCs and to examine opportunities and challenges LDCs face in integrating into global trade. In 2025, in addition to proposals put forward by members, the Sub-Committee discussed ways of bolstering LDCs' participation in agricultural supply chains, explored new paths for LDC trade growth, and efforts to support the integration of recently acceded LDCs into global trade.

This fourth edition of the LDC Success Stories magazine includes stories shared by LDCs at the Sub-Committee in 2025 and published on the LDC Success Stories blog. Contributors to this edition range from women entrepreneurs in Burkina Faso to a government official from Lao PDR to the voice of civil society in Bangladesh. Experiences shared by government officials from Comoros and Timor-Leste, recently acceded LDCs, are also featured in this edition.

Olia Ouedraogo shares her experience in supplying dried mango to the European Union, and highlights how the mango processing industry is helping empower women in Burkina Faso and beyond. Souliya Souvandouane discusses how a community-based approach is helping farmers in Lao PDR meet the standards

required by export markets, thereby improving peppercorn quality and boosting smallholder farmer incomes.

Dr Fahmida Khatun reflects on the export diversification strategies of Bangladesh with a view to maintaining strong economic growth, generating new jobs for Bangladeshi youth and achieving long-term sustainability. Ambassador António da Conceição of Timor-Leste and Ahmed Mzé of the Permanent Mission of Comoros share their experiences in integrating into global trade following their accession to the WTO.

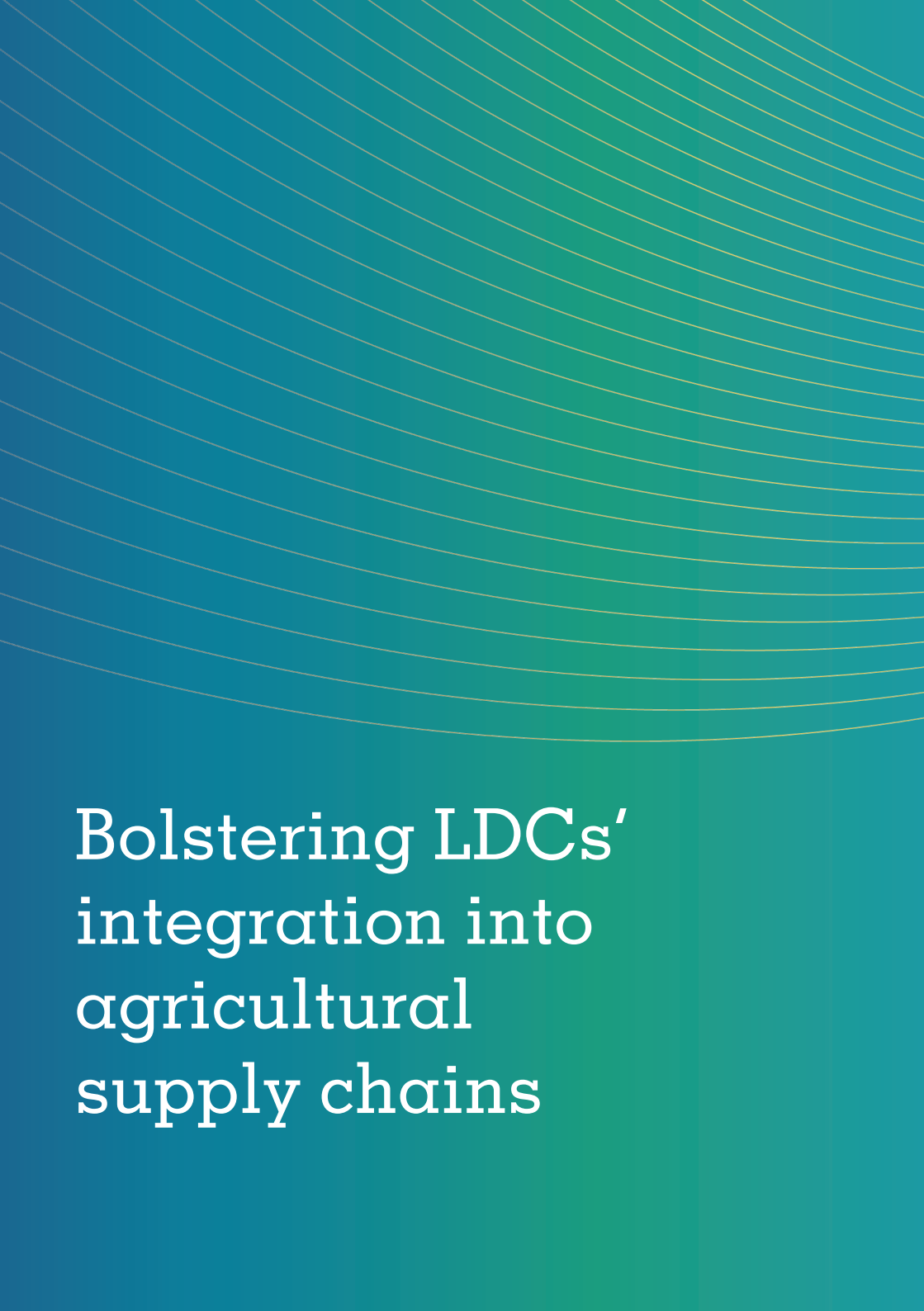
These stories underscore the importance of concerted efforts aimed at enhancing the export competitiveness of LDC businesses in global markets. They also highlight LDC exporters' ongoing need for support to meet evolving trading requirements, as well as for investment in sectors with high export potential, and blended finance to de-risk green investment by small and medium-sized enterprises.

