UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT
UNCTAD

Independent Project Evaluation:
"Transparency in Trade Regulation and Facilitation in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus"

Independent Evaluation Unit
October 2021

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UNCTAD/OSG/INF/2021/5

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ACRONYMS

AUD	Australian Dollar
CMS	Content Management System
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DoT	Department of Trade
EQ	Evaluation Question
ESCAP	Economic and Social Committee for Asia and the Pacific
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HDI	Human Development Index
KM	Knowledge Management
LDC	Least Developed Countries
MCIC	Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Cooperatives
MFAET	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and External Trade
MFAT	Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NTM	Non-Tariff Measures
NZD	New Zealand Dollar
OCO	Oceania Customs Organization
PACER	Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations
PICTA	Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement
PIF	Pacific Island Forum
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SME	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SPARTECA	South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary
TBT	Technical Barriers to Trade
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
WTO	World Trade Organization

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The PACER Plus is a reciprocal trade agreement that was signed by Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu and entered into force on 13 December 2020. It obliges the nine Pacific island signatories to gradually reduce import tariffs and liberalize incoming services, trade and investment. The agreement also sets some standards to make national laws and administrative procedures accessible to international actors to decrease potential obstacles to international trade and economic relations.

The project under evaluation involved UNCTAD, with the financial support of the Governments of Australia and New Zealand through their PACER Plus Readiness Package, providing training and technical assistance to the nine Pacific island PACER Plus countries. The aim of the project was to increase trade–related regulatory transparency ahead of the agreement's entry into force. The project established seven overarching goals, corresponding to the indicators of achievement listed in the Project Document. These were:

- Prepare countries for the initial notification and information exchanges
- Support countries in acquiring capacity to implement PACER Plus transparency obligations
- Strengthen human and institutional capacity on links between trade and gender including in transparency obligations
- Establish contact points and enquiry points in the nine beneficiary countries
- Launch a dialogue for a regional coordinating network for maintaining transparency standards
- Set the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees
- Launch a regional electronic platform (composed of national and regional modules) for publication of information and transparency of trade regulations

The main project outputs were online national trade portals established in each beneficiary country to provide an interface where information on relevant legislation and procedures could be uploaded and accessed, and where information to facilitate trade and investment could be accessed. Together with a regional trade facilitation index, the portals would form a regional electronic platform. This content management system (CMS) would facilitate the comparison and benchmarking of trade-related procedures among signatories, helping to simplify and harmonize procedures and contributing to the sustainability of the project.

As per its terms of reference (ToR), an evaluation was to be conducted at the end of the project in order to contribute to the overall quality of UNCTAD assistance; to show the possible attribution of achievements to the project and mobilize further support and resources; and to provide accountability to the donor countries and other project stakeholders. The evaluation was guided by standard evaluation criteria and a list of eleven evaluation questions. It began on 5 October 2020 and included a review of project documents and background literature; a series of semi-structured interviews involving UNCTAD staff, national counterparts and donor country representatives; a discussion group inserted in the project closing forum; a private sector consultation; and a comprehensive review of the national trade portals created during the project. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, in-person meetings and interviews between the evaluator and project counterparts were substituted by videoconferences.

The evaluation concluded that the project was fully *relevant* to beneficiary countries' needs. The project addressed relevant limitations in public administration and resulted in enhanced capacity which improves the overall business environment and administrative efficiency of the beneficiaries. It was also aligned with UNCTAD's mandate and tapped into UNCTAD's comparative advantage based on the use of business and trade facilitation portals.

The project has been *effective* in helping countries to meet their publication obligations. All beneficiary countries have published legislation related to all the issues raised in the PACER Plus and national counterparts have gained a better knowledge of their transparency obligations. Work started by UNCTAD could be completed in the near future so that beneficiary countries meet other transparency obligations and improve trade-related networking at the national and regional level.

The project faced some *efficiency* challenges related to human resource issues in some beneficiary countries, such as rotation of personnel and difficulties in finding suitable national consultants, but project adaptations and extensions were successful in minimizing disruption. UNCTAD provided an adequate solution (national trade portals), along with highly applicable expertise.

Indications of *sustainability* varied considerably from one beneficiary to another, with human resource and technical knowledge being the most relevant issues. UNCTAD staff and national counterparts agree that further support is necessary to consolidate and sustain the project achievements. Sustainability is also affected by the lack of integration of the donor countries' trade-related internet resources in the regional trade platform.

The project included a relevant *gender analysis*, which uncovered links between gender and trade transparency. Furthermore, products that women producers are more involved in were identified, facilitating the prioritization of import-export procedures that may have a higher impact on women's livelihoods. However, the knowledge generated by the project in this respect did not always permeate the beneficiary government officials involved in the project; the evaluation revealed that most of them believe that lack of regulatory transparency impacts men and women equally, and some of them are not aware of the gender-and-trade materials that have been uploaded onto their own trade portals.

The project's design and implementation did not mainstream other human rights considerations. However, in broad terms, the project contributed to inclusive trade in two ways. Firstly, the project targeted SIDS, some of which were LDCs, and therefore it enhanced trade-related capacities in economies that face major challenges in fully benefiting from international trade. Secondly, the project's focus has a strong potential to empower other vulnerable target groups by providing direct access to legal information.

As the *private sector* is the final recipient of the project outputs, its involvement could be more intensive in similar future projects through closer consultation during the creation of knowledge products and greater involvement in the dissemination of the portal links. The private sector consultation conducted following national workshops indicated a high level of interest in online information about trade procedures and regulations, and the workshops have had a positive impact on the internet conversation around key words related to the project.

Based on the previous assessment against the standard criteria, and knowing that the project has been extended for six months and further technical assistance to beneficiary countries could possibly be funded in the framework of the PACER Plus Implementation Package, the evaluation provided the following recommendations for UNCTAD and the beneficiary and donor countries:

Recommendation to donor countries

I.   *On the sustainability of the capacities built:* It is recommended that establishment of the planned PACER Plus Implementation Unit be prioritised as a matter of urgency to ensure that the PACER Plus countries are supported in sustaining and expanding the project achievements, including the maintenance of national and regional trade portals and regional activities aimed at increasing regulatory transparency on trade and investment issues.

II.   *On the regional platform:* The donors should consider better connecting their trade-related internet resources to the regional trade portal and the trade facilitation index. It is recommended that they use UNCTAD trade portals to inform PACER Plus partners on the two import and two export procedures that are of most interest in the Pacific Islands. In the identification of such procedures, the UNCTAD guide on products made by women in the nine Pacific Island Countries should be taken into account. The portals could also facilitate links to information on legislation available in other internet resources.

III. *On future projects:* The donors could take into account the beneficiary countries' requests to expand the functionalities of the portals and even make them capable of facilitating transactions. This could be done in a coordinated manner with other development cooperation initiatives involving the donors and oriented towards private sector development, business environment improvement or public administration reform. Additionally, they should consider involving UNCTAD in further technical cooperation in the framework of the PACER Plus in order to enhance capacity and expertise ahead of the establishment of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit and other national or regional coordinating bodies.

Recommendations to beneficiary countries

IV.   *On trade portals:* It is recommended that the six beneficiary countries that have so far ratified the treaty make the notifications which were due by the entry into force (on trade remedies and import licencing). This could be done by putting the notification tool included in the trade portals into immediate use, which would also constitute a training exercise for future exchanges on eventual legislative changes in other areas (trade in services, trade in goods, SPS and TBT). It is also recommended that the 'Procedure' section of the trade portals be expanded and when selecting new export procedures, trade departments prioritize the products listed in the UNCTAD 'Export Guide for Women in the Pacific Islands'.

V.   *On knowledge management:* It is recommended that trainers be appointed in each beneficiary country to ensure the hand-over of portal knowledge. The work of these trainers could be supported with the materials produced in the framework of the project, and further UNCTAD training.

VI.   *On trade portal promotion:* It is recommended that promotional activities on trade portals be conducted in order to raise awareness across private companies. The activities should differentiate between different target groups based on gender and equity criteria, and collect comments and suggestions. The activities could be monitored using internet metric tools to provide feedback on the efforts. Promotional activities could also be oriented to other government departments.

Recommendations to UNCTAD

VII. *On the obligation to notify fellow signatories:* Recognising that the obligation to provide notifications is fully the responsibility and at the discretion of each country, and taking into account the six-month extension of the project, it is suggested that UNCTAD assist the beneficiary countries in using the portals, perhaps by conducting one-on-one clinics, to make the notifications that were due by the entry into force of the agreement (on trade remedies and import licencing). This would complement the training already received and reinforce beneficiary country preparedness for future compliance when the obligation to notify on changes in legislation (in the areas of trade in services, trade in goods, SPS and TBT) arises in the future.

VIII. *On the project networking results:* It is recommended that the project team provide the Implementation Unit and the beneficiary countries with advice on how to reinforce existing national and regional networks and institutions on the basis of the project's tangible achievements. This advice should build upon existing institutions, and highlight how the national portals can facilitate communication within PACER Plus Committees, and how the regional platform and trade facilitation index can support peer review and regional benchmarking in trade transparency.

IX. *On the maintenance of the portals:* It is recommended that UNCTAD continues providing advice on reinforcing the business facilitation aspects of the portals and expands their functionalities through the integration of feedback tools and use of internet metric tools, which should be designed to allow disaggregation by gender. Furthermore, e-simplification functionalities could be a good addition to the trade portals and even sustain their primary role as a legal content manager. Likewise, it must be noted that national counterparts would like to integrate the portals with e-registration and e-payment tools. Finally, it is recommended that UNCTAD continue its training efforts by adopting a training-of-trainers approach, in order to reinforce the knowledge management capacity of the beneficiaries.

INTRODUCTION

1.   The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations Plus (PACER Plus, 2017) is an international trade agreement, which entered into force on 13 December 2020. It was signed in Tonga on 14 June 2017 by Australia, Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, New Zealand, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu, following eight years of negotiations. The agreement has been ratified by all but Nauru, Tuvalu and Vanuatu (dfat.gov.au, 2020a).

2.   The PACER Plus is a reciprocal arrangement which replaces a previous one-way agreement that provided the Pacific islands with duty and quota-free access to Australia and New Zealand. It includes a provision for technical assistance and aid to be provided by the Australian and New Zealand governments for a development and economic cooperation work programme, aimed at helping the signatory Small Island Developing States (SIDS) benefit more from trade (un.org, 2017). In the framework of this aid, UNCTAD has provided technical assistance to increase regulatory transparency and improve trade-and-investment-related capacity in the above-mentioned nine island countries. The project was scheduled to be completed in December 2020, and a final evaluation was to be conducted in line with the terms of the project agreement. This is the final report of that evaluation.

3.   As per its terms of reference (ToR), the purpose of the evaluation was threefold. Firstly, the exercise was meant to contribute to the overall quality of UNCTAD's assistance. Secondly, by carrying out this evaluation, UNCTAD plans to show the possible attribution of achievements to the project and mobilize further support and resources. Thirdly, the evaluation will provide accountability to the donor countries, Australia and New Zealand, and other project stakeholders.

4.   The evaluation started on 5 October 2020 and its methodology included a document review; a series of semi-structured interviews; a discussion group inserted in the project's closing forum; a private sector survey; and a comprehensive review of the trade portals that constituted the main project outputs. The evaluation approach and methodology are further described in Sections 1, 2, 3 and 4 of the report. In Section 5, the evaluation findings are presented, structured by evaluation criterion and question. The report concludes with an overview of the project assessment against the evaluation criteria, and suggests some recommendations as well as lessons learned and best practices that can be applied beyond the context of the project.

1. CONTEXT OF THE EVALUATION

5.   The nine small island PACER Plus signatories have a combined population of about 1.35 million people and cover a total land area of 45,086 square kilometers (UNCTAD, 2019: 4). As such, all the countries have relatively small populations and small land areas. This said, population size varies considerably, ranging from Niue with 1,600 people, to Solomon Islands with over 611,000. Population densities also vary considerably; Niue, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have densities below 25 people per square kilometer, while Tuvalu and Nauru have 373 and 682, respectively (UNCTAD, 2019: 5). The region is also characterized by great cultural and linguistic diversity, with hundreds of local languages spoken on the multitude of small islands that comprise the nine states.

6.   All of the nine Pacific island countries are classified as SIDS and three are Least Developed Countries (LDCs): Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu[1]. As neighbours in the Pacific region, they share a number of challenges to development, including vulnerability to natural disasters and climate change; dependence on aid and external financing; low economic growth; persistent poverty and increasing inequality levels; and constraints due to factors such as distance from markets, small productive bases and high transport costs (Forum.sec.org, 2020b). All of the countries, with the exception of Cook Islands and Nauru, have a gross domestic product (GDP) per capita below $US 4,300, (see Table 1), and all but Nauru have experienced low average GDP per capita growth rates in recent years[2] (UNCTAD, 2019: 6). The human development index (HDI) is only calculated for five of the countries; Tonga and Samoa are found in the high human development group, Vanuatu and Kiribati in the middle group and Solomon Islands is in the low development group (see Table 1).

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[1] Vanuatu graduated from this group in December 2020.
[2] Nauru's growth rate has been considerably higher due to the exploitation of phosphate reserves.

Table 1. PACER Plus signatories' selected socioeconomic indicators

	GDP (millions of current US dollars)	GDP per capita (millions of current US dollars)	GDP per capita, PPP (constant 2011 international dollars)	GDP Growth Rate (%)	GDP per capita growth rate (%)	Poverty rate	Gini Index	HDI Value	HDI Rank
Cook Islands	309.3	17,798	-	2.4	3.4	-	-	-	-
Kirbati	185.6	1,594	1,986	3.1	1.2	12.9	37.0	0.612	134
Nauru	113.9	8,344	12,896	15.4	10.8	-	-	-	-
Samoa	840.9	4,281	6, 036	2.2	1.4	1.1	38.7	0.713	104
Solomon Islands	1303.5	2,132	2,206	4.9	2.7	25.1	37.1	0.546	152
Tonga	427.7	3,959	5,426	2.0	1.5	1.0	37.6	0.726	98
Tuvalu	39.7	3,550	3,575	2.8	1.9	3.3	39.1	-	-
Vanuatu	862.9	3,124	2,922	2.1	-0.2	13.1	37.6	0.603	138
Australia	1,323,421	53,800	44,649	2.6	1.0	0.7	35.8	0.939	3
New Zealand	205, 853	42,941	36,096	2.8	1.4	-	-	0.917	16

Note: Poverty ratio refers to the poverty headcount ratio based on the PPP US$1.90/day threshold value. Poverty ratio and Gini index values are for 2006 for Kiribati, for 2013 for Samoa and Solomon Islands, for 2015 for Tonga, for 2010 for Tuvalu and Vanuatu, and for 2014 for Australia. GDP growth rate and GDP per capita growth rate are averages for 2010–2017. The rest of the figures are for 2017. Niue is not included in the table due to lack of data. HDI: Human Development Index; PPP: purchasing power parity; … = not available.

Source: UNCTAD, 2019: 6

8.   Analysis of trade flows reveals that most of the nine Pacific island countries have significant current account deficits and that all except Solomon Islands have large merchandise trade deficits as a share of GDP. The nine are also found to have high levels of import dependency and a high degree of export concentration on a few products. Main exports for most of the nine countries are fish and molluscs, fruit juice, fruit and vegetables, ships and vessels and perfume plants, while other top exports vary considerably across the nine countries. Asian markets are important destinations for merchandise exports, while markets in Oceania generally account for a low share of such exports. Merchandise imports from Oceanian markets, on the other hand, account for a more significant share, though developed economies in Oceania provide a larger share of imports than developing ones (UNCTAD, 2019). The asymmetric nature of intra-regional merchandise trade flows is detailed in Table 2, where the prominence of Australia and New Zealand in merchandise import and export flows contrasts with that of the nine small island PACER Plus signatories.

9.   All eleven PACER Plus signatories are members of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF), which aims at fomenting regional trade development and integration under the Framework for Pacific Regionalism (2014) (forum.sec.org 2020a). To support these goals, PIF members have entered into several trade agreements, including the South Pacific Regional Trade and Economic Cooperation Agreement SPARTECA (1980) and the Pacific Island Countries Trade Agreement PICTA (2007) (forum.sec.org, 2020a).

Table 2 Share of merchandise trade (export or import) with PACER Plus countries in a given year

Country (year)	Including Australia and New Zealand		Excluding Australia and New Zealand	
	Export	Import	Export	Import
Australia (2018)	2.94%	2.58%	0.10%	0.00%
New Zealand (2018)	16.65%	11.53%	0.73%	0.02%
Samoa (2018)	29.33%	34.80%	0.85%	0.26%
Solomon Islands (2018)	2.12%	22.64%	0.45%	0.16%
Kiribati (2016)	30.43%	43.52%	0.01%	5.32%
Cook Islands (2011)	7.04%	82.87%	1.11%	0.46%
Tonga (2014)	35.50%	34.18%	3.54%	0.18%
Tuvalu (2008)	..	35.52%	..	0.01%
Vanuatu (2011)	24.31%	42.65%	1.60%	0.29%

Source: evaluator's own elaboration based on data from wits.worldbank.org (2020)

The PACER Plus

10.   The PACER Plus is a reciprocal trade arrangement that replaces the one-way SPARTECA agreement, under which the Pacific island countries have quota and duty-free access to Australia and New Zealand. Instead, the PACER Plus obliges the Pacific island signatories to gradually reduce import tariffs and liberalize incoming services, trade and investment (un.org, 2017). The agreement also sets some standards to make national laws and administrative procedures accessible to international actors, as regulatory disinformation and uncertainty represent additional potential obstacles to international trade and economic relations.

11.   Dedicated development assistance has been allocated by Australia and New Zealand to support the Pacific island signatories in preparing for the entry into force of the agreement. The PACER Plus Readiness Package, consisting of 4 million Australian Dollars (AUD) and 4 million New Zealand dollars (NZD), is designed to provide technical support for ratification, customs, notification and revenue planning (dfat.gov.au, 2020b). Further assistance, through the PACER Plus Implementation Package, will be allocated following the entry into force, when Australia and New Zealand will make a further AUD 19 million and NZD 7 million available under the decision making of a Joint Committee of PACER Plus Parties (dfat.gov.au, 2020b). As part of the funding provided, a PACER Plus Implementation Unit will be established to facilitate regional coordination during the implementation phase.

PACER Plus transparency obligations

12.   Transparency, the main focus of the project under evaluation, is one of several elements covered by PACER Plus[3]. The agreement takes in four different transparency obligations: the publication of legislation and other information; the establishment of communication channels in the form of contact points; the notification of other parties on changes in legislation and other information; and providing opportunities to comment on draft legislation. The first of these two obligations were to be fulfilled before the entry into force of the PACER Plus agreement, while the last two are to be fulfilled after[4].

13.   Not all areas of legislation included in the agreement are covered by every one of the four transparency obligations. It is only necessary to publish legislation and other information (regulations, procedures, and administrative rulings) in four areas: trade in goods, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), technical barriers to trade (TBT) and trade in services. (mfat.gov.nz, 2017). Likewise, signatories are obliged to issue notifications – that is to say provide information and respond to questions on actual or proposed measures that may be of interest to other signatories – on the same four areas (mfat.gov.nz, 2017). On the other hand, communication channels must be provided for eight areas of legislation[5], while opportunities to comment are only necessary for SPS and TBT. Under the agreement, each country is also obliged to provide contact points. These are individuals who are officially in charge of implementing the four transparency obligations and providing communication channels which cover all the topics for which publication is required. The contact points must therefore be trained to comply with the disclosure requirements.

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[3] Others are trade in goods and services, rules of origin, customs procedures, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), technical barriers to trade (TBT), movement of natural persons, investment, development and economic cooperation and consultations and dispute settlement.

4 In the case of most categories of legislation, the obligation to notify was only activated following the agreement's entry into force. However, there were two exceptions; it was required that signatories notify each other on trade remedies (which fall under technical barriers to trade) and import licensing (under trade in goods) before entry into force.

[5] These are trade in goods, trade in services, sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), technical barriers to trade (TBT), investment, movement of natural persons, development and cooperation and institutional provisions.

2.   SUBJECT OF THE EVALUATION

14.   The project under evaluation involved UNCTAD, with the financial support of the Governments of Australia and New Zealand through their PACER Plus Readiness Package, providing training and technical assistance to the nine Pacific island PACER Plus countries. The aim of the project was to increase the trade–related regulatory transparency and the investment-related capacity of the beneficiaries, ahead of the agreement's entry into force. This would in turn support the countries in achieving the standards established in PACER Plus and leveraging the opportunities presented by the agreement. By meeting these goals, it was aimed to strengthen regional integration and competitiveness and favour economic opportunities, with a particular focus on small and medium-sized enterprises. Gender considerations were to be mainstreamed throughout project activities.

15.   The project had a budget of AUD 2 million, with half contributed by each donor. The start date was 1 March 2018 and it was originally planned that it would run for 18 months, finishing by the end of the third quarter in 2019 with a three-month evaluation to follow. In the event, the project was extended twice in the period preceding this evaluation, firstly to June 2020, and then to 31 December 2020. Finally, UNCTAD decided to extend the project a third time until June 2021 with its own resources.

16.   The project established seven overarching goals, corresponding to the indicators of achievement listed in the Project Document (Doc. 2018b). These were:

-    Prepare countries for the initial notifications and information exchanges that will take place on entry into force of the PACER Plus.
-    Support countries in acquiring capacity to implement PACER Plus transparency obligations.
-    Strengthen human and institutional capacity on links between trade and gender including in transparency obligations.
-    Establish contact points and enquiry points in the nine beneficiary countries.
-    Launch a dialogue for a regional coordinating network for maintaining transparency standards.
-    Set the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees.
-    Launch a regional electronic platform (composed of national and regional modules) for publication of information and transparency of trade regulations and equip countries with practical knowledge on the platform's use.

17.   The main project outputs were online national trade portals established in each beneficiary country. These portals were to provide an interface where information on relevant legislation and procedures could be uploaded and accessed. They would thus help provide the technical means for countries to meet their PACER Plus transparency obligations. They would also facilitate trade and investment by providing easier access to relevant information. Together with a regional trade facilitation index, the national trade portals would form a regional electronic platform. This content management system (CMS) would facilitate the comparison and benchmarking of trade-related procedures among PACER Plus signatories, helping to simplify and harmonize procedures and contributing to the sustainability of the project.

18.   The main project activities centered around the gathering and sharing of information and the training of government staff and national consultants in order to meet the project's goals and the ongoing PACER Plus transparency requirements. During the first half of the project, a gap analysis, including a gender analysis, was to be conducted to ascertain each country's starting point. National

information officers were also to be hired, who would be responsible for gathering and uploading information to the national portals during the project. And a regional workshop was to be held to achieve aims which included promoting understanding and support among stakeholders, providing training on PACER Plus commitments and identifying challenges and opportunities relevant to the project. Finally, the regional electronic platform was to be launched. In the second half, one export and two import procedures were to be published by each country to prepare national counterparts for the publishing of information. National workshops were also to be held in order to, among other things, provide training, including on gender; introduce toolkits and knowledge products relevant to the project; set the basis for national transparency PACER Plus committees; and encourage stakeholder participation. The regional trade facilitation index was also to be implemented.

19.   The project was to be run on the ground by a regional project coordinator, who would be based in Samoa for its duration. The regional coordinator would be responsible for training national consultants, who would conduct gap analyses, and national information officers, who would be responsible for information gathering and processing. The coordinator would also deliver the national workshops. These efforts were supported by other UNCTAD experts who provided advice remotely from the headquarters in Geneva.

20.   The project was framed under the PACER Plus Readiness Package, which is a technical assistance funding package committed by Australia and New Zealand to addresses the beneficiary countries' immediate needs related to the ratification of the PACER Plus. In addition, the readiness package includes technical support for ratification, customs, and revenue planning. Upon ratification, a second technical assistance programme, the PACER Plus Implementation Package, will be launched to provide support on rules of origin and other aspects of the PACER Plus tariff commitments, customs, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment, trade in services, and investment.

3.   EVALUATION SCOPE, OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

21.   This final evaluation of the project has the following specific objectives: to assess the degree to which the desired project results have been realized, including the extent of gender and human rights mainstreaming; and identify good practices and lessons learned from the project that could feed into and enhance the implementation of related interventions. It covered all activities implemented over the duration of the project from 18 May 2018 to 31 December 2020.

22.   The evaluation was guided by the questions provided in the ToR, which are clearly formulated and linked to the intervention logic. The questions are also largely comprehensive and consistent in relation to the standard evaluation criteria, as shown in Box 1.

23.   During the inception phase of the evaluation, some of the questions were slightly modified and reformulated in a dichotomous manner for the sake of simplicity and homogeneity. Each was to be further elaborated on with quantification and explanation whenever possible. Finally, Questions 1 and 2 under the relevance criterion were reorganized in order to separate the project relevance to beneficiaries' needs from project design and alignment to UNCTAD's mandate and priorities. Question 5, which falls under effectiveness, was reformulated by the evaluator. This question asked about lessons learned and best practices for future interventions and was modified to emphasize its focus on effectiveness. In the following paragraphs, the evaluation approach is presented, and it is explained how each criterion was applied to the project under evaluation.

24.   In this evaluation, relevance can be defined as the extent to which UNCTAD's measures to increase technical knowledge and capacities on transparency-related trade and investment issues responded to the needs of beneficiary countries within the scope of the PACER Plus agreement. Also, it entails an assessment of UNCTAD's involvement in this project with regards to its mandate, objectives and comparative advantage.

25.   The project's effectiveness is the extent to which the project contributed to improving beneficiary countries' capacities on regulatory transparency and investment related issues. According to the Project Document, this concerned several indicators of achievement that have been grouped in two overarching outcomes: compliance with PACER Plus Transparency obligations and overall information exchange capacities.

26.   Compliance with PACER Plus Transparency obligations include, for each of the nine Pacific islands, training for the publication of legislation in an electronic platform; preparation for notifications and information exchanges on the entry into force of PACER Plus; and the establishment of contact points and enquiry points. Overall information exchange capacity, according to the Project Document, included setting the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees through the establishment of national stakeholder networks, launching a dialogue for regional coordinating networks and launching a regional electronic platform.

27.   The evaluation has also assessed project efficiency, which is to say how the project was implemented, monitored and coordinated, and whether or not the expected outputs were achieved according to the work plan and budget. It will also consider the use of intangible resources from UNCTAD and other partners. The focus of the project assessment against the efficiency will focus on the activities listed in the Project Document (Doc 2018b).

28.   Sustainability can be defined as the commitment and the capacity of the project beneficiaries to continue working towards the project objectives, as well as related arrangements. Specifically, it refers to the ongoing capacity to implement PACER Plus transparency obligations, including the maintenance and updating of trade portals; continuing a dialogue towards establishing a regional coordinating network for maintaining transparency standards; and an ongoing commitment to form

National Transparency PACER Plus Committees from the base provided by the established national stakeholder networks.

29.   The gender and human rights criterion entailed an assessment of how the project design advanced equity and ensured the inclusion of women, as well as the most vulnerable countries, regions or groups. It considered how the project has responded to any gender-specific constraints identified during the initial gap analysis, including through the incorporation of any gender-specific components in training courses and workshops, and the strengthening of human and institutional capacity on the links between trade and gender, particularly those related to transparency obligations.

30.   The evaluation also considered partnerships generated by the project. These included national stakeholder networks and regional network initiatives. It also assessed how the project built and reinforced partnerships between stakeholders, including national consultants, partner organizations, international experts and UNCTAD staff.

Box 1. Evaluation questions (EQs)

Relevance

1. Did the project properly reflect and address the development needs of participating countries?

2. Were the actual activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goals and intended outcomes and how did the different activities complement each other towards the intended results?

3. Did the project take into account UNCTAD's mandate and priorities and did UNCTAD tap into its comparative advantage in this area?

Effectiveness

4. Are there indications that the project achieved, or is likely to achieve, planned objectives and outcomes as stated in the Project Document, as well as the SDG targets supported by the project?

5. What are enabling factors that contributed to the achievement of results? Were there any limiting factors? What actions are needed to overcome barriers that are limiting progress?

Efficiency

6. Have project implementation modalities, and internal monitoring and control been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner?

7. Has the project leveraged in-house expertise, previous research and technical cooperation outcomes, existing databases and other internal resources of UNCTAD and/or external collaboration from international development partners and mechanisms?

Sustainability of results

8. Is there evidence that beneficiary countries are committed to continuing to work towards the project objectives beyond the end of the project and/or have there been catalytic effects from the project both at the national and regional levels?

Gender and human rights

9. Did the design and implementation of the project incorporate gender mainstreaming considerations, and are results identified in this regard?

10. Did the project advance UNCTAD's efforts to promote equitable development?

Partnerships and synergies

11. Did the project advance partnerships with national and regional counterparts, international development partners, the civil society and/or the private sector in support of results and the sustainability of results?

4. METHODOLOGY OF THE EVALUATION

31.   In order to respond to the evaluation questions and to assess the project against the above-defined criteria, the evaluation collected findings from numerous sources of information. These sources included documents generated by the project (progress reports, lists of attendance, training materials, end-of-activity evaluations, etc.) and relevant background documents produced by UNCTAD and development partners engaged in trade promotion in the Pacific region. Also, the opinions of the project actors and beneficiaries were collected by means of a series of interviews and a discussion group, while a consultation on the project's relevance was conducted among private sector stakeholders. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting travel restrictions and health measures, all consultations were conducted online; in person interviews and meetings were replaced by videoconferences, as described in the following paragraphs. The data-collection methods mentioned above were used as follows, while the full evaluation matrix is presented in Annex V.

Review of trade portals and project documents

32.   Two documentary reviews were conducted. First, a 'project document' review covered the PACER Plus treaty; the Project Document (Doc, 2018b); progress reports (Docs 2018a, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a); a best practice collection elaborated in the framework of the programme (Doc, 2020b); and evidence on the progress of activities disseminated online (unctad.org, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c; and dfat.gov.au, 2020a), as well as outputs from specific activities, such as gap analyses. It also included documents on beneficiary countries' national development plans, UNCTAD's mandate and strategy and the UN Cooperation Framework. Secondly, the documents uploaded into the trade platforms and their categorization were reviewed in order to verify beneficiary compliance with the publication requirements set in the PACER Plus Agreement.

33.   Of the four transparency obligations established in the PACER Plus (publication, establishment of contact points, notification and opportunity to comment), publication has had special value for this evaluation. It applies before the entry into force of the treaty, it is the most time-consuming obligation and it paves the way to meeting other obligations such as notification and opportunity to comment. Consequently, the evaluation document review has paid special attention to the national trade portals, which were used to publish legislation.

34.   In order to carry out such an extensive review, the obligation of publication was first detailed according to the PACER Plus legal text, with five chapters setting publication obligations and details distributed across articles and paragraphs within each specific chapter. The result of this review is summarized in the effectiveness section under Evaluation Question 4 (see Table 5), and further detailed in Annex I. It is presented according to the categories used by UNCTAD and its national counterparts. These are: 1. Import licenses; 2. Export licenses; 3. Trade remedies; 4. Other like fees and duties; 5 Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary measures (SPS); 6. Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT); 7. Services licensing; and 8. International trade agreements.

35.   As a complement to the review of trade portals, web statistics and social internet metrics provided by Google Analytics and Google advanced searches have been used to provide data on the actual use of the uploaded information.

Private sector consultation

36.   Private sector stakeholders who were involved in project activities such as national workshops were consulted by means of an online survey tool. The questionnaire was distributed by email among the project team's contacts. This consultation enquired about the private sector representatives' general view of the PACER Plus agreement, the regional challenges for increased trade and investment and the aspects of regulatory transparency that they considered most relevant. Forty-one representatives from six different signatory countries responded, 53% of whom were female. Their views are taken as a relevant input to the evaluation from a specific category of project participant. However, considering their selection bias and limited size, their views cannot be taken as representing the entire private sector of the beneficiary countries.

Interviews and discussion group

37.   Semi-structured interviews were conducted online via the videoconference platforms Zoom and Microsoft Teams. They were used to collect richer information from the most relevant actors and observers of the project, as well as to deepen understanding of more complex issues raised by the evaluation questions, such as UNCTAD's comparative advantage and its national partners' sense of ownership. All of the interviews were guided by the list of evaluation questions.

38.   Finally, the evaluator participated in an end-of-project virtual meeting, which gathered UNCTAD's counterparts from beneficiary countries and the donors. This was used to discuss preliminary conclusions of the evaluation report, triangulate findings drawn from the above-listed sources and collect further information. The discussion was supported by an online survey tool. Responses were gathered from 11 representatives from seven beneficiary countries. Four of the respondents were female, six were male and one preferred not to state a gender.

Triangulation

39.   The reliability of the evaluation was sought by triangulating sources of information; that is, the use of various techniques and/or sources of information for each evaluation question. Table 3 shows how each evaluation question drew on different evaluation sources and data collection techniques. This is further detailed in the evaluation matrix provided in Annex V. Findings on each evaluation question had to be supported by at least two information sources in order to be considered valid.

Table 3. Triangulation

Number of indicators/sub-questions for every evaluation question and data collection technique.

| #	EQ	Discussion group	Document review	Internet metrics	Interviews	Private Sec.	Web review	Total general
1	Beneficiaries' needs	1			1	2		4
2	Project design	1			1	3		5
3	UNCTAD's role	1	2		1			4
4	Achievements	7	7	4	7		5	30
5	Factors in effectiveness	1	1		1			3
6	Implementation and monitoring	1	2		1			4
7	Use of UNCTAD's resources	1	1		1			3
8	Beneficiaries' commitment	1	2	2	1			6
9	Gender mainstreaming	1	1		1		1	4
10	Equitable development	1	1		1		1	4
11	Private and public partnerships	1	1		1			3

5. FINDINGS

Relevance

1. The project addressed information gaps in beneficiary countries which affect compliance with the PACER Plus and the overall business environment

40.   Legal information in beneficiary countries is not comprehensively and systematically managed and consolidated. They do not have centralized legal databases[6], and the various pieces of legislation and second-layer regulations that apply to a specific issue often need to be gathered *ad hoc* from several departments. Parliamentary services and attorney general offices partly fill the gap, but the executives do not have dedicated capacities for managing and sharing legal information. In this context, the entry into force of the PACER Plus agreement, with the transparency implications described in the introduction, posed a real challenge.

41.   This lack of information about trade and investment related regulations and procedures has a negative influence on companies' capacity to operate in other countries in the Pacific according to the private sector consultation conducted in the framework of this evaluation. It was found that uncertainty about import and export procedures (38%) and other regulations (29%) are two significant trade obstacles among the private sector (see Graph 1). This suggests a clear need for improved transparency mechanisms and access to information, as aimed at by the project.