These experiences provide practical insights for WTO members to consider as they explore ways to support LDCs' greater integration into global trade.

H.E. Mr Ib Petersen

Ambassador of Denmark

Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on LDCs

The background is a teal gradient with numerous thin, wavy, light-colored lines that create a sense of movement and depth. The lines are more densely packed in the upper half and become more sparse towards the bottom.

Bolstering LDCs' integration into agricultural supply chains



Olia Ouedraogo is the Marketing Manager of the Association Burkinabé Action Solidarité Femmes/Enfants (ABASF/E). © Olia Ouedraogo, Association Burkinabé Action Solidarité Femmes/Enfants (ABASF/E).

BURKINA FASO

Bringing dried mango to European consumers

Ms Olia Ouedraogo, Marketing Manager of the Association Burkinabé Action Solidarité Femmes/Enfants (ABASF/E) in Burkina Faso, shares her experience of exporting dried mango to the European Union.

Why do you focus on exporting dried mango?

Agriculture is the backbone of our country, with nearly 80 per cent of the population relying on it. Mango farming alone provides around 64,000 jobs, both directly and indirectly. Dried mango has huge potential. There is strong global demand, especially in Europe, and the global dried fruit market is projected to reach US\$ 10 billion by 2027.

What are some of the challenges you face?

There are several challenges, and I would say they fall into four main areas: market access, logistics, finance and global competition.

Exporting dried mango is not as simple as growing and drying fruit. When it comes to market access, we face high tariffs and complex non-tariff measures. Meeting sanitary and phytosanitary standards, for example, can be extremely costly. Just to get certified, we have to bring in foreign auditors, which adds to the expense. For small-scale producers, this is a major barrier.

Being landlocked must make things difficult.

That is the second big challenge. Because we do not have access to the sea, we rely on ports in neighbouring

countries. Poor roads, customs delays and high shipping fees all pile up. For example, one of our containers was stuck at the port for over three weeks and we had to pay extra fees.

You also mentioned finance as a third issue.

Yes. Access to finance is a persistent problem. Many of our small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) cannot get the loans they need to invest in better equipment or expand operations. Without funding, we cannot grow. It is even harder for women entrepreneurs, who face a US\$ 42 billion financing gap across Africa, according to the African Development Bank.

What is the role of women in the dried mango industry?

Women are at the heart of the mango value chain. They handle much of the processing, sorting, drying and packaging. Yet despite their contributions, they often lack access to land, credit and opportunities to export. Empowering women is not just a matter of equity – it is an economic necessity. Studies show that investing in women-led businesses boosts productivity and growth.

Competing globally must be tough, with major exporters leading the way. Major mango-exporting countries,



Women processing mangoes in Burkina Faso. © Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI), The Netherlands.

such as Thailand and Mexico, dominate the international market, benefitting from trade agreements, advanced processing technology and strong branding. For us in Burkina Faso to compete, we need strategic partnerships and targeted support.

So, what is the way forward? What can be done to support your industry?

- Lower trade barriers: Reducing tariffs on dried mango from developing countries and simplifying certification processes will make a tangible difference.
- Improve trade logistics: Digitizing customs processes and increasing port efficiency can cut costs and delays.
- Enhance financial support: Creating financial mechanisms, especially for women-led agribusinesses, will empower more exporters to compete.
- Strengthen partnerships: Connecting Burkinabé exporters directly with international buyers through trade fairs and digital platforms can open new opportunities.

Have there been any success stories?

With support from the Dutch Centre for the Promotion of Imports from developing countries (CBI), we have received training, coaching and opportunities to attend trade fairs such as Biofach and SIAL. These platforms have helped us meet buyers and now we are exporting directly to the European Union. Initiatives such as the Global Trade Helpdesk and the Standards and Trade Development Facility are also making a difference.

Any final thoughts?

The dried mango industry in Burkina Faso has incredible potential. This is about more than trade – it is about improving livelihoods, promoting women's empowerment and achieving sustainable economic growth. The WTO has an important role to play in creating a level playing field in which small exporters, particularly women entrepreneurs, have a genuine opportunity to succeed.



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Souliya Souvandouane is the Director of the Plant Protection Centre at the Department of Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao People's Democratic Republic. © WTO.

LAO PDR

Boosting peppercorn exports in Southeast Asia

Mr Souliya Souvandouane, Director of the Plant Protection Centre at the Department of Agriculture in the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry of Lao People's Democratic Republic, highlights how helping smallholder farmers meet quality and safety standards for peppercorns can raise their income and assist them in reaching new markets.

How did the initiative get under way?

Back in 2020, we wanted to identify key challenges holding back the commercial production and export of peppercorns in Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. So, with the support of the Standards and Trade Development Facility and the Centre for Agriculture and Bioscience International (CABI), we assessed the situation.

What kind of challenges did you discover?

- Poor farm management practices
- Food safety and hygiene issues, especially related to microbial contamination
- A complex supply chain with limited traceability

These factors made it difficult for smallholder farmers to meet the standards required for export, especially in international markets.

What did you do to address these issues?

We designed a project to improve productivity, safety and market access for smallholder pepper growers and processors. One of our key innovations was introducing the Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), a community-based approach that helps farmers ensure compliance

with quality standards. We focused on three main activities:

- Developing a regional code of practice for peppercorn production and processing
- Testing the code in all three countries to ensure practicality, then translating and adapting it to local contexts
- Training and outreach – we created manuals, posters and guides to make the standards accessible to local farmers

What were some of the steps taken to support farmers?

In Lao PDR, we trained 300 participants and created PGS groups so farmers could monitor and support each other in applying the code of practice. We also organized cross-country exchanges – including farm visits and knowledge-sharing sessions – between Cambodia, Lao PDR and Viet Nam. These allowed farmers to learn from each other's successes and challenges in implementing the code of practice.

In addition, we hosted a trade fair in Viet Nam, creating a direct platform for farmers to meet potential buyers. This was a crucial step in unlocking access to new markets.



Peppercorn production. © Standards and Trade Development Facility.

What were the results in Lao PDR?