Graph 1. Issues which have a more negative influence on a company's capacity to trade and invest in other countries in the Pacific region (N=52)
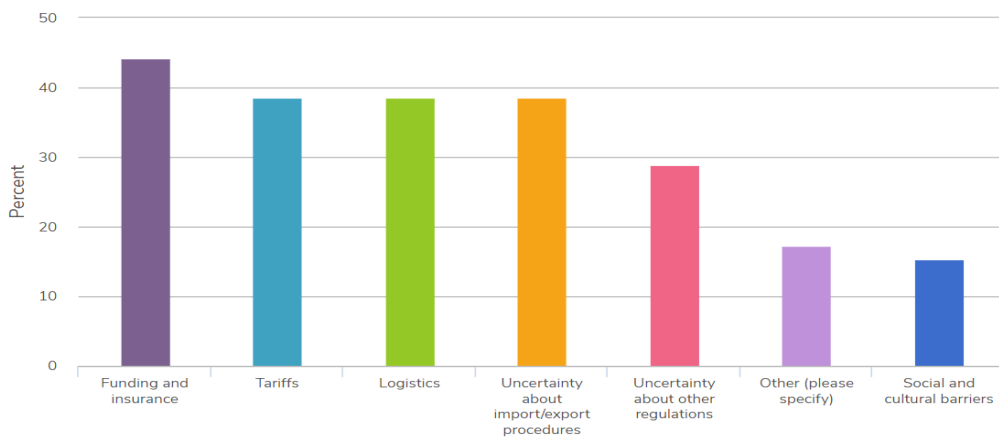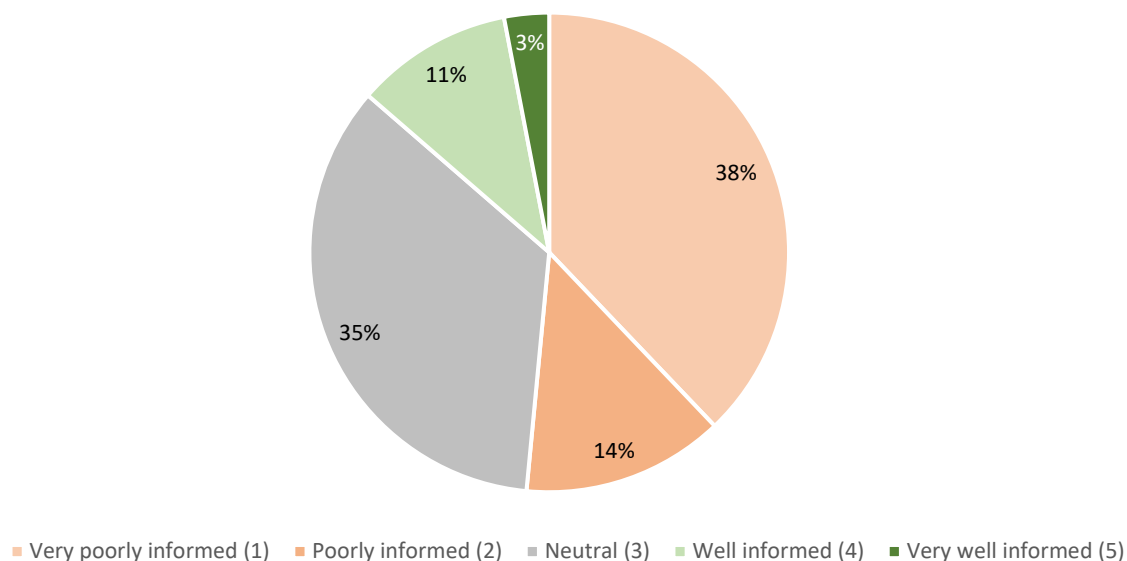

Source: private sector consultation (Question 1)

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[6] With the exception of Tuvalu, which has a database run by the Attorney General, according to interviewees.

42.   Furthermore, firms are not well informed on the type of trade regulations relevant to their activity. As shown in Graph 2, most of the private sector representatives consulted considered themselves to be poorly informed in this area.

Graph2. Respondents opinion on how well informed they are on the types of trade regulations relevant to their companies
From 1 (very poorly informed) to 5 (very well informed) (N=37)

Very poorly informed (1) ■ Poorly informed (2) ■ Neutral (3) ■ Well informed (4) ■ Very well informed (5)

Source: private sector consultation (Question 3)

43.   The relevance of the project in addressing information gaps was also supported by the responses of the public sector officials consulted during the discussion group. All agreed that the project had responded to their countries' needs in trade-related transparency and to the needs of other PACER Plus signatory countries (see Annex III). Indeed, the majority of their governments have acknowledged the need for improved business environments in their national development plans, while a third of the plans refer to increasing legislative transparency as part of their national development goals, and over half of them advocate increased economic integration at a regional and global scale[7].

44.   While there is a consensus on the need to increase legislative transparency for domestic and international businesses, the companies who were consulted agreed that the PACER Plus agreement itself will not have a very high impact on investment and trade opportunities.

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[7] See References section for list of national development plans.

2. A proven IT solution was provided for an information management problem

45.   The problem addressed by the project was information mismanagement and the solution suggested, a web-accessed information management system, was fit for purpose. The national trade portals, which along with the regional module would form a regional electronic platform, were created using UNCTAD's content management system (CMS), one of the tools offered by UNCTAD's Business Facilitation Program. This system allows information to be displayed to users on a public website. Users can interact with the site and its administrators via email and online chat facilities to make inquiries, suggestions and complaints. The system can be installed on a local server or in the cloud, based on the preferences of the recipient country. Importantly, it is intended that specific technical knowledge is not required for the technical maintenance of the site, but rather can be achieved through 'normal server maintenance', with UNCTAD providing complete technical documentation. Therefore, it allows for the registering and updating of procedures, and corresponding data, and the modification of the public interface via the administration interface, administrated by beneficiary country officials (businessfacilitation.org 2020). The CMS was further tailored by UNCTAD to the requirements of the project with the creation of two new modules developed specifically to meet the needs of the project: one for collecting, publishing and notifying on legislation and a second for contact points to facilitate information sharing in the context of the PACER Plus transparency obligations.

46.   This online solution also responded well to the information gathering habits of the private sector. According to the consultation results, they rely on internet resources – the internet is the most frequently indicated way of obtaining information to trade or invest in foreign countries by respondents – more commonly than governments, local companies, and specialized consultants (see Graph 3). However, the national trade and investment portal websites were only familiar to 61% of respondents (see Annex IV).

Graph 3. Ways to obtain information to trade or invest (N=44)
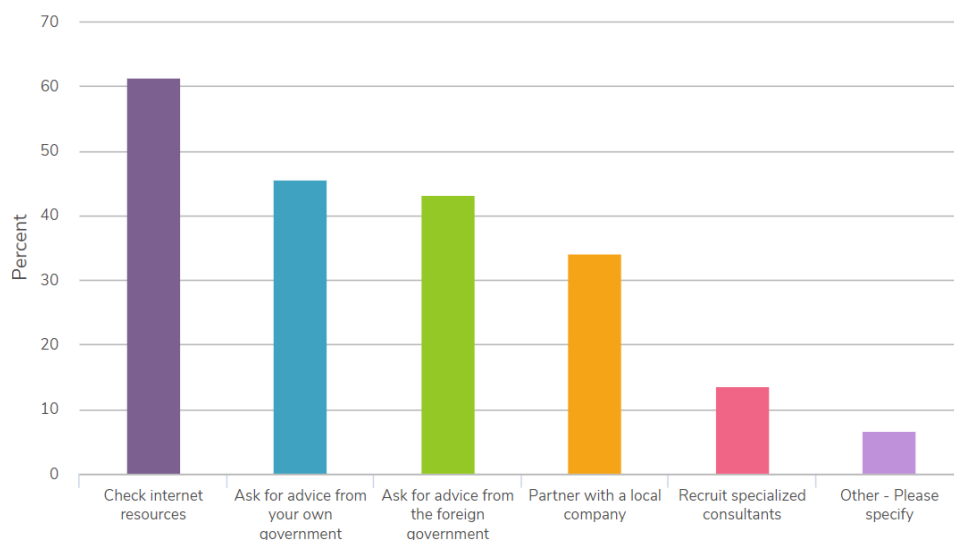
Source: private sector consultation (Question 4)

47.   The utility of the IT solution in responding to the project's transparency related objectives is clear. Likewise, the regional and national workshops provided necessary opportunities for training and

forums for information exchange. And the creation of a trade facilitation index as a mechanism for contributing towards the sustainability of the regional platform had clear relevance. However, the Project Document (Doc 2018b) sets other outcomes that were not so precisely defined and whose complementarity to the main project outcomes was less clear. Involving stakeholders in order to 'set the basis' for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees and 'launching a dialogue for a regional coordinating network' were additional goals. What constituted a national committee or a regional coordinating network was not well-defined in project documents, and during interviews with UNCTAD staff and national counterparts it was agreed that such institutional developments were not needed to meet the PACER Plus transparency obligations.

48.   In retrospect, the solution proposed by UNCTAD posed some human resources challenges related to the small size of the administration and departments that were to implement the portals (see the Efficiency section). Some interviews have raised a question about the adaptability of this tool, which was designed and first implemented in larger countries, to the specificities of SIDS. However, further reflection with beneficiary countries revealed that the most time-consuming tasks of the project had to do with information gathering across departments, while the support of an electronic platform did in fact facilitate the classification and dissemination of the documents once identified. Moreover, once the legislative information is uploaded, the maintenance and update work are limited to changes in legislation or administrative reforms. This can be done in a user-friendly manner and optimizes the time of departments with scarce human resources.

3. The project aligned with UNCTAD's mandate and tapped into UNCTAD's global and regional experience

49.   Considering that all nine beneficiary countries are SIDS (un.org, 2020), and Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tuvalu are classified as LDCs, the project is fully relevant to the UN Sustainable Development Agenda. In fact, according to UNCTAD the project was expected to contribute to four Sustainable Development Goals[8]: SDGs 5. Gender Equality, 8. Economic Growth 16. Strong Institutions; and 17. Partnerships, and five targets: 5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere; 8.3 Promote development-oriented policies for productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and MSMEs; 16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels; 17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020; and 17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development (sdgs.un.org, 2020). Table 4 shows the results of a logical review of how the SDGs were incorporated into the project, both in terms of the project's design and its achievements.

50.   The project is well-aligned to UNCTAD's mandate in supporting developing countries in achieving beneficial integration into the international trading system (UNCTAD.org) and received strong public support from UNCTAD's leadership. In accordance with paragraphs 55.b and 55.v of its Nairobi commitment, UNCTAD should 'provide technical assistance on the changing international trade landscape, including identifying means of stimulating economic diversification, reducing trade costs and promoting value added production, including in global value chains for goods and services, while addressing transparency, social and environmental responsibility and their potential

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[8] See Annex VII

development impacts'; and 'assist developing countries, in particular the least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing states address the challenges and opportunities in relation to the use of the internet and e-commerce, to develop their international trade capacities' (UNCTAD, 2020).

51. In terms of more specific regional experience, UNCTAD is involved in the eTrade Readiness Assessments taking place in Kiribati and Tuvalu and has already conducted assessments in Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu for the same purpose. It has also established its Automated System for Customs Data (ASYCUDA) programme in all nine Pacific island PACER Plus countries and will run the forthcoming Trade for Sustainability project in the Melanesian Spearhead Group, which aims to build on the PACER Plus project by using trade legislation collected during the project as a key input. Furthermore, UNCTAD has relevant technical expertise. At the beginning of the project, the agency was running trade portal projects in approximately ten developing countries through the previously described eRegulations system, which has been active since 2005. This experience with trade and business facilitation portals accounts for 68 systems in 37 seven countries, and 2993 documented procedures. (businessfacilitation.org, 2020).

Table 4. Logical review of SDGs in project design and achievements

Target	Project rational	Project achievements
5.1. End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere	The Project Document integrated a gender equity goal: 'Strengthen human and institutional capacity on links between trade and gender including in transparency obligations.'	The project did uncover the link between trade transparency and gender equity and produced reports that could inspire policy action in the future (e.g. by prioritizing transparency on export procedures for products produced by women).
8.3 Promote development-oriented policies for productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and MSMEs	The project is framed under a trade agreement meant to increase economic opportunities. The agreement includes a cooperation dimension for increasing the SIDSs' capacity to fully benefit from such opportunities.	Trade portals are designed to facilitate trade and have been appreciated in beneficiary countries for their potential for overall business facilitation.
16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels	The project goal was to build capacity to meet transparency requirements in legislative/regulatory activities and public administration procedures.	The project addressed information management gaps that go beyond the PACER Plus transparency requirements as it employed ICT to systematize and disseminate legal information which is relevant for trading and doing business
17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries'	The project is framed under a trade agreement meant to increase economic opportunities.	The impact of this project on SIDS with regards to trade flows is not yet known.

share of global exports by 2020		
17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development	The project links trade policy, with good governance and inclusiveness considerations such as gender equality.	The national counterparts could make use of trade portals in the future to pursue specific inclusive trade goals.

Source: evaluator's own elaboration

52.   Interviews confirmed that UNCTAD was perceived as having a comparative advantage over other potential partners in part due to its experience in trade portal creation. Indeed, the experience was a factor in its selection over other international agencies.   UNCTAD's credibility and political authority[9] in developing countries, strong record in capacity building and a comprehensive trade portfolio, which includes programmes on trade facilitation and gender and trade, were also mentioned as factors in its selection.

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[9] In the framework of the project, UNCTAD's Secretary General, Mukhisa Kituyi, issued a statement of support for the agency's involvement in the PACER Plus (unctad.org, 2018c) available at: https://unctad.org/news/unctad-australia-and-new-zealand-launch-project-pacific-islands

Effectiveness

53.   As indicated in Section 4, this evaluation question considers whether the project goals, corresponding to the seven indicators of achievement, were met. It was found that these goals were in large part achieved.

4. The project was very effective in helping countries to meet publication obligations

54.   The nine Pacific island countries have met their publication obligations by using the trade portals designed and put in place in the framework of the project. As explained in Section 1, there are four type of transparency obligations in the PACER Plus. The publication of legislation and other information (including regulations, procedures and administrative rulings) is one of these and was required to be completed before the entry into force of the agreement.

55.   The obligation to publish covers four overarching areas: trade in goods (covered in Chapters 2 and 4 of the agreement), sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) (Chapter 5), technical barriers to trade (TBT) (Chapter 6) and trade in services (Chapter 7). The extent of the beneficiary countries' compliance with the chapters, articles and paragraphs of the PACER Plus agreement which require publication of legislation on certain issues is indicated in Table 5[10]. It is further detailed in Annex I, where a detailed description of compliance relating to various sub-categories is provided.

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[10] It should be noted that this analysis was intended to confirm that the beneficiary countries had published relevant information under each of the categories covered by the agreement, but neither the project team nor the evaluator could verify that all pieces of legislation belonging to a particular country and pertaining to one of the aforementioned aspects of trade had been published.

Table 5. Legislation published by category

Chapter	Article	Issues	Cook Islands	Kiribati	Nauru	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu	UNCTAD categories
2	7.4 7.7	Information of Anti-Dumping and Countervailing Measures	Y	NA	Y	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA	Y	3. Trade remedies
	7.10 7.13	Global Safeguard Measures	Y	NA	Y	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	Y	3. Trade remedies
	11.3	Import licensing	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	1. Import licenses
	13.1	Classification or valuation of the products for custom purposes	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	2 Quota / Prohibition/ Export license
		Rates of duty, taxes or other charges	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	2. Quota / Prohibition/ Export license
		Rules on sale, distribution, transport, insurance, warehousing…	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	2. Quota / Prohibition/ Export license
	13.2	International agreements	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	N	8. International trade agreements
	14	Fees and duties	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	4. Other like fees and duties
4	13.2	Customs Administration statutory and regulatory provisions and any customs administrative procedures	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	-
5	8.1	Sanitary and phytosanitary regulations that are applicable	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	5. SPS
6	8.1 8.4	Technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	6. TBT
7	17.2 17.3	Measures of general application relating to licensing requirements and procedures, qualification requirements and procedures, and technical standards.	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7. Services licensing
	17.2	Agreements affecting international trade policy	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	8. International trade agreements
	14	Non-preferential and preferential applied rates of customs duty	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7. Services licensing
	14	A list of all existing custom fees and charges	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7. Services licensing
	14	Information on its new or modified import licensing procedures	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	7. Services licensing

Notes: (1) 'Y' indicates that the country has published legislation related to a certain issue in the trade portal; 'N' indicates that such publications have not been found; and 'NA' indicates that the evaluation has found information according to which such legislation does not exist in the country under assessment. (2) UNCTAD has guided the publication work with a list of eight categories that do not perfectly match the agreement structure. This was done for reasons of practicality and clarity. A column has been added to the table to link the PACER Plus Agreement with UNCTAD's categories.

Source: evaluator's own elaboration

4.bis The project reinforced regulatory transparency beyond publication requirements of the PACER Plus agreement

Procedures

56.   The publication of legislation in the trade portals has covered all nine countries, and all the eight categories listed in the methodology section11. As shown in Graph 4, created with data from the trade portals' internal statistics, 1,051 pieces of legislation were published. Furthermore, each beneficiary country was to publish two import procedures and one export procedure over the course of the project to provide practice in the publication of procedures. This goal was met and indeed exceeded. The countries published between three and eleven import procedures and between two and eleven export procedures, with many of them covering several sub-procedures (see Annex VIII). For instance, importing animal products in a given country, which appears as one procedure in the trade portal, may integrate registration procedures in several departments (e.g. finance, justice, customs, trade, etc.), as well as applications for biosecurity and customs clearance. According to the data provided by UNCTAD, which was sourced from the national platforms, 546 procedures (descriptions of steps for achieving an objective) are currently uploaded on the platform. This has resulted in 1,287 documents, such as templates and certificates, which concretize the procedures. These documents have involved participation of 117 administration users (see Graph 4).