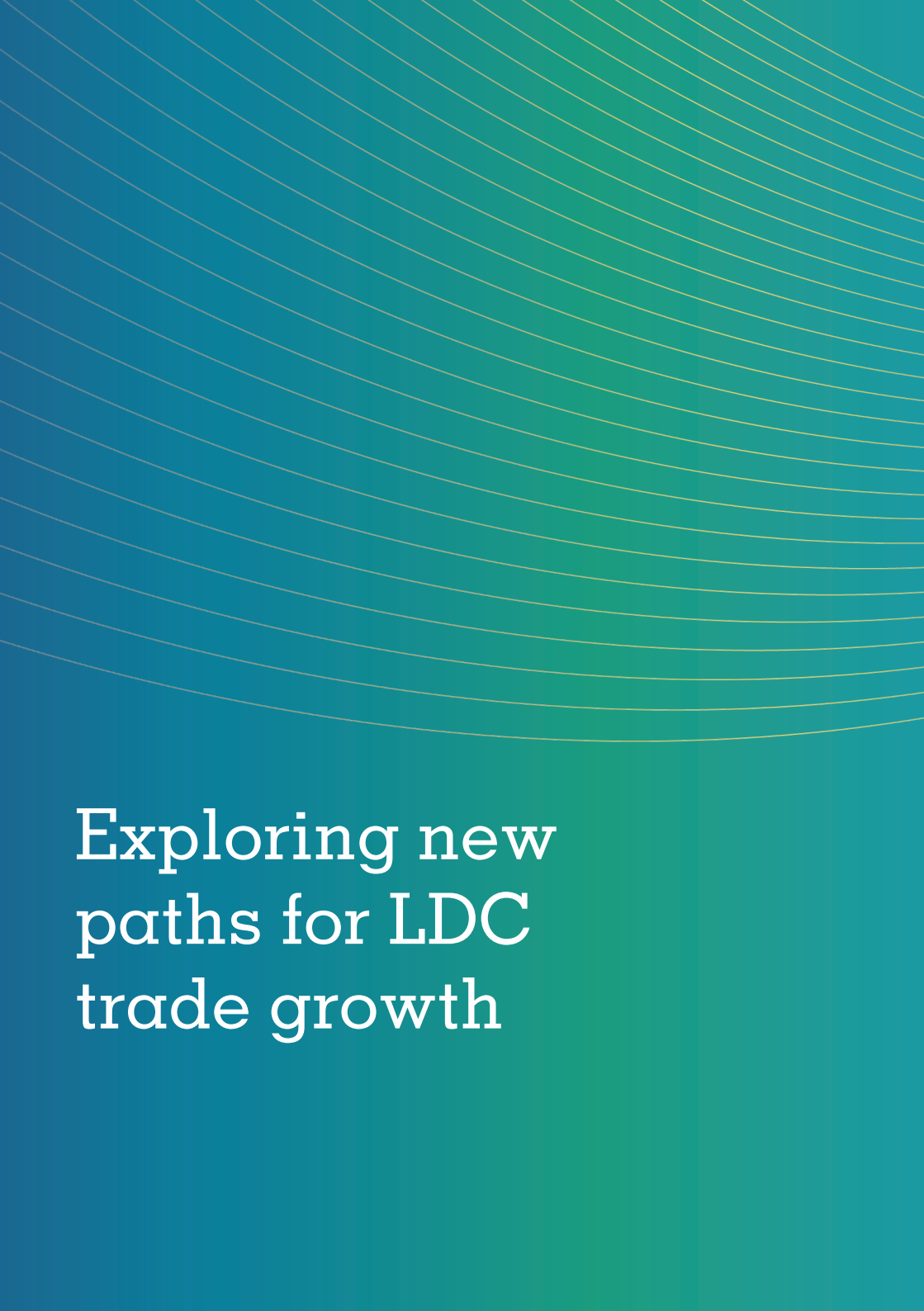
Our efforts led to a 10 to 30 per cent improvement in the quality of peppercorns produced. Use of chemicals and fertilizers declined, leading to a 30 per cent reduction in costs. Farmer incomes increased from around US\$ 50 to US\$ 70 per week during peak season (July to December). In addition, some exporters began shipping peppercorns to Viet Nam.

And what about Cambodia and Viet Nam?

Cambodian exporters reached a new market – China – exporting over 30 tons of peppercorn. In the first quarter of 2024, these exports generated US\$ 10 million, resulting in a 30 per cent income boost for Cambodian farmers. In Viet Nam, the improved production process enabled producers to fully comply with the European Union's export requirements, marking a significant achievement.



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Exploring new paths for LDC trade growth



Fahmida Khatun is the Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue of Bangladesh. © Fahmida Khatun, Centre for Policy Dialogue of Bangladesh.

BANGLADESH

Working towards a sustainable export future

Dr Fahmida Khatun is Executive Director at the Centre for Policy Dialogue of Bangladesh. She reflects on Bangladesh's sustainable development prospects in an evolving trading landscape.

Bangladesh has experienced remarkable export-led growth and is set to graduate from LDC status in 2026. What's behind this success?

Since the 1980s, Bangladesh has leveraged its labour-intensive strengths to become a global powerhouse in apparel, with exports of ready-made garments now contributing over US\$ 36 billion to the economy. This represents 81 per cent of total exports and nearly 8 per cent of GDP.

And it's empowering women too?

Over 57 per cent of Bangladesh's 4.5 million ready-made garment workers are women, making the sector a vital driver of women's economic empowerment and socio-economic transformation.

What are some of the main markets for Bangladeshi garment exports?

The European Union and the United States are the main export destinations. In 2024, around 40 per cent of Bangladeshi ready-made garment exports went to the European Union and another 18 per cent went to the United States.

What are some of the challenges for Bangladesh's ready-made garment sector?

Bangladesh remains vulnerable to climate change, which threatens

the long-term sustainability of its development progress.

Second, consumer patterns are shifting. Many buyers are looking for climate-friendly products.

Third, Bangladesh's imminent graduation from LDC status requires bolstering its export competitiveness, including through compliance with labour and environmental standards, with a view to securing access to markets of its trading partners.

And let's not forget automation: 60 per cent of ready-made garment jobs could disappear by 2040 if the sector does not evolve. This requires the adoption of advanced technologies for accountability, traceability and compliance with evolving international standards.

Is the industry responding to these challenges?

Over 200 factories are [LEED-certified](#), the world's most widely recognized green building rating system. This includes nine of the world's top ten! Large factories are making big investments: on average, each firm spends US\$ 710,000 over five years, or 37 per cent of their total capital expenditure, according to a survey conducted in 2022 involving 403



Bangladeshi textile worker. © Asian Development Bank.

factories. Factories are investing in solar power, water meters, LED lighting and air filtration to name just a few expenditures. At the same time, smaller factories are struggling, held back by upfront costs and lack of access to finance.

Is reliance on ready-made garments a sufficient strategy for the future?

COVID-19 and geopolitical tensions have exposed the dangers of over-reliance on one export sector. The future demands diversification into areas such as light manufacturing. Jute, pharmaceuticals, plastics and home textiles are among the sectors with high export potential. Digital services also have an important role to play for the future of Bangladesh's economy.

At the same time, the country's low domestic revenue – representing around 8 per cent of GDP – constrains essential investments in the physical infrastructure and logistics required to support export diversification and climate adaptation and mitigation measures for economic sustainability.

So how can Bangladesh achieve a sustainable export future?

It involves three big tasks:

1. Reform fragmented trade and industrial policies.
2. Invest in green technology, training and infrastructure.
3. Strategize to secure post-LDC market access and global competitiveness.

And who needs to act?