Graph 4. Number of administration users per country and procedures, documents and pieces of legislation uploaded per country
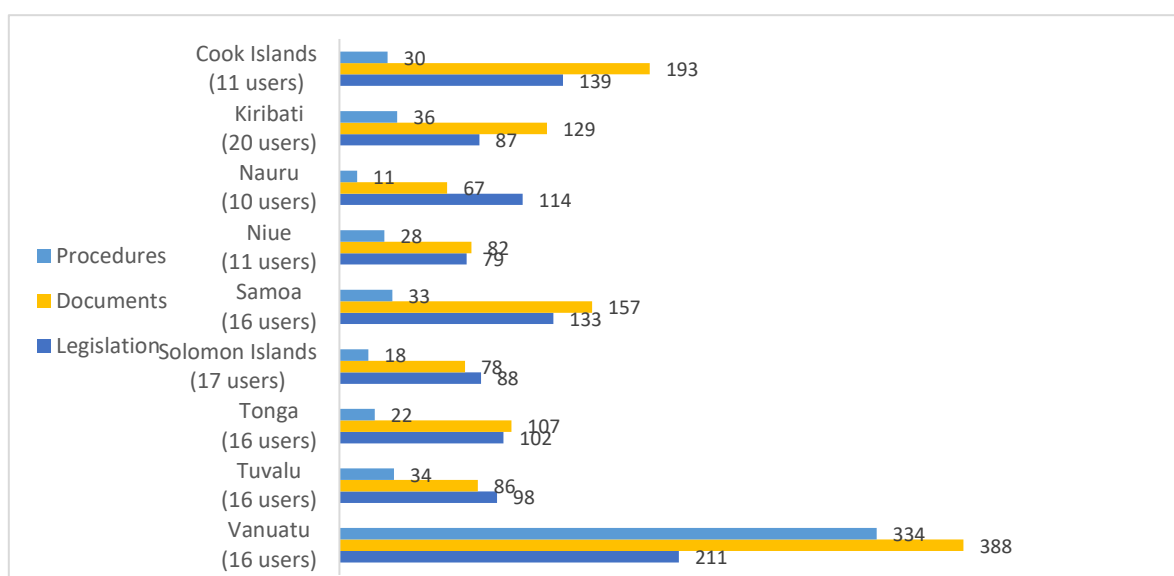
Source: internal platform statistics provided by UNCTAD staff

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11 These are: 1. Import licenses; 2. Export licenses; 3. Trade remedies; 4. Other like fees and duties; 5 Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary measures (SPS); 6. Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT); 7. Services licensing; and 8. International trade agreements.

57.   Procedure sections in trade portals not only group pieces of legislation by products, therefore connecting with the needs of companies, but also inform on the way legislation is applied in practical terms. The private sector has already benefited from the portals. Indeed, 44% of the private firms consulted said that the trade portal website has been useful for business operations, versus 13% that say it has not (see Table 6). Additionally, 6% of the respondents use the portal every week and 56% do so monthly (see Annex IV).

Table 6 Assessment of national trade and investment portal websites' usefulness
From 1 (not useful) to 5 (very useful) (N=18)

Country	Percent	Count
Not useful at all (1)	-	0
Not very useful (2)	13%	3
Neutral (3)	44%	10
Useful (4)	26%	6
Very useful (5)	17%	4
Average mark (1-5)	**3.6**	**18**

Source: private sector consultation (Question 8)

Business facilitation

58.   In addition to trade regulation, the trade portals were used to upload information on how to start a business, how to obtain a tax identification number and how to obtain visas and residence permits. These business facilitation services were greatly appreciated by national counterparts and created expectations of the broader use of the portals as single windows for businesses, both for domestic and international operations.

Transparency capacity building

59.   By consolidating all the information available in the trade portals and receiving training and support from the UNCTAD team to meet publication requirements, the national teams appointed by the beneficiary governments have become aware of the subjects affected by the agreement transparency obligations. They have also improved their understanding of the kind of regulatory changes that might entail notification and the providing of opportunity to comment to other signatories. Moreover, the nine beneficiary countries have established contact points, and the trade portals integrate contact lists that enormously facilitate notification. Indeed, when asked about capacities related to trade transparency, public officials agreed on several improvements at a national level, as shown in Graph 5.

Graph 5. Level of improvement in capacities related to trade transparency
From 1 (low) to 5 (high) (N=11)
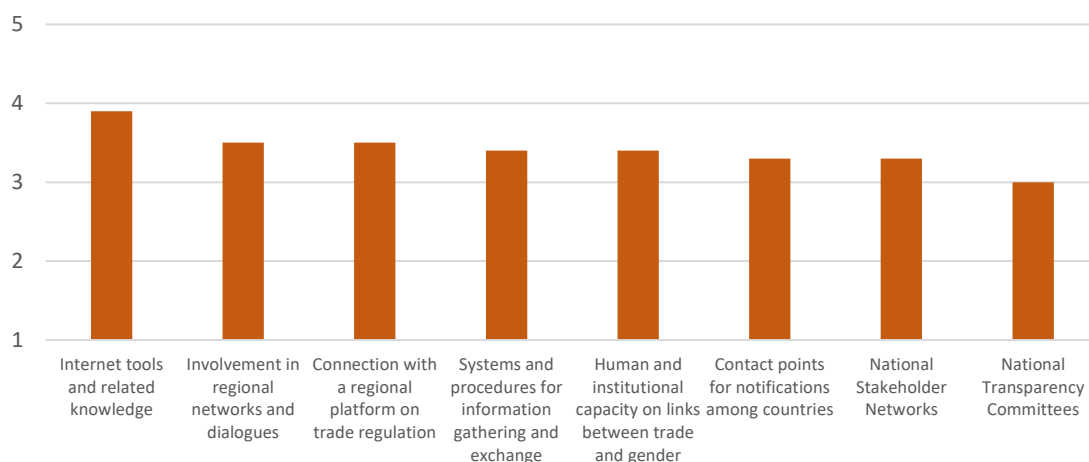
Source: discussion group (Question 4)

60.   With regards to transparency obligations, officials agreed, both for their own country and other signatories, that countries have made information available, to some extent, on the aspects for which transparency is required by the PACER Plus agreement. As shown in Graph 6, the lowest-ranked aspect concerns global safeguard measures, and the second lowest one concerns anti-dumping and countervailing measures, which according to the UNCTAD team and WTO databases do not exist in the concerned countries.

Graph 6. Officials' opinion on the extent to which countries (own and other) have made information available

From 1 (low extent) to 5 (high extent) (N=11)
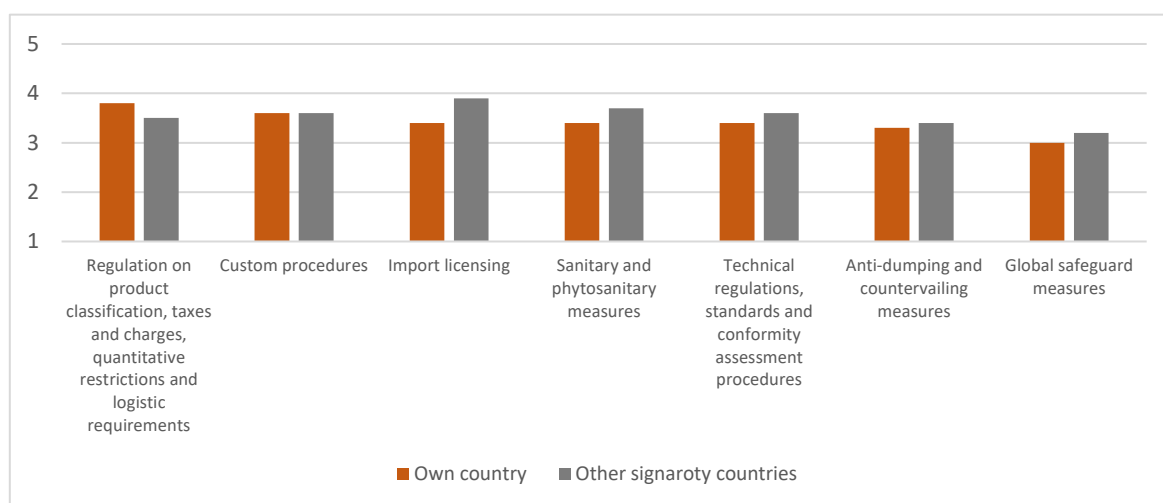
Source: discussion group (Questions 2 and 3)

61.   Despite the positive self-assessment of beneficiary countries about the capacities built by the project, it must be noted that countries have not met their notification obligations foreseen by the entry into force of the agreement. These obligations concern import licencing and trade remedies.

Information on the former is available in the portals, and trade remedy measures are absent in the beneficiary country legislation, but the partners should have formally informed each other on both issues[12]. Moreover, UNCTAD added a systematic database of trade legislation to the trade portals and a tool that can help to do these notifications by means of an email, which is then recorded on the platform. The notification requirements, and how to meet them using the platform, formed part of the programme for the project's closing regional forum held in November 2020.

Networking

62.   In addition to supporting compliance with the transparency requirements stipulated in the PACER Plus agreement, the project integrated other complementary goals related to information exchange and dialogue among stakeholders both at national and regional level. These were launching a dialogue for a regional coordinating network and setting the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees.

63.   At the regional level, the project set up a regional platform with two main functionalities. First, it is a single access point to national trade portals. Secondly, it provides a trade facilitation index for comparing and measuring ease of import and export procedures. The former functionality contributes to making regional cooperation among PACER Plus partners more visible, while the latter has a great potential for policy dialogue as it can be used to support peer reviewing and regional benchmarking with a view to simplifying procedures and facilitating cross-national business operations. In addition, the project participants were gathered in two regional meetings which were instrumental for the project's implementation and might have also contributed to increasing regional exchanges from a broader perspective. In fact, these contacts were used to share information on the COVID-19 pandemic in the Pacific SIDS[13]. That said, it is difficult to conclude that the project did launch a dialogue for a regional coordinating network[14]. Moreover, UNCTAD officials indicated that such a goal does not respond to countries' needs because there are already regional coordination mechanisms in place, such as the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat meetings, PACER Plus signatories' meetings and regular Pacific Trade Ministers meetings.

64.   At the national level, it cannot be said that networks of national stakeholders which set the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees have been created either. Some project activities, such as document collection across government departments, national training sessions and national validation workshops, might have reinforced coordination in these issues but do not necessarily constitute a new network. Again, according to UNCTAD staff, networks and committees (e.g. WTO Committees) already exist at a country level, and the project focused on tools and capacities rather than the set-up of new institutions.

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12 It should be noted that ensuring that these notification obligations were met did not fall within the remit of the project.
13 The UNCTAD regional coordinator met with the Australian High Commission, New Zealand High Commission, Women in Business Development Inc. and other UN organisations. Additionally, UNCTAD was in direct exchange with the Oceanian Customs Office (OCO), the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat (PIFS), stakeholders of the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF), the Centre for International Private Enterprise (CIPE) and the Global Trade Professional Alliance (GTPA) to coordinate respective activities. Meetings were also held with the Samoa Association of Manufacturers and Exporters (SAME) and several national women's business associations.
14 A new section was created on the 9 trade portals to inform users about COVID-19 measures. It is found in the upper menu of every portal https://pacific.tradeportal.org

5. Enabling and limiting factors

65.   Several enabling factors were highlighted over the course of interviews with the project team and beneficiary country representatives, and during the discussion group. It was commented that the location of the Regional Coordinator post in Samoa was an important step, as it enabled contact between him and project stakeholders in the same, or relatively close, time zone(s) and generally facilitated communication. Good communication with UNCTAD in general was also mentioned by beneficiaries as an enabling factor.

66.   The IT solution that the project employed, the national trade portals, were also positively assessed during the interviews and discussion group. In particular, the accessibility and adaptability of the trade portals were commented on. They were described by some as a 'one stop shop' for providing information on trade and investments and other related topics, and the potential to further increase their utility by adding additional functions was recognised[15]. Their effectiveness was reinforced with the regional website providing information on topics such as regional meetings, good practices, PACER Plus texts and transparency obligations. This platform served as an information desk for countries to learn about the aspects of transparency which are necessary for the entry into force of PACER Plus.

Efficiency

6. Activities largely ran to schedule with most delays caused by local human resource issues. Project adaptations were successful in minimizing disruption.

67.   Most project activities were completed within the timeframes given in the initial plans. The project itself was extended twice, in part to accommodate Cook Islands' late start[16]. Having originally been set a completion date of December 2019, the project was extended to June 2020. A further no-cost extension to 31 December 2020 was then agreed on in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and to allow time for Cook Islands to complete its trade portal. The pandemic presented challenges through the closure of government offices and institutions and through national lockdowns, flight cancellations and border closures. The project team responded by consulting beneficiary countries and providing national counterparts with regional economic impact analyses. Additional sections were created on trade portals to inform on COVID-19 measures of fellow PACER Plus countries.

68.   Public officials identified human resource issues within their countries (82%) and coordination between departments (82%) as the factors that contributed most to delays, followed by technical problems (55%) (see Graph 7). The project's semi-annual reports provide additional insight into issues in these areas. Factors such as a lack of suitable candidates, the rotation of government staff and internal coordination problems led to delays in hiring information officers in a number of countries. The hiring process, due to be complete by the end of 2018, was therefore not completed until June 2019. A shortage of human resources also presented challenges during the gap analysis training, held to prepare countries to identify relevant legislation between January and June 2019. A lack of qualified government staff in two countries meant that UNCTAD staff ultimately conducted the analyses

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[15] The potential impact of broadening the scope of the portals will be addressed further in Sustainability.
[16] This was due to Cook Island's ratification process being on hold and the government's subsequent decision to suspend project activities.

themselves. A lack of government staff in the departments relevant to the project was also identified as a challenge to project progress at times in two countries. Meanwhile, internet connectivity problems were experienced in two national validation workshops, while they also slowed progress in entering data into the portal in one country.

Graph 7. Factors contributing to delays in project implementation (N=11)
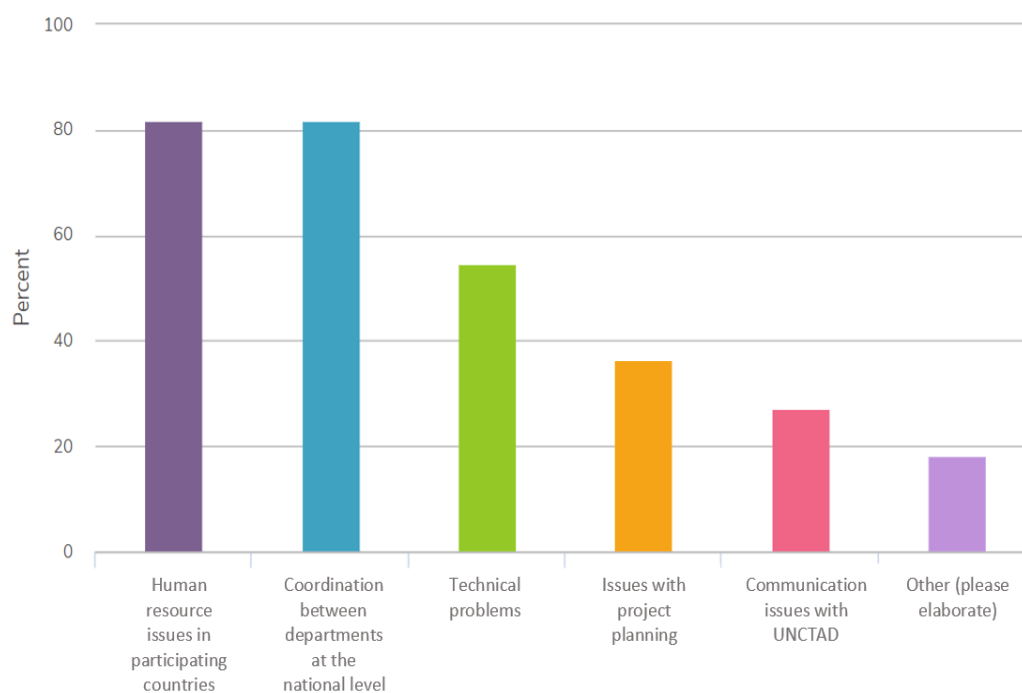
69.   Further challenges to project scheduling arose in the form of the measles epidemic in Samoa, which interrupted the project in the fourth quarter of 2019, and the death of Tonga's Prime Minister in September 2019, which led to a rescheduling of the national validation workshop and subsequent implementation of the project in the country. Despite these events, the activities planned for this period were completed, with only Cook Islands' national workshop pending completion by June 2020.

70.   Project coordination involved most of the communication with beneficiary country counterparts being carried out by the regional coordinator, who was able to rely on expert from members of the UNCTAD team based in Geneva. Meetings among the UNCTAD team were held regularly, up to twice a week when necessary. Additionally, donors received updates on project performance at country level prior to certain meetings. Some interviewees suggested that project planning and monitoring could have been more results-orientated in order to provide a better understanding of beneficiary countries' progress towards the PACER Plus obligations.

7. UNCTAD used highly applicable expertise and attempted to leverage external contacts

71.   When asked to rate the level of expertise and quality of resources provided by UNCTAD, 82% of the public officials said that it was high or excellent (see Annex III). Internal expertise and resources were used in the creation of the trade portals, which drew on UNCTAD's experience with its Business Facilitation Program website and in trade portals created through its eRegulations system. UNCTAD

also applied its experience in conducting and training for gap analyses, while workshops were led by the regional project coordinator, who was based in Samoa for the duration of the project, with expert support from UNCTAD HQ in Geneva. UNCTAD's Statistics Branch was able to provide support to the Statistics Office in Vanuatu to improve data collection, analysis and sharing capacity. Though not one of the outputs of the project, improved statistical capacity was considered to be a positive step in helping the country capitalize on the project's longer-term benefits.

72.   Internal expertise was also leveraged through the incorporation of staff from different UNCTAD programmes and interviews with UNCTAD staff have confirmed close coordination and cooperation between departments. The project was coordinated by the Technical Cooperation Section and the Trade Facilitation Section, with support from the Non-tariff measures (NTM) programme, the Business Facilitation programme, and the Trade, Gender and Development programme.

73.   During the early stages of the project, the regional project coordinator held meetings with the Australian High Commission, New Zealand High Commission and Women in Business Development Inc. (WIBDI), in addition to other UN organizations (FAO, UN Women, ILO and the UNDP Women Empowerment Programme) with the aim of exploring potential collaborations, raising public awareness of the project, coordinating the implementation of trade-related projects and organizing joint workshops on different aspects of the PACER Plus Agreement. The progress reports do not provide information on any specific collaborations that resulted from these meetings.

Sustainability

8. Indications of sustainability varied between beneficiaries. Human resource and technical factors are likely to have the greatest impact.

74.   Several factors were identified by public officials as limiting the sustainability of the project. Human resource limitations in the participating countries (73%) and a lack of technical knowledge (73%) were the factors identified by most respondents, while four others were chosen by more than 50%: a lack of internal coordination, rotation of government staff, internet connection issues and insufficient national ownership (see Graph 8).

75.   These findings are further illustrated by comments obtained during public sector discussion groups. One representative affirmed that officials' technical knowledge on the portal 'is limited to publishing of procedures and legislations', and that 'other queries beyond that scope will heavily rely on UNCTAD expertise as it is their system'. In the same vein, another official asserted that most of the information (to be uploaded in their country) had not been uploaded at the time of the evaluation and suggested that training sessions on uploading and updating information (particularly, with regards to the tariff tab, which, in the word of the official, can only be updated by UNCTAD) were required for those responsible for maintaining the portal (see Annex III). According to interviewees, the problems related to technical knowledge and knowledge transfer could be mitigated by the Implementation Unit when it is functional, therefore helping to address any knowledge vacuum created by UNCTAD's departure at the end of the project.

Graph 8. Factors limiting project sustainability (N=11)
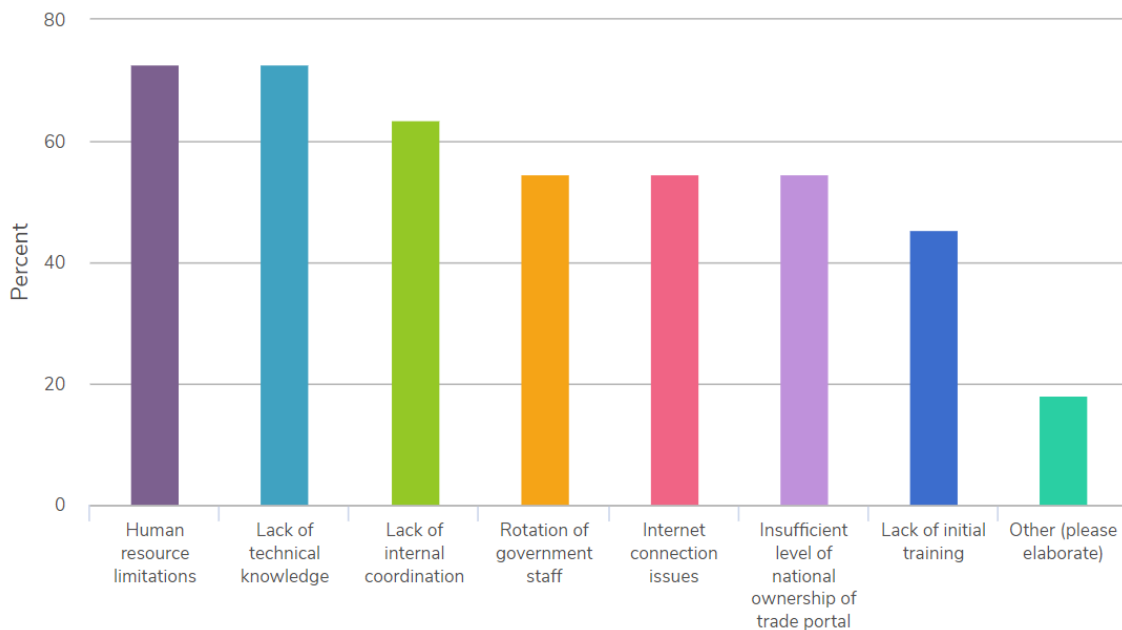
Source: discussion group (Question 10)

Indications of national ownership

76.   There have also been indications of limited ownership or involvement of officials in the project in some countries, which may have implications for sustainability. One of the goals of the national validation workshops was to raise public awareness of the trade portals and PACER Plus among stakeholders, including those from the public and private sectors, NGOs and the New Zealand and Australian High Commissions. A second was to provide a space for validating the information collected about import and export procedures with the relevant institutions. As such, the workshops were to contribute to the national ownership and sustainability of the project and also offered an indication of how relevant parties within the beneficiary countries had participated in the project up to that point.

77.   In the case of one partner country, limited follow-up in the collection and uploading of data on the part of national counterparts in advance of the national validation workshop meant that little legislation was prepared for validation. Furthermore, the national project coordinator from the MFTA was absent for much of the workshop, which 'severely complicated' the discussion of the project's results. The project progress report concludes that '(c)loser inter-ministerial coordination and closer support from the counterpart ministry (MFAT) would be important aspects for the successful continuation of the programme' (Doc.2019b). In another country, limited collaboration with the Attorney General's Office and ongoing legislative reform made obtaining the necessary legislation difficult ahead of the validation workshop. In a third country, the contact point from the Department of Finance and Planning was absent through the national workshop, which, along with limited information sharing in the government, hindered meetings. Furthermore, the public sector representatives had not invited the stakeholders from the private sector. Instead, the Chamber of Commerce were able to step in and organize consultations with private sector representatives.

78.   Overall, when asked in internal evaluation surveys conducted by UNCTAD, national validation workshop attendees responded positively as to whether they had improved their general knowledge on how the functioning of the trade portals would work to comply with the PACER Plus transparency

obligations. Responses from three of the countries were somewhat less effusive than those from elsewhere but were generally in agreement (Doc. 2019b).

79.   Examples of strong commitment to project goals on the part of beneficiaries are also provided. One country was praised in implementation reports for its strong national ownership, desire to further develop the trade portal and strong interest in the trade and gender component of the project, while another was described as a 'best practice example' among the project countries (Doc. 2019b). The country was able to link its trade portal with the ASYCUDA system, was prompt in data collection and outreach and included a broad range of different procedures on the portal, suggesting high levels of ownership and initiative. Discussions took place with several countries on switching the server used to host the national trade portal from one in Geneva to a national server in order to increase national ownership.

Expanding the scope of the trade portals

80.   Despite some technical ownership challenges, it is remarkable that the national counterparts participating in the discussion group and interviews were very positive about the portals and their potential. Several ideas on potential additions to the national trade portals that could positively affect sustainability were mentioned during the discussion group. One representative suggested there would be benefits to making the portals transactional in addition to informational, in order to allow for payments to be made. In response, it was explained by UNCTAD that such a functionality is outside the remit of the current project. However, such additions to the portals during future interventions could add to the sustainability of the project by ensuring that larger numbers of users have reason to use the portals and by increasing the value of the portals across multiple departments or agencies. The interest in expanding the scope of the portals could be partly met by incorporating features from UNCTAD's eSimplification and eRegistration systems, sister initiatives of the eRegulation system used for the creation of the national portals. These systems aid in simplifying administrative procedures and computerize the issuance of certificates and other documents, respectively (businessfaciliation.org, 2020). Additionally, UNCTAD team members have acknowledged during meetings the considerable difficulties associated with some of the trade transparency related procedures that must be carried out by beneficiaries. This suggests there would also be efficiency gains if these systems were incorporated.

81.   Examples of additional functionality being linked to national portals already exist. The type of information collected for PACER Plus and made available for publication is in line with the WTO publication and notification system of which Tonga, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Samoa are part. The trade portals have therefore been designed so the information is shared in a common database and WTO and PACER Plus notifications can be combined, following indications of support from the countries involved. This could increase the relevance of the portals and provide an additional incentive for their maintenance. Similarly, at least one country has linked their portal to the ASYCUDA system of which other signatories are part. Likewise, this could make a positive contribution to sustainability.

Other factors

82.   Findings on other elements of the project linked to sustainability are mixed. The regional trade facilitation index, which forms part of the regional electronic platform, is intended as a mechanism for increasing sustainability by allowing the comparison and harmonization of trade procedures and facilitating peer review and networking. It was implemented as planned. However, the project progress reports reveal expectations on the part of beneficiary countries that Australia and New Zealand make

their own trade related procedures and legislation equally transparent by developing their own trade portals in keeping with efforts made by other PACER Plus signatories. Currently, information on legislation and procedures related to trade is made available online by the donors[17]. Considering their size and development, the integration of the Australian and New Zealand portals in the regional portal and index would reinforce the interest in the portals and reinforce the project sustainability.

83. The regional coordinating network, on which a dialogue was to be launched, was also to contribute to project sustainability as an organ for maintaining transparency standards. As explained in *Effectiveness*, it is not clear to what extent the goal of launching the dialogue was achieved.

84. Analysis using the Google advanced search tool revealed that there was an increase in traffic to the national portals following the national workshops, as detailed in the *Partnerships* section below. This finding indicates that further promoting the trade portals among stakeholders could positively affect rates of use. As in this report, internet metrics could be used to measure the use of trade portals and assess the impact of promotional activities and could therefore contribute to the sustainability of the trade portal.

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[17] For example, on the websites of the Australian Border Force: https://www.abf.gov.au/home and the New Zealand Custom Service: https://www.customs.govt.nz/business/import/

Gender and human rights

9. Gender was mainstreamed in project design and implementation. Several knowledge products were delivered, but national counterparts' awareness was not always increased.

85.   Gender was mainstreamed in project design and implementation. As foreseen in the Project Document, a study was conducted to improve the understanding of the links between gender equality and trade transparency. Analyses and research during first six months of the project resulted in the paper 'International Trade, Transparency, and Gender Equality: The case of the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus' (UNCTAD, 2019). The draft study was shared with national and regional stakeholders for their input and comments in December 2018, before being finalized in the second half of 2019 and uploaded on the regional trade portal. Country fact sheets were also produced, based in part on the study. They included key economic, trade and gender information for each country and were uploaded on national portals.

86.   Following this initial gender analysis, two more knowledge products were produced. In June 2019 an 'Export Guide for Women in the Pacific Islands' was finalized with the aim of making women producers and traders aware of what is required for their products to enter Australian and New Zealand markets, focusing on nine major products in which women are particularly involved. It was also uploaded on the trade portal of each island. Finally, a Trade and Gender Case Study 'Women producers of Kiribati and their participation in inter-island and international trade' (UNCTAD 2020) was conducted.

87.   The International Trade, Transparency, and Gender Equality study links issues that usually are not addressed in connection with each other, namely trade and the potential benefits of transparency in trade for women traders and entrepreneurs and the overall impact of transparency on gender equality and women's empowerment. It provides important potential input for promoting equitable development in the context of trade transparency. This is especially relevant given that PACER Plus can be considered a gender blind agreement; the main text of the agreement does not contain any provisions on the need to support women's participation in trade or measures intended to create more equal conditions,[18]and no ex-ante gender impact assessment of the agreement was conducted (UNCTAD, 2019). The study aimed to identify ways in which the transparency provisions of PACER Plus could reduce the difficulties experienced by women as producers and traders within the context of the agreement and in the future.

88.   The Kiribati trade and gender case study investigated the economic activities of women producers and traders and analyzed the supply side constraints which affect them on different islands of Kiribati. It identifies major challenges faced by women producers and concludes with a series of policy recommendations aimed at addressing constraints, promoting women's participation in trade and contributing to women's economic empowerment in Kiribati (UNCTAD, 2020).

89.   Gender mainstreaming was aimed at through the inclusion of training on gender provided at the National Validation Workshops which included a presentation of the International Trade,

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[18] A supporting document on the implementation of development and economic cooperation in the framework of the PACER Plus does contain a reference to gender and women's participation in trade, including capacity-building, assistance for data collection on women in agriculture, and support to establish a women-led garment production cottage industry in manufacturing. This said, the document does not enter into greater detail and broader supply-side constraints to women's participation in trade are not addressed (UNCTAD, 2019).

Transparency, and Gender Equality study, the Export Guide for Women in the Pacific Islands and the country fact sheets. A further half-day training session on gender was also organized in Kiribati following particular interest expressed by the government there. However, there are indications that the issue of gender inequality in trade is not widely recognized by public sector participants following the project. Only 36 % of public official discussion group participants said that administrative obstacles in trade procedures and lack of regulatory transparency have a different effect on men and women, a figure which increases to 50% when only answers by women are considered (see Annex III). Furthermore, during interviews with beneficiaries, it emerged that some were unaware of the 'International Trade, Transparency, and Gender Equality' study despite being uploaded on their own national portals.

90.   Regarding national measures to facilitate women's access to opportunities in trade, officials from two countries said that their countries had already put in place measures to facilitate women's access to opportunities in trade, but that these are undergoing improvement following UNCTAD's project. In a third, measures are being actively put in place. On the other hand, officials from two other countries said that such measures had not been established (see Annex III). An analysis of the export procedures which the beneficiary countries published on national trade portals during the project revealed that six of the nine countries had included procedures on products commonly made by women producers (see Annex VIII) but interviews revealed that the choice of procedures had not been influenced by gender considerations.

10. Project lacked specific analyses, activities and goals related to other human rights issues

91.   Supporting trade capacity in SIDSs may provide economic opportunities to groups that have been traditionally excluded from international trade. A project like this is fully aligned to the inclusive trade idea that is embedded in the 2030 Agenda. However, at country level, the project did not mainstream a human rights approach (other than gender mainstreaming).

92.   The project did not identify target groups within each country who experience disadvantages resulting from trade and difficulty accessing trade-related information. It is notable that the Project Document contained references to small entrepreneurs and opened the door to specific inclusive activities. As in the case of gender, this could have started by including an analysis of human right issues in trade facilitation which could have in turn inspired specific activities to be incorporated in the project. It should be noted, though, that the project donors did not raise any human right considerations other than gender equality, and that UNCTAD does not have a specific unit to conduct such studies or specific human rights requirements in internal project management guidelines or clearance requirements.

Partnerships

11. Participation of national and regional counterparts, international development partners, civil society and the private sector was rather low.

93.   Attempts were made to build and advance partnerships between international development partners and relevant organizations. Multiple meetings were organized with the Pacific Island Forum Secretariat (PIFS) and the Oceania Customs Organization (OCO), with a memorandum of understanding (MoU) being published with the PIFS to intensify collaboration on regional trade facilitation, knowledge exchange and capacity building in the Pacific region. Meetings were also held with the NGO Standards Australia with the aim of linking projects in the area of digital trade and standards. Furthermore, exchanges took place with other regional and local stakeholders, including the Center for International Private Enterprise (CIPE), the Global Alliance for Trade Facilitation (GATF), the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) and the Global Trade Professional Alliance (GTPA) in order to coordinate respective activities. However, following review of the project progress reports and interviews with UNCTAD staff, it is not clear that these meetings resulted in closer ongoing collaboration or the formation of new partnerships, with the exception of the MoU created with the PIFS.

94.   When public officials were asked whether the project had established a relevant and robust regional network of organisations for information exchange and trade transparency, 36% were totally in agreement that it had and 64% were in agreement to some extent. However, when asked about the private sector's level of involvement in different aspects of the project, the officals only consider participation to be moderately high in the identification of information needs (average 3.5 out of 5) and the regular use of the information uploaded to the trade portal (average of 3.1) (see Graph 9).

Graph 9 Project aspects and level of private sector participation
From 1 (low level) to 5 (high level) (N=11)
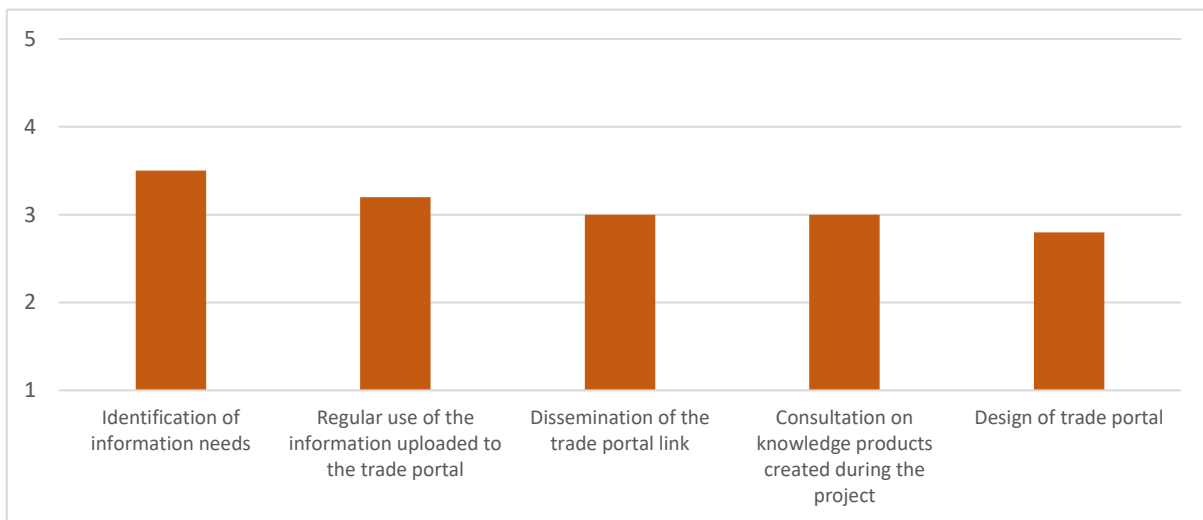
Source: discussion group (Question 17)

95.   Analyses of internet metrics indicate that references to key words related to the project, such as 'business registration procedures', 'customs procedures', 'import licensing procedures', 'land and real state legislation', or 'phytosanitary measures' are generally very scarce in the main online news

sources. However, in most beneficiary countries, the number of references to these words increased following the national workshops held in summer 2019. The results are shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Mentions of PACER-Plus key terms online since 2010: "business registration procedures", "customs procedures", "import licensing procedures", "land and real estate legislation", "phytosanitary measures"

| | | Mentions per month in average | | Overall number of mentions | |
		Before national workshops	After national workshops[i]	Total	After national workshops
The web	Beneficiary countries[ii]	0.14	0.25 (+76%)	145	28 (13.8%)
	Control cases[iii]	0.54	0.30 (-44%)	139	10 (7.2%)
Online	Beneficiary countries	0.07	0.42 (+506%)	68	27 (40%)
Newspapers[iv]	Control cases	0.08	0.09 (+18%)	21	3 (14%)

[i] In almost all the countries, the workshops were held in summer 2019. In Cook Islands, it was held in summer 2020.
[ii] Only beneficiary countries for which mentions have been found are listed.
[iii] When possible, the same key words have been searched in other close Anglophone Pacific islands (Papua New Guinea and Fiji).
[iv] The online newspapers are: Vanuatu Daily Post, Samoa Observer, Solomon Star News, Cook Islands News, Matangi Tonga Online, The National (Papua), Fiji Times.