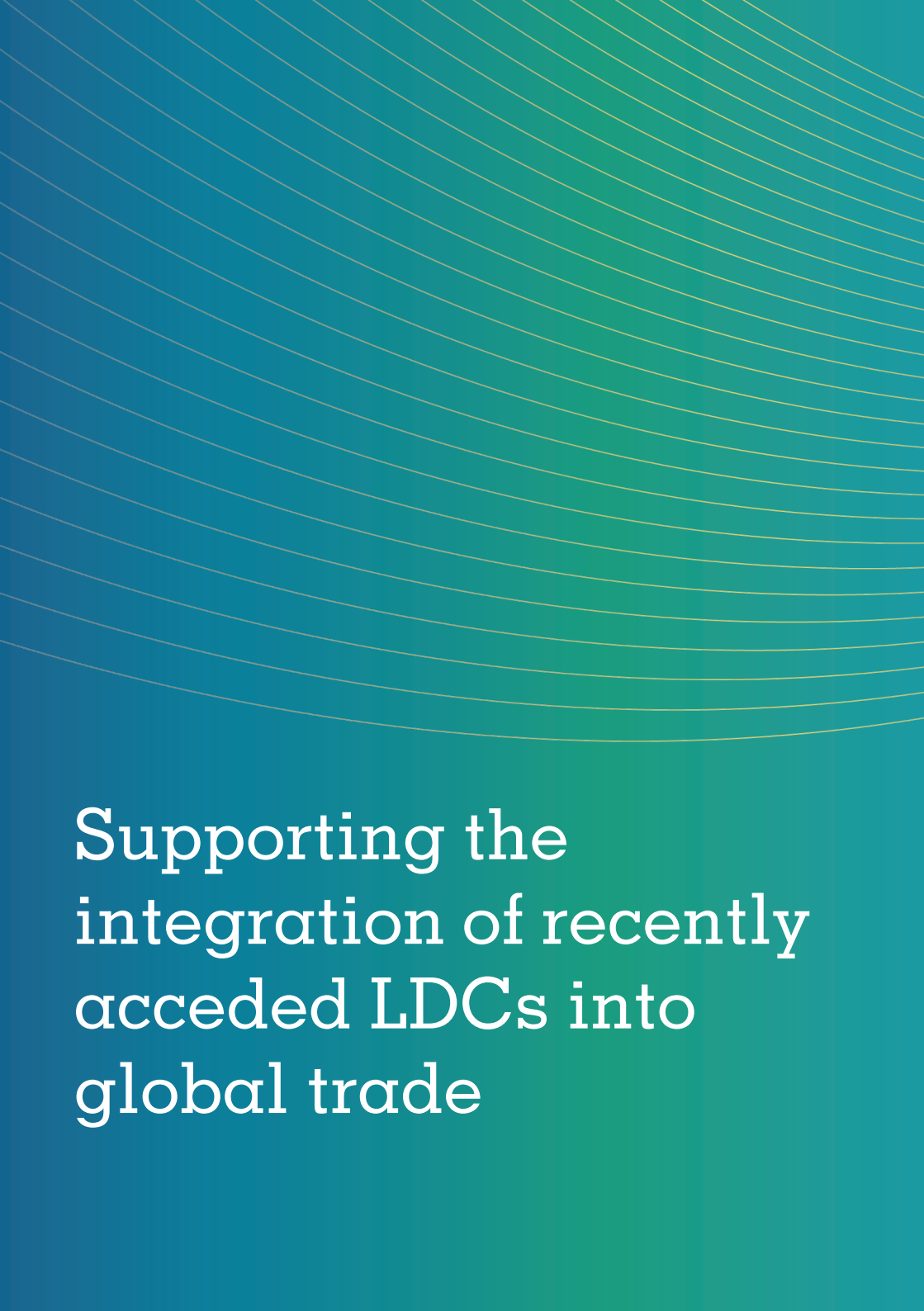
Everyone. In particular:

- Policymakers need to integrate fragmented policies and boost regulatory capacity.
- Industry leaders should embed green goals into business strategies and focus on circularity.
- Buyers and investors can support green suppliers by offering fair prices and co-fund training and emissions tracking in value chains.
- Development partners need to provide blended finance and de-risk SME green investments.



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Supporting the
integration of recently
acceded LDCs into
global trade



Ambassador António da Conceição is Timor-Leste's Permanent Representative at the WTO. © WTO.

TIMOR-LESTE

A year of reform, engagement and ambition

Ambassador António da Conceição is Timor-Leste's Permanent Representative at the WTO. Ambassador da Conceição reflects on the country's progress since joining the WTO.

When we joined the WTO in 2024, we knew we were taking on significant commitments. So, we built a roadmap: our Post-Accession Strategy and Implementation Plan.

Following accession, our main priority has been aligning our national framework with the realities of modern global trade. That means looking carefully at our legislation, institutions and procedures, and making sure they match the commitments we have undertaken and what we want to achieve.

And this has kicked off transformation at home?

Absolutely. The pace of change has been remarkable.

On the regulatory front, we are fast-tracking key laws under our legislative action plan. We have already approved a government resolution on rules of origin, and we have draft laws ready on competition policy, export promotion and industrial property. These are essential tools for building a competitive economy.

We have also set up new administrative procedures for sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures, including providing a reasonable period for comments on proposed SPS measures. It is a big step for transparency and predictability.

And we have been building technical infrastructure. In September 2025, we launched a brand-new website for the Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs, which includes a dedicated page for our WTO membership. We also introduced a Trade Information Portal, giving local traders practical information to navigate international markets.

Have these reforms helped you stay on track with your WTO obligations?

Of course. For example, we are fully up to date on applied tariff and import licensing requirements. We are also making steady progress on our trade facilitation notifications.