Source: Google advanced search tool

96. Analysis using Google Analytics reveals that, though the portals are being used by domestic users and those from other PACER Plus countries, significant numbers of users from other countries have also accessed them (Graph 10).

Graph 10. National platforms and visitors by country (domestic, beneficiaries, Australia, New Zealand and others[i])
(number of users by national platform)
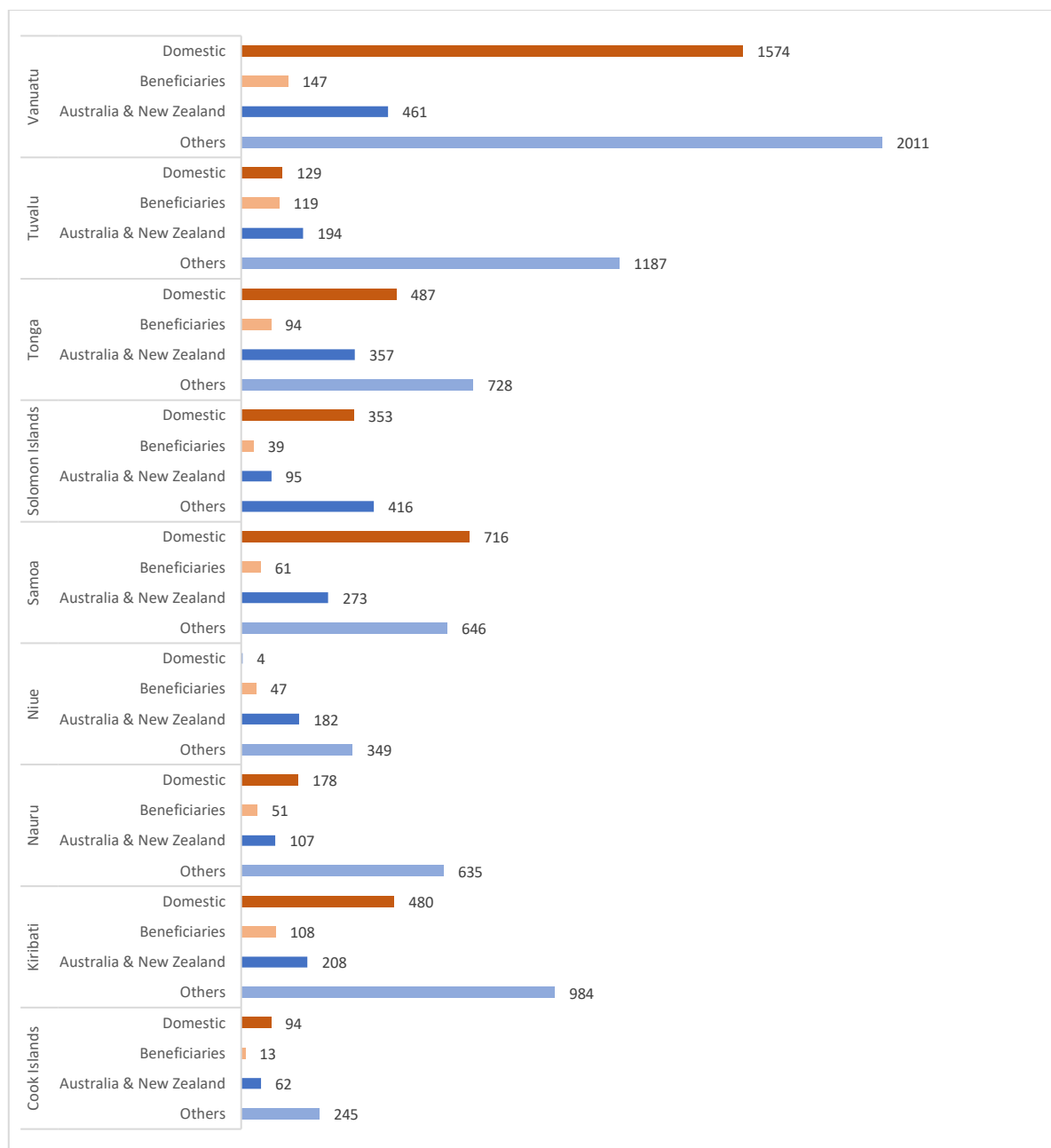
[i] The category 'others' is composed of 181 countries which made 7,201 visits to national platforms. The ten countries producing most visits are the United States (1361), Switzerland (742), India (514), Fiji (454), China (303), Japan (203), Hong Kong (199), Nigeria (189), France (147) and the United Kingdom (146).

Source: Google Analytics (data from 1st October 2018 to 11th January 2021

CONCLUSIONS

Overall assessment

97.   The project was fully *relevant* to beneficiary countries' needs and UNCTAD's mandate. The web-accessed information management system provided a suitable solution to information mismanagement issues. Although the beneficiary countries' companies consulted during this evaluation showed low expectations about the impacts of the PACER Plus on their economies, the project addressed relevant limitations in public administration that affect not only the countries' capacity to comply with the PACER Plus Agreement. The systematization and dissemination of rules and procedures that affect trade and investment also improves the overall business environment and administrative efficiency. Moreover, the project was aligned with UNCTAD's mandate according to its Nairobi conference, and tapped into UNCTAD's comparative advantage based on the design and implementation of business and trade facilitation portals across the world.

98.   The project has been *effective* in helping countries to meet their publication obligations. By the entry into force of the PACER Plus in December 2020, all beneficiary countries had published legislation related to all the issues raised in the agreement: import and export licenses, trade remedy measures, custom fees and duties, sanitary and phytosanitary regulations, technical barriers to trade, trade in services, and trade agreements. This was a significant achievement considering that laws and administrative rules in beneficiary countries are not comprehensively and systematically managed and consolidated. They had also successfully practised publishing import and export procedures. These goals were achieved through the setting-up of trade portals and UNCTAD's Content Management System (CMS). By feeding this system, national counterparts have gained a better knowledge of their transparency obligations and the challenges that they pose, and they are better prepared to cope with other PACER Plus transparency obligations. The tool helps to identify contact points, inform on ongoing regulatory changes for other parties to comment on and notify definite modifications to regulatory frameworks.

99.   That said, UNCTAD's work in the coming months could include supporting the beneficiary countries in meeting other transparency obligations (besides publication) and improving trade-related networking at the national and regional level. In this respect, it must be noted that the PACER Plus partners have not met the notification requirements of the agreement set for before the entry into force of the agreement. Although UNCTAD is not responsible for ensuring that these obligations are met, it could provide additional guidance on making notifications, helping to ensure that the capacities that have been built are being fully used. Regarding trade-related networking, there is little clarity on the next steps towards national PACER Plus committees and regional cooperation in trade transparency issues among PACER Plus partners.

100.   The project faced some *efficiency* challenges related with human resource issues in participating countries, such as rotation of personnel and difficulties in finding suitable national consultants. That said, project adaptations and extensions were successful in minimizing disruption. UNCTAD provided a suitable solution (a trade portal), along with highly applicable expertise for guiding local staff to address the endeavour of gathering and classifying such an amount of legal and administrative information. Once this work was done, the portal enormously facilitated publication and provided a sustainable solution to publish new pieces of legislation and notify partner countries with limited human resources.

101.   Indications of *sustainability* varied considerably from one beneficiary to another, with human resource and technical knowledge being the most relevant issues. UNCTAD staff and national

counterparts agree that further support is necessary to consolidate and sustain the project achievements, with the latter suggesting a longer involvement of the former in trade portal maintenance and expansion. The handover of UNCTAD's technical support towards local or regional actors has not yet been specified.

102. Sustainability is also affected by the lack of integration of donor countries' trade-related internet resources in the regional trade platform. Although the portal pacific.tradeportal.org links to relevant webpages in Australia and New Zealand, these webpages do not outline administrative procedures or trade-related legislation in the same way as UNCTAD's portals do. As a consequence, their procedures are not aggregated in the trade facilitation index, which allows the Pacific island countries to exchange good practices and to track their progress towards facilitation goals set at the regional and national levels. Considering that Australia and New Zealand are the main trade powers and have the most developed administrations in the region, this absence undermines the ability of the regional platform to enhance peer review and regional benchmarking in trade transparency issues.

103. The project included a relevant *gender analysis* which uncovered links between gender and trade transparency: the lack of regulatory transparency increases discretionary decisions of public officials and intermediaries which affects women more than men. Moreover, by identifying the products that women producers are more involved in, the project paved the way to prioritizing transparency in the import-export procedures that may have a higher impact on women's livelihoods. That said, the interviews and discussion group revealed that the knowledge generated by the project in this respect did not always permeate the national counterparts.

104. The project's design and implementation did not mainstream *human rights* of vulnerable groups other than women. That said, in broad terms, the project contributed to inclusive trade in two ways. First, the project targeted SIDS, some of which were LDCs, and therefore it enhanced trade-related capacities in economies that face major challenges in fully benefiting from international trade. Secondly, as has been explained in the case of women, the project's focus has strong potential to empower other vulnerable target groups by providing direct access to legal information. In future phases, this potential could be exploited by promoting the portals among vulnerable communities and collecting their feedback in order to make the portal more accessible to disadvantaged groups if needed.

105. As the private sector *partners* are the final recipient of the project outputs, its involvement could be more intensive in similar future projects through closer consultation on knowledge products and greater involvement in the dissemination of the portal link. Following the national validation workshops, the private sector consultation conducted indicated a high interest in online information on trade procedures and regulations, and the national validation workshops have had a positive impact on the internet conversation around key words related to the project.

LESSONS LEARNT

106. Three lessons can be learnt from this experience and applied beyond the scope of the project:
     a. As outlined in the previous conclusions on gender issues, the gender-trade links between gender and trade are better understood following the gender analysis. However, such an analysis in a given policy area is only a start in gender mainstreaming. Analysis results must be transferred to relevant policymakers and concrete policy action must be planned and implemented. Similarly, mainstreaming human rights in a project on trade facilitation is not straight forward and requires a previous and rigorous analysis involving experts.
     b. Vagueness in the definition of networking results are difficult to manage and evaluate, as it is very difficult to determine when a project activity consisting of a meeting or a discussion is actually part of a deeper and longer process of dialogue and collaboration. Networking should be used as a type of activity rather than as a performance indicator, unless the resulting network is precisely defined in the Project Document.
     c. Capacity building projects consisting in delivery tools and training by international actors should include phasing out and continuation arrangements so that the project results can be sustained with local resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

107.   Drawing from the previous assessment, the following recommendations can be made to the project partners taking into account that the project has been extended for six months and further financial support for trade-related technical assistance is expected from the donors.

Recommendation to donor countries

I-   On the *sustainability* of the capacities built: It is recommended that the establishment of the planned PACER Plus Implementation Unit be prioritized as a matter of urgency to ensure that the PACER Plus countries are supported established as soon as possible as. The unit will provide support to beneficiary countries in sustaining and expanding the project achievements, including the maintenance of national and regional trade portals and regional activities aimed at increasing regulatory transparency on trade and investment issues.

II-   On the *regional platform*: Based on trade flows in the region, the trade-and-development rational of the project and the fact that the project has set the basis for peer review and collaboration at a regional level, Australia and New Zealand should consider better connecting their trade-related internet resources to the regional trade portal and the trade facilitation index. More specifically, it is recommended that Australia and New Zealand use UNCTAD trade portals to inform PACER Plus partners on the two import and two export procedures that are of most interest in the Pacific Islands. In the identification of such procedures, the UNCTAD guide on products made by women in the nine Pacific Island Countries should be taken into account. The portals could also facilitate links to information on legislation available in other internet resources.

III-   On *future projects*: Donors could take into account the beneficiary countries' requests to expand the functionalities of the portals and even make them capable of facilitating transactions. This could be done in a coordinated manner with other development cooperation initiatives involving Australia and New Zealand and oriented towards private sector development, business environment improvement or public administration reform. Additionally, they should consider involving UNCTAD in further technical cooperation in the framework of the PACER Plus in order to enhance capacity and expertise ahead of the establishment of the PACER Plus Implementation Unit and other national or regional coordinating bodies.

Recommendations to beneficiary countries

IV-   On *trade portals*: As the PACER Plus Agreement entered into force on 13 December 2020, it is recommended that the six beneficiary countries that have so far ratified the treaty make the notifications which were due by the entry into force (on import licencing and trade remedies). This could be done by putting the notification tool included in the trade

portals into immediate use. The notification tool operates through email, with pre-recorded addresses for contact points from each of the nine countries plus Australia and New Zealand. It automatically keeps a registry of notifications sent and received. Using the tool for these initial notifications would also constitute a training exercise for further exchanges on eventual legislative changes in other areas which are also subject to notification requirements (trade in services, trade in goods, SPS and TBT). It is also recommended that the 'Procedure' section of the trade portals be expanded and when selecting new export procedures, trade departments prioritize the products listed in the UNCTAD 'Export Guide for Women in the Pacific Islands'.

V-   On *knowledge management*: Considering that the rotation of personnel and the preservation of technical knowledge related to the use of the portals are the main challenges affecting sustainability, it is recommended that trainers be appointed in each beneficiary country to ensure the hand-over of portal knowledge. The work of these trainers could be supported with the materials produced in the framework of the project, and further UNCTAD training.

VI-   On *trade portal promotion*: It is recommended that promotional activities on trade portals be conducted in order to raise awareness across private companies of the existence and potential of the portals. Promotional activities should differentiate between different target groups based on gender and equity criteria and tap into these exchanges by collecting comments and suggestions from groups who may require extra support to overcome information barriers. The promotional activities and their impact on the public could be monitored by means of internet metric tools such as the ones used for the purpose of this evaluation, including those which measure visits to the portals and those which measure impact on internet conversations. This would give feedback on how successful the promotional efforts had been so that subsequent efforts could be further tailored and improved. Promotional activities could also be oriented to other government departments with a twofold objective. Firstly, to encourage the meaningful involvement of contact points in non-trade departments. Secondly, to increase collaboration in order to expand on the topics covered and the functionalities integrated in the portals.

Recommendations to UNCTAD

VII-   On the *obligation to notify* fellow signatories: Recognising that the obligation to provide notifications is fully the responsibility and at the discretion of each country, and taking into account the six-month extension of the project awarded by UNCTAD, it is suggested that UNCTAD assist the beneficiary countries in using the portals, perhaps by conducting one-on-one clinics, to make the notifications that were due by the entry into force of the agreement (on import licencing and trade remedies). This practical exercise will complement the training received and it will reinforce beneficiary country preparedness for future compliance when the obligation to notify on changes in legislation (in the areas of trade in services, trade in goods, SPS and TBT)

arises in the future.

VIII- On the *project networking results*: It is recommended that the project team provide the implementation unit and the beneficiary countries with advice on how to reinforce existing national and regional networks and institutions on the basis of the project's tangible achievements. This advice should build upon existing institutions and highlight how the national portals can facilitate communication within PACER Plus Committees, and how the regional platform and trade facilitation index can support peer review and regional benchmarking in trade transparency.

IX- On the *maintenance of the portals*: Following beneficiary countries' requests, it is suggested that UNCTAD continues providing advice on how to reinforce the business facilitation aspects of the portals and expand their functionalities through the integration of feedback tools and use of internet metric tools. The feedback tools and internet metrics should be designed so that information can be disaggregated by gender. Concerning the expansion of the portals towards business facilitation, it must be noted that several evaluation sources have indicated that the existing procedures are excessively complex and inefficient. As such, e-simplification could be a good addition to the trade portals and even sustain their primary role as a legal content manager. Likewise, it must be noted that national counterparts would like to integrate the portals with e-registration and e-payment tools. Finally, as the project comes to an end, it is recommended that UNCTAD continue its training efforts by adopting a training-of-trainers approach, in order to reinforce the knowledge management capacity of the beneficiaries.

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ANNEX I. LEGISLATION PUBLISHED, BY CATEGORY

The project has supported the nine Pacific island countries to meet their transparency obligations by designing national trade portals and building capacity to inform and maintain the portals. There are four type of transparency obligation in the PACER Plus: publication of legislation related to certain issues relevant to trade; providing opportunity to comment on ongoing regulatory changes; notification of regulatory changes once confirmed; and establishment of contact points for such exchanges. As explained in the evaluation report under Evaluation Questions 4 and 4 bis, the project focused on the publication obligation to be completed before the entry into force of the agreement

The obligation to publish covers four overarching areas: trade in goods (covered in Chapters 2 and 4 of the agreement), sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) (Chapter 5), technical barriers to trade (TBT) (Chapter 6) and trade in services (Chapter 7). The following paragraphs provide some details on the review of trade portals conducted to assess countries' compliance with the publication obligation, which was summarized in Table 5. It should be noted that this analysis was intended to confirm that the beneficiary countries had published relevant information under each of the categories covered by the agreement, but neither the project team nor the evaluator could verify that all pieces of legislation belonging to a particular country and pertaining to one of the aforementioned aspects of trade had been published.

Import licensing (Ch. 2 Article 11.3)

All the countries have uploaded information regarding import licensing to their portals, which is accessible through the 'Legislation' section found in the navigation bar of every trade portal. In addition, in some countries, information on licences can be found in sections on 'Procedures', 'Starting a business' or, as in the case of Nauru, in a specific category named 'Import License'. Samoa's and Vanuatu's trade portals are very complete on this issue and integrate several subcategories of imported products with their subsequent licenses and procedures.

Export licenses (Ch. 2 Article 13.1)

This obligation is very extensive and affects classification or valuation of the products for custom purposes, in addition to rates of duty, taxes or other charges; and requirements, restrictions, and prohibition on imports and exports. It also affects the transfer of payments and the sale, distribution, transport, insurance, warehousing, inspection, exhibition, processing, mixing or other use of products; and agreements affecting international trade policy. This obligation is also materialized in the 'Legislation' section. The information regarding the regulation of trade in goods is found inside the categories 'Quota', 'Prohibition', 'Export license', 'International agreement' and 'Others'

Trade remedy (Ch. 2 Articles 7.4, 7.7, 7.10 and 7.13)

Anti-dumping information is also found inside the 'Legislation' section. However, this section is very large and filled with a large number of legal texts. In order to make the section accessible and useful to everyone that might enter the trade portal, countries have organized the different legislation into subcategories, which includes the subcategory 'Trade remedy' in some cases.

Only four countries have specific regulations on this topic: Cook Islands, Nauru, Samoa and Vanuatu. In these cases, anti-dumping measures are found inside broader legal texts such as 'Customs Tariff Acts' and those on 'Import duties'. The rest (Kiribati, Niue, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu) do not have any regulations on this topic, according to the UNCTAD team, and this is stated on their portals. This information is consistent with WTO records on anti-dumping legislation.

Similarly, global safeguard measures are located in the legislation sections of the portals, under trade remedy subsections. Again, Cook Islands, Nauru and Vanuatu have complied with both anti-dumping and global safeguard measures, while the other countries have not passed legislation of this kind.

Other like fees and duties (Ch.2 Article 14)

This obligation is materialized and fulfilled in the 'Legislation' section along with regulations on general trade in goods. The specific measures group together: 1) non preferential and preferential applied rates of customs duty; 2) a list of all existing fees and charges that are imposed on or in connection with importation and exportation; and 3) information on its new or modified import licensing procedures in form of a completed response to a questionnaire.

Sanitary and phytosanitary regulations (SPS) (Ch. 5 Article 8.1)

These regulations are also found in the 'Legislation' section. Additionally, information on this topic is found inside the 'Procedures' sections, by clicking on specific materials or services. Most trade portals (those of Kiribati, Nauru, Samoa, Salomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu) also gather forms and examples of sanitary and phytosanitary certificates.

Technical barriers to trade (TBT) (Ch.6 Articles 8.1 and 8.4)

The PACER Plus agreement establishes a mandate for every contract party to publish their technical regulations and conformity assessment procedures. Every trade portal has uploaded information devoted to the protection of human, animal and plant life and the environment. The information is located inside the category 'TBT', which is found the 'Procedures' section where TBTs are specified for different products and services.

Trade in services (Ch. 7 Articles 17.2. 17.3 and 14)

Information on trade in services is located in 'Services' inside the 'Procedures' section. Every trade portal has this category and hosts several legal texts concerning measures of general application relating to licensing requirements and procedures; qualification requirements and procedures; and technical standards.

Agreements affecting international trade policy (Ch.7 Article 17.2)

The obligation to upload agreements affecting international trade policy is required both in the PACER Plus chapters related to trade in goods and those on trade in services. These agreements have a specific category inside the 'Legislation' section.

ANNEX II. DISCUSSION GROUP

PACER Plus evaluation public sector discussion group

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Disagree	Slightly agree	Agree	Strongly agree	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
The project responded well to my country's needs in trade-related regulatory transparency	%	%	63.6%	36.4%	11
The project responded well to the needs of other Pacer Plus Signatory countries, including Australia and New Zealand, in trade-related regulatory transparency	%	%	63.6%	36.4%	11
The project responded well to the needs of the private sector with regards to international trade and investment.	%	9.1%	63.6%	27.3%	11

2. Please indicate the extent to which your country has made information available on the following aspects for which transparency is required by the PACER Plus Agreement

	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Anti-dumping and countervailing measures	36.4%	9.1%	27.3%	27.3%	%	11
Global safeguard measures	18.2%	36.4%	9.1%	36.4%	%	11
Regulation on product classification, taxes and charges, quantitative restrictions and logistic requirements	%	%	9.1%	45.5%	45.5%	11
Customs Procedures	%	9.1%	%	36.4%	54.5%	11
Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	%	10.0%	20.0%	40.0%	30.0%	10
Technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures	%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	11
Import licensing	%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	36.4%	11

3. Please indicate the extent to which other signatory countries have made information available on the following aspects for which transparency is required by the PACER Plus Agreement.

	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Anti-dumping and countervailing measures	27.3%	9.1%	18.2%	36.4%	9.1%	11
Global safeguard measures	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%	36.4%	9.1%	11
Regulation on product classification, taxes and charges, quantitative restrictions and logistic requirements	%	%	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%	10
Regulation on product classification, taxes and charges, quantitative restrictions and logistic requirements	%	%	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	11
Custom procedures	%	%	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	11
Sanitary and phytosanitary measures	%	%	18.2%	45.5%	36.4%	11
Technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures	%	%	27.3%	45.5%	27.3%	11

4. Please indicate to what extent has your country improved the following capacities related to trade transparency.

	1 (low)	2	3	4	5 (high)	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Internet tools and related knowledge	%	%	10.0%	70.0%	20.0%	10
Contact points for notifications among countries	%	9.1%	18.2%	27.3%	45.5%	11
National Transparency Committees	%	18.2%	36.4%	18.2%	27.3%	11
National Stakeholder Networks	%	%	45.5%	18.2%	36.4%	11
Involvement in regional networks and dialogues	%	9.1%	18.2%	45.5%	27.3%	11
Systems and procedures for information gathering and exchange	%	%	45.5%	27.3%	27.3%	11
Connection with a regional platform on trade regulation	%	9.1%	18.2%	45.5%	27.3%	11
Human and institutional capacity on links between trade and gender	%	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	11

5. Please indicate to what extent the following factors have positively (+) or negatively (-) influenced the acquisition of the above listed capacities.

	1 (-)	2	3	4	5 (+)	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Staff and other resources made available by my government	%	20.0%	50.0%	10.0%	20.0%	10
Consultants and resources funded by the project	%	%	9.1%	72.7%	18.2%	11
Technical assistance and training by UNCTAD	%	%	27.3%	27.3%	45.5%	11
Internet solutions	9.1%	18.2%	45.5%	9.1%	18.2%	11
Human and institutional capacity on links between trade and gender	%	10.0%	40.0%	30.0%	20.0%	10
Private sector interest and support	%	%	36.4%	63.6%	%	11
Political will at the national level	%	%	36.4%	36.4%	27.3%	11
Staff and other resources made available by my government	%	9.1%	27.3%	45.5%	18.2%	11

6. What factors contributed to delays in project implementation in your country? Multiple answers possible. Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below.

Value	Percent	Count
Human resource issues	81.8%	9
Coordination between departments	81.8%	9
Communication issues with UNCTAD	27.3%	3
Issues with project planning	36.4%	4
Technical problems	54.5%	6
	18.2%	2

Other (sic):

Availability of equipment

Resources or Timeframe

7. What factors contributed to delays in project implementation in your country? Multiple answers possible. Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below.

The Local Consultants didn't have any laptops and UNCTAD could consider having the flexibility to provide adequate resources.
there is also the delay on identifying of needs which results in the delay of communications and planning or confirming of projects

8. How well did the project respond to challenges that arose during its implementation?

Value	Percent	Count
1	%	0
2	%	0
3	27.3%	3
4	63.6%	7
5	9.1%	11
Totals		11

9. How would you rate the level of expertise and quality of resources provided by UNCTAD?

Value	Percent	Count
1	%	0
2	%	0
3	18.2%	2
4	27.3%	3
5	54.5%	6
Totals		11

10. What factors do you think could limit the sustainability of the project objectives in your country? Multiple answers possible. Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below.

Value	Percent	Count
Human resource limitations	72.70%	8
Rotation of government staff	54.50%	6
Lack of technical knowledge	72.70%	8
Internet connection issues	54.50%	6
Lack of internal coordination	63.60%	7
Lack of initial training	45.50%	5
Insufficient level of national ownership of trade portal	54.50%	6
Other (please elaborate)	18.20%	2

Other (sic):

Lack of political will

Lack of support from UNCTAD whether they will sustain portal

11. What factors do you think could limit the sustainability of the project objectives in your country? Multiple answers possible. Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below.

our technical knowledge on TP is limited to publishing of procedures and legislations. other queries beyond that scope will heavily rely on UNCTAD expertise as it is their system.
Countries should also commit their resources in terms of human resources as part of their commitment to ensure the sustainability of the project.
Need to train staff from customs and biosecurity to update their own processes, and legislations.

12. Do you consider that the trade portal will be properly maintained following completion of the project? Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below.

Value	Percent	Count
Yes, it can be maintained using national resources	9.10%	1
Yes, but it will require ongoing support from UNCTAD	81.80%	9
Yes, but it will require further training from UNCTAD	9.10%	1

13. Do you consider that the trade portal will be properly maintained following completion of the project? Please feel free to leave additional comments in the space below. - comments

as above. Still need support like a helpdesk with queries beyond our knowledge
Update on the Portal: Kiribati domain name for the Trade and Investment Portal will be effective as of 1 Jan 2020. Kiribati will continue to seek UNCTAD's support on googles analytics tool.
As the PACER Plus enters into force, UNCTAD should continue providing support as part of the implementation. It is likely that there'll be emerging issues during the implementation of PACER Plus within the first five years.
will still require support from UNCTAD. eg. helpdesk

14. Do you consider that administrative obstacles in trade procedures and a lack of regulatory transparency have a different effect on men and women?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	36.4%	4
No	63.6%	7

15. Does your country have measures in place to facilitate women's access to opportunities in trade?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes, they were already in place before the project	36.4%	4
Yes, they were already in place but are undergoing improvement following the project	36.4%	4
No, but they are actively being put in place	9.1%	1
No	18.2%	2

16. In your view, has the project established a relevant and robust regional network of organisations for information exchange and trade transparency?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	36.4%	4
To some extent	63.6%	7

17. To what extent has the private sector participated in the following aspects of the project?

	1 (-)	2	3	4	5 (+)	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Regular use of the information uploaded to the trade portal	%	18.2%	27.3%	36.4%	18.2%	11
Design of trade portal	27.3%	18.2%	54.5%	%	%	11
Identification of information needs	18.2%	%	36.4%	36.4%	9.1%	11
Dissemination of the trade portal link	%	27.3%	18.2%	27.3%	27.3%	11
Consultation on knowledge products created during the project	9.1%	27.3%	36.4%	27.3%	%	11

18. Please select your country.

Value	Count
Kiribati	3
Nauru	1
Niue	2
Samoa	2
Tonga	1
Tuvalu	1
Vanuatu	1

19. Which of the following most closely describes your role in the project?

Value	Percent	Count
National Information Officer	27.3%	3
National Project Coordinator	9.1%	1
Representative of ministry or government department	45.5%	5
National technical expert	9.1%	1
Contact point	9.1%	1

20. Which of the following most closely describes your role in the project?

Value	Percent	Count
Male	54.5%	6
Female	36.4%	4
Prefer not to say	9.1%	1

21. In the space below, please comment on how you think the project could have been improved. Also, feel free to leave any other relevant comments.

Thank you UNCTAD - we look forward to more collaboration like such in future. cheers

-To ensure that the portal is updated to also allow for the provision of notifications to the WTO.
Given that each Signatory are at different levels with their regulatory and legislative measures. There's definitely gaps with legislative measures in place at the national level; UNCTAD could look into this and provide assistance in developing antidumping, countervailing measures and trade remedies for Signatories who don't have those in place?

more in-country visits.

There is still space to improve Samoa's trade portal as most of the information hasn't been uploaded , it would also be ideal to have trainings from time to time for the officers who will maintain the portal in terms of uploading and updating information. There is also the tariff tab where most of the signatories are interested in which can only be updated by UNCTAD, is there a way signatories can build their capacity in this area . Also, the sustainability of the portal is one of the most vital part where signatory countries are mostly questioning for the long run, whether UNCTAD will remain as the sustaining body for the unit.

ANNEX III. PRIVATE SECTOR CONSULTATION

Economic relations in the Pacific

Thank you for participating in this consultation on economic relations among Pacific countries. Its purpose is to collect opinions from the private sector on challenges and opportunities related to transparency in international trade and investment. Please click 'next' to start the survey and to advance to each question. The process will take around five minutes and only a few questions marked with a red asterisk (*) are mandatory.

1. Please indicate which of the following issues have a more negative influence on your company/-ies capacity to trade and invest in other countries in the Pacific region. Multiple answers possible.

Value	Percent	Count
Tariffs	38.5%	20
Logistics	38.5%	20
Funding and insurance	44.2%	23
Social and cultural barriers	15.4%	8
Uncertainty about import/export procedures	38.5%	20
Uncertainty about other regulations	28.8%	15
Other (please specify)	17.3%	9

Other (sic):

China companies deal in bulk quantities with certain minimum purchases requirements plus the difficulty with the payments terms. A small company could do well as a supplier of quality products from the Chinese manufacturers but the payment terms of 100% upfront is like giving away money with no guarantee of supply. very hard for small companies.

Do not have business connection. The distance makes it hard to commect

Non tariff differences in standards and their application

Uncertainty about Market - if goods will sell well etc

frequency of shipment

less demand on photographic services

negative foreign investment policies

2. Please indicate which of the following areas of domestic regulations might be more relevant to your company/-ies when trading and investing in other Pacific countries.Multiple answers possible

Value	Percent	Count
Tariffs and rules of origin	52.3%	23
Anti-dumping and countervailing measures	2.3%	1
Import licensing procedures	31.8%	14
Customs procedures	45.5%	20
Taxes and administrative fees	40.9%	18
Sale, distribution, warehousing and transportation rules	31.8%	14
Insurance and banking procedures	22.7%	10
Work and residence permits	25.0%	11
Business registration procedures	25.0%	11
Land and real estate legislation	20.5%	9
Phytosanitary clearance	15.9%	7

3. How well are you informed on the types of trade regulations that are relevant to your company in each of the following countries (including your own country). Please, rate from 1 (Very poorly informed) to 5 (Very well informed)

	1	2	3	4	5	Responses
	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Row %	Count
Beneficiaries	50.2%	13.5%	27.6%	4.0%	4.7%	31
Australia and New Zealand	25.7%	14.3%	41.4%	17.1%	1.4%	35

4. What would you do to obtain relevant information for your company to trade or invest in a foreign country in the Pacific region? Multiple answers possible.

Value	Percent	Count
Ask for advice from the foreign government	43.2%	19
Ask for advice from your own government	45.5%	20
Partner with a local company	34.1%	15
Recruit specialized consultants	13.6%	6
Check internet resources	61.4%	27
Other - Please specify	6.8%	3

Other (sic):
Ads
Ask for advice from foreign business community
testing

5. Are you aware of the PACER Plus Agreement?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	58.5%	24
No	41.5%	17
	Totals	41

6. How do you assess the PACER Plus in terms of investment and trade opportunities for your company/ies, from 1 (very negatively) to 5 (very positively)?

Value	Percent	Count
1	13.0%	3
2	13.0%	3
3	34.8%	8
4	30.4%	7
5	8.7%	2
	Totals	23

7. Are you familiar with your country's trade and investment portal website?

Value	Percent	Count
Yes	61.0%	25
No	39.0%	16
	Totals	41

8. How useful has the portal been for your business operations, from 1 (not useful) to 5 (very useful)?

Value	Percent	Count
2	13.0%	3
3	43.5%	10
4	26.1%	6
5	17.4%	4
Totals		23

9. How frequently do you generally use the trade portal?

Value	Percent	Count
Every week	5,6%	1
Every month	55.6%	10
Other (please specify)	38.9%	7
	Totals	18

Other (sic):
On an as need basis
Rarely
Sometimes
When I need to which is rare
havent yet
never used
only when needed

10. Do you have any comments or suggestions related to the trade portal? If so, please use the space below.

add a contact point tab on the web page

Need awareness on the trade portal so that it can be known to the businesses and especially the private sector.

Trade Portal should be make aware to all agent that are involved and also private sector...some guidelines on products available in each county should be included. Investment opportunities should also be reflected.