The real secret has been our mindset: learning-by-doing. We listen, we ask questions, we engage actively. And it is paying off.

A highlight for us this year was becoming the first LDC ever to begin negotiations to join the Government Procurement Agreement (GPA). This milestone came after targeted national workshops with strong support from development partners. We are now finalizing the legal mandate to establish an inter-ministerial technical working group on GPA accession, which we expect to be in place by the end of 2025. We aim to submit our market access offer by mid-2026.



Accession of Timor-Leste to the WTO. © WTO/Prime Vision.

What about other initiatives?

We are also exploring the Investment Facilitation for Development (IFD) Agreement and the Joint Statement Initiative (JSI) on E-commerce. Our message is simple: Timor-Leste wants to be an active and constructive player in the multilateral trading system.

It sounds like 2025 has been an important year for Timor-Leste.

The year has been defined by two major national priorities that have moved forward in parallel: our full integration into the WTO and our accession to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which we completed in October 2025.

This required a whole-of-government effort – intense, coordinated and very focused. We see WTO and ASEAN memberships as mutually reinforcing, providing long-term stability and a strong foundation for our economic development and regional integration.

We remain fully committed to the multilateral trading system and to implementing our WTO commitments responsibly and effectively. And we know that the journey will require continued efforts and strong partnerships. The path ahead is long, and we continue to advance with confidence – with all WTO members as partners.



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Ahmed Mzé is an Economic Advisor at the Permanent Mission of the Union of Comoros.

© WTO/ Lucas Narciso Pimenta Ricardo.

COMOROS

Navigating the path from accession to integration

Mr Ahmed Mzé is an Economic Advisor at the Permanent Mission of the Union of Comoros. He shares his experiences and reflections on the country's journey to WTO membership in 2024 and its post-accession work.



What are the key steps Comoros took before and after its accession?

Accession was not just a negotiation process – it was a national journey.

Our first task was awareness-raising. We needed every ministry, agency and stakeholder to understand what WTO membership would mean. With support from the WTO Secretariat, we organized workshops that demystified the process and helped everyone see the practical implications.

We also went on study visits to Cabo Verde and Liberia, two countries that joined the organization in recent years. Those trips were incredibly useful.

Seeing how they handled the post-accession process gave us a much clearer picture of what awaited us.

And then there is the technical side. Notifications became our daily bread and butter. By March 2025, we had submitted notifications on trade facilitation, import licensing and customs valuation. And we are aiming to complete all mandatory notifications by the end of 2026.

What have been the biggest difficulties for Comoros since joining the WTO?

Simply handling everything that comes after accession has been one of the biggest challenges.



Harvesting of Ylang Ylang in Comoros. © Olivier Girard/EIF.

For example, we are required to notify all our laws and regulations. We need more trained officers who understand the requirements and can prepare the notifications properly.

Participating effectively in WTO discussions is another hurdle. When you are new, it is not obvious how the different WTO bodies work, what is expected of you, or how to intervene.

There are not really any guidelines for newly acceded LDCs, so you learn by doing – and that can be overwhelming at first.

Based on your experience, what advice would you give to other LDCs preparing for accession?

Prepare your post-accession strategy early. Joining the WTO is not an end point – it is the beginning. You need

to know which sectors require support, where the capacity gaps are, and what your priorities will be once you join.

Another important point is building the necessary technical expertise early on. Do not wait until after accession to train your officials. Once you become a member, the obligations come quickly, so you really need people who understand the system.

What kind of support would be helpful for recently acceded LDCs like Comoros?

I think three things would make a big difference.

First, it would help to have a dedicated support mechanism for newly acceded LDCs. While the WTO's Accessions

Division has been very helpful, a structured, tailored system for providing post-accession guidance would make a huge difference.

Second, we need help with mobilizing partners and funding. We know our priorities. At the same time, identifying who to approach for technical or financial support is not always straightforward.

And third, partnerships are essential. We are very grateful to the Enhanced Integrated Framework and the United Kingdom for supporting us throughout the accession process, and to the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility for helping us with our trade facilitation notifications. For a small LDC like Comoros, cooperation is not just helpful – it is essential.



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Printed by the World Trade Organization.