11. Where is your company based?

Value	Percent	Count
Australia	5.60%	2
Kiribati	5.60%	2
Nauru	5.60%	2
Niue	5.60%	2
Samoa	58.30%	21
Tuvalu	19.40%	7
	Totals	36

12. Please select the category that best describes your company's size and ownership

Value	Percent	Count
Freelance / Self-employment	45,7%	16
Microenterprise	5,7%	2
SME	22,9%	8
Large company	8,6%	3
Foreign company branch	2,9%	1
Private sector association	8,6%	3
Other (please specify)	5,7%	2
	Totals	35

Other (sic):
NGO / Social enterprise
Public enterprise

13. How many employees does your company have?
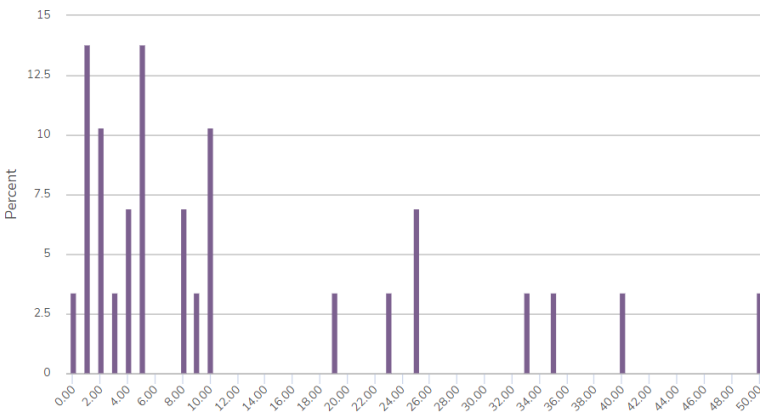
14. Please select the category that best applies to your company's area of activity

Value	Percent	Count
Food, drinks and tobacco (including live animals);	20.0%	7
Raw materials	2.9%	1
Energy products	5.7%	2
Other manufactured goods	25.7%	9
Tourism	11.4%	4
Other (please specify)	34.3%	12
	Totals	35

Other (sic):

Agriculture based value addition and fresh produce

CONSTRUCTION & SERVICES

Consultancy

Information Technology

Photography capturing treasured memories & memorial finish products, advertising & promotional services

Retail clothing apparel, footwear and accessories

Stamps and postcards, stationery

Transportation

acesories

bakery

consultancy services

consulting

15. Please select your gender

Value	Percent	Count
Male	41.2%	14
Female	52.9%	18
Prefer not to say	5.9%	2
	Totals	34

16. Please use the space below to provide any further comments or information you think are relevant

We only source small niche markets

Certification of local companies to ensure compliance with trade and relevant services area standards is essential for our area of service when dealing with foreign businesses. Financing is also important and some incentive to support large purchases for major projects can assist small businesses.

PACER PLUS is supposed to facilitate trade but there is no attempt to harmonize entry requirements so that countries can protect their borders just power based constraints until there is a level approach to enabling trade this agreement will serve Australia and New Zealand best to the disadvantage of the PICS it is the reason why why PNG and iji have not joined.

Due to covid we are 4 employees in normal home we are 9

Thank you for the survey, looking forward to work with you and any other company regarding trade and investment.

Would appreciate financial assistance to keep business going with Bank & purchasing new technology for value added within business services

ANNEX IV. EVALUATION MATRIX AND QUESTIONNAIRES

Matrix

#	EQ	##	Indicator(s)	Sources	Data collection	Analysis	Ref
1	Beneficiaries' needs	1	Private sector overall assessment of PACER+ opportunities	Private sector	Survey via whatsapp	Statistics	Sur1.1
1	Beneficiaries' needs	2	Importance given to regulatory trasnparency among trade obstacles	Private sector	Survey via whatsapp	Statistics	Sur1.2
1	Beneficiaries' needs	1	Agregated responses to evaluation question 1 on Beneficiaries' needs	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int1.1
1	Beneficiaries' needs	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ1 about response to beneficiaries' needs	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis1.1
2	Project design	1	Most relevant areas of regulatory transparency	Private sector	Survey via whatsapp	Statistics	Sur2.1
2	Project design	2	Knowledge on other and own country regulation	Private sector	Survey via whatsapp	Statistics	Sur2.2
2	Project design	3	Reliance on Internet sources	Private sector	Survey via whatsapp	Statistics	Sur2.3
2	Project design	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 2 on Project design	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int2.1
2	Project design	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ2 about Project design	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis2.1
3	UNCTAD's role	1	Involvement of UNCTAD's staff and resources	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc3.1
3	UNCTAD's role	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 3 on UNCTAD's role	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int3.1
3	UNCTAD's role	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ3 about UNCTAD's comparative advantage	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis3.1
3	UNCTAD's role	2	Alignment to SDGs and relevance to national SDG gaps	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc3.2

#	EQ	##	Indicator(s)	Sources	Data collection	Analysis	Ref
4	Achievements	1	Preparation of the first set of notifications and information exchanges to be made upon the entry into force of the agreement	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.1
4	Achievements	2	Contact focal points and enquiry points established	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.2
4	Achievements	3	Regional dialogue launched	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.3
4	Achievements	4	Capacity built on transparency obligations	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.4
4	Achievements	5	Capacity built on gender-trade links	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.5
4	Achievements	6	Trade Committees and regional platform launched	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.6
4	Achievements	7	Practical training on trade portals	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc4.7
4	Achievements	1	Information availability on anti-Dumping and countervailing measures per country	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web4.1
4	Achievements	2	Information availability on global safeguard measures per country	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web4.2
4	Achievements	3	Information availability on import licensing per country	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web4.3
4	Achievements	4	Other relevant categories of information in country portals	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web4.4
4	Achievements	5	Information availability under additional categories per country	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web4.5
4	Achievements	1	Aggregated responses to EQ 4 / achievement 1: notifications first set	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.1
4	Achievements	2	Aggregated responses to EQ4 / achievement 2: focal points	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.2
4	Achievements	3	Aggregated responses to EQ 4 / achivement 3: regional dialogue	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.3

#	EQ	##	Indicator(s)	Sources	Data collection	Analysis	Ref
4	Achievements	4	Aggregated responses to EQ4 / achievement 4: general transparency-related capacity	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.4
4	Achievements	5	Aggregated responses to EQ4 / achievement 5: trade and gender	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.5
4	Achievements	6	Aggregated responses to EQ 4 / achievement 6: committees and regional platform	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.6
4	Achievements	7	Aggregated responses to EQ 4 / Achievement 7: practical training	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int4.7
4	Achievements	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 1: notifications upon entry into force	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.1
4	Achievements	2	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 2: focal points	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.2
4	Achievements	3	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 3: regional dialogue	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.3
4	Achievements	4	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 4: capacity for transparency obligations	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.4
4	Achievements	5	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achivement 5: capacity on gender and trade	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.5
4	Achievements	6	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 6: committees and regional platform	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.6
4	Achievements	7	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ4 / achievement 7: regional platform	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis4.7
4	Achievements	1	Number of legislation pieces and related content uploaded by country/category	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int4.1
4	Achievements	2	Number and typology of external users by country/category	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int4.2
4	Achievements	3	Use of key words related to portal content in social media and benchmark webpages	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int4.3
4	Achievements	4	Identification of contact points and related activity per country	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int4.4
5	Effectiveness factors	1	Enabling and limiting factors identified in project	Project documents	Document review	Logical	Doc5.1

#	EQ	##	Indicator(s)	Sources	Data collection	Analysis	Ref
			reporting			analysis	
5	Effectiveness factors	1	Agregated responses to EQ5 on enabling/limiting factors	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int5.1
5	Effectiveness factors	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ5 on enabling/limiting factors	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis5.1
6	Implementation and monitoring	1	Timely implementation of activities according to initial plans	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc6.1
6	Implementation and monitoring	2	Project adaptation to challenges reported	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc6.2
6	Implementation and monitoring	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 5 on Implementation and monitoring	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int6.1
6	Implementation and monitoring	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ5 on implementation and monitoring	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis6.1
7	Use of UNCTAD's resources	1	References to other UNCTAD departments staff and resources	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc7.1
7	Use of UNCTAD's resources	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 6 on Use of UNCTAD's resources	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int7.1
7	Use of UNCTAD's resources	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ6 on UNCTAD's resources	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis7.1
8	Beneficiaries commitment	1	Indications of beneficiaries' involvement in platform activity	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc8.1
8	Beneficiaries commitment	2	Indications of beneficiaries' ownership in platform design and maintenance	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc8.2
8	Beneficiaries commitment	1	Agregated responses to evaluation question 7 on Beneficiaries commitment	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int8.1
8	Beneficiaries commitment	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ7 on beneficiaries commitment and continuation arrangements	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis8.1
8	Beneficiaries commitment	1	Number of users uploading pieces and related content uploaded by country/category	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int8.1
8	Beneficiaries	2	Evolution of uploads across the time by country/category	Portal users	Internet metrics	Statistics	Int8.2

#	EQ	##	Indicator(s)	Sources	Data collection	Analysis	Ref
	commitment						
9	Gender mainstreaming	1	Salience of gender issues in project desing and follow up	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc9.1
9	Gender mainstreaming	1	Salience of gender issues in portals	Trade portals	Web review	Logical analysis	Web9.1
9	Gender mainstreaming	1	Agregated responses to evaluation question 8 on Gender mainstreaming	UNCTAD and partners	Interviews	Triangulation	Int9.1
9	Gender mainstreaming	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ8 on Gender mainstreaming	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis9.1
10	Equitable development	1	Salience of inclusive trade and investment in project design and follow up	Project documentos	Documento revise	Logicial análisis	Doc10.1
10	Equitable development	1	Salience of inclusive trade and investment in portals	Tarde portal	Web revise	Logicial análisis	Web10.1
10	Equitable development	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 9 on Equitable development	UNCTAD and partes	Interviews	Triangulación	Int10.1
10	Equitable development	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ9 on Equitable development	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis10.1
11	Private and public partnerships	1	Participation of private sector in project activities	Project documents	Document review	Logical analysis	Doc11.1
11	Private and public partnerships	1	Aggregated responses to evaluation question 10 on Private and public partnerships	UNCTAD and partes	Interviews	Triangulación	Int11.1
11	Prívate and publicó partnerships	1	Agreement on preliminary conclusions on EQ10 on Private and public partnerships	Local counterparts	Discussion group	Triangulation	Dis11.1

Document review questionnaire

The review of the project documents was guided by the following questions.

Matrix Ref.	Question
Doc 3.1	Do the project documents refer to previous work by UNCTAD or synergies with other UNCTAD ongoing activities?
Doc3.2	Alignment to SDGs and relevance to national SDG gaps
Doc 4.1	Are the nine Pacific island countries prepared for notifications and information exchanges on the entry into force of the PACER Plus Agreement?
Doc 4.2	Are contact/focal points and enquiry points established in each of the nine pacific islands?
Doc 4.3	Has a dialogue for regional coordinating networks been launched?
Doc 4.4	Have the countries acquired the capacity to implement PACER Plus transparency obligations?
Doc 4.5	Have human and institutional capacity on the links between trade and gender been strengthened?
Doc 4.6	Have the nine islands set the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees, through the establishment of national stakeholder networks, and launched a joint regional electronic platform for the publication and transparency of trade regulations?
Doc 4.7	Have the nine islands been equipped with the practical knowledge necessary to enter information in the platform for the publication and transparency of trade regulations?
Doc 5.1	Timely implementation of activities according to initial plans
Doc 5.2	Project adaptation to challenges reported
Doc 6.1	References to other UNCTAD departments staff and resources
Doc 7.1	Indications of beneficiaries' involvement in platform activity
Doc 7.2	Indications of beneficiaries' ownership in platform design and maintenance
Doc 8.1	Salience of gender issues in project design and follow up
Doc 9.1	Salience of inclusive trade and investment in project design and follow up
Doc 10.1	Participation of private sector in project activities

Web review

The review of the documents uploaded onto the web portal aimed to collect information on the following points.

Matrix Ref.	Question
Web 4.1	Information availability on anti-Dumping and countervailing measures per country
Web 4.2	Information availability on global safeguard measures per country
Web 4.3	Information availability on import licensing per country
Web 4.4	Other relevant categories of information in country portals
Web 4.4	Information availability under additional categories per country
Web 8.1	Salience of gender issues in portals
Web9.1	Salience of inclusive trade and investment in portals

Internet metrics

The review of the documents uploaded onto the web portal aimed to collect information on the following points.

Matrix ref	Indicator(s)
Int 4.1	Number of legislation pieces and related content uploaded by country/category
Int 4.2	Number and typology of external users by country/category
Int 4.3	Use of key words related to portal content in social media and benchmark webpages
Int 4.4	Identification of contact points and related activity per country
Int 7.1	Number of users uploading pieces and related content uploaded by country/category
Int 7.2	Evolution of uploads across the time by country/category

ANNEX V. RESULT FRAMEWORK

The following table summarizes the intervention logic according to the Project Document (Doc, 2018b). The evaluation focused on the achievement of the below-listed objectives and indicators (effectiveness) and activities (efficiency).

Intervention logic	#	Description
Overall goal	0	Meeting PACER Plus Transparency standards with a view to strengthening regional integration and competitiveness in order to create economic opportunities, particularly for SMEs.
Objectives	1	Regulatory transparency increased
	2	Trade-and-investment-related capacity built
Indicators	a	Countries have prepared to the extent possible the first set of notifications and information exchanges to be made upon the entry into force of the PACER Plus
	b	Capacity is acquired to implement transparency obligations in the PACER Plus
	c	Strengthened human and institutional capacity on the links between trade and gender, including vis-à-vis transparency obligations
	d	Contact focal points and enquiry points are established in the nine Pacific islands
	e	The dialogue for a regional coordinating network for maintaining the transparency standards in the PACER Plus has been launched
	f	The nine Pacific islands have set the basis for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees
	g	The nine Pacific islands have launched a joint regional electronic platform for publication and transparency of trade regulation and have been equipped accordingly
Activities	0	Advisory services on the implementation of transparency obligations and regulatory data collection
	1	Gap and stakeholder analyses in each of the nine Pacific islands
	2	Regional forum for contact/focal points
	3	A regional electronic platform for publication and transparency of trade regulations
	4	Two import procedures and one export procedure published online for each country and simplification measures proposed
	5	National workshops
	6	Sustainability of the regional electronic platform

ANNEX VI. TERMS OF REFERENCE

Independent Evaluation of UNCTAD Project "Transparency in Trade Regulation and Facilitation in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus"

A. Introduction and Purpose

1. This document outlines the Terms of Reference (TOR) for the final independent evaluation of the project entitled "Transparency in Trade Regulation and Facilitation in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus" funded by the Governments of Australia and New Zealand.

2. The UNCTAD Evaluation and Monitoring Unit (EMU), in close collaboration with the Technical Cooperation Section, will undertake this evaluation.

3. This evaluation exercise is meant to ensure ownership, result-based orientation, cost-effectiveness and quality of UNCTAD assistance. By carrying out this evaluation, UNCTAD plans to assess its work, to learn lessons, to receive feedback, appraisal and recognition, as well as to mobilize resources by showing the possible attribution of achievements to the programme.

4. The evaluation will systematically and objectively assess project design, project management, and project performance, including consideration of gender equality objectives. The evaluation will provide assessments that are credible and useful, and also include practical and constructive recommendations, in order to enhance the work of UNCTAD in this area.

5. The evaluation will provide accountability to UNCTAD management, the Governments of Australia and New Zealand, project stakeholders, as well as UNCTAD's member States with whom the final evaluation report will be shared.

B. Project Background

6. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) with the financial support of the Government of Australia and New Zealand shall provide training and assistance to the nine Pacific island countries – Cook Islands, Kiribati, Nauru, Niue, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu – to increase their regulatory transparency in trade and investment-related capacity to reach the standards set out in the Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER Plus). The project aims at strengthening regional integration and competitiveness to create economic opportunities, particularly for small and medium-sized enterprises and women entrepreneurs.

7. The project focuses on identifying capacity gaps and strengthening the institutional environment of the nine Pacific islands to ensure full compliance with the transparency obligations of PACER Plus. Three modes of technical assistance will be provided through the present project:

    (a) At the regional level, the project will build capacity through one regional workshop and assist in the development of a regional strategy for the exchange of information among PACER Plus signatories, materialized in the launch for a regional network initiative and a regional trade hub to coordinate the implementation of the transparency obligations in PACER Plus, which will work in synergy with the national platforms. Identification of national training needs to be addressed in the national training sessions. The target

audience is national Contact/Focal points.

(b) At the national level, a technical assistance package composed of one rounds of national training workshops that will be adapted to two groups of countries: WTO Members (Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga and Vanuatu) and non-WTO Members. The workshops will also set the basis for national networks of stakeholders, laying foundations for National Transparency PACER Plus Committees. The target audience is a wider group of relevant stakeholders from the public and private sector, as identified during the stakeholder analysis at the beginning of the project.

(c) Furthermore, continuous advisory services will be delivered locally and remotely through telecommunication and web-based solutions. This also includes an in-depth UNCTAD online training course on regulatory transparency.

8. The program delivery will be based on initial gap-analysis and tailor-made to the participating countries' realities. The project will strengthen existing, and where necessary prepare the basis for, transparency mechanisms and public-private partnership platforms in the nine Pacific islands. It will increase technical knowledge on transparency-related trade and investment issues. The project will reinforce the dialogue and coordination between these stakeholders as a condition to success in the implementation of the PACER Plus. The initial gap-analysis will also assess any gender-specific constraints that may hinder full compliance with transparency and regulatory obligations. Particular focus will be placed on existing gender gaps, including women's role in the economy, political participation in relevant institutional bodies, and access to information regarding laws, regulations and procedures. The findings will inform capacity-building activities by the inclusion of gender-specific components as part of the online course, and of national and regional workshops.

9. The project contributes to the following **Sustainable Development Goals:**

5: Gender Equality;

8: Decent Work and Economic Growth;

16: Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions; and

17: Partnership for the Goals

as well as the following **SDG Targets:**

5.1 End all forms of discrimination against all women and girls everywhere

8.3 Promote development-oriented policies for productive activities, decent job creation, entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation and MSMEs

16.6 Develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels

17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular doubling LDCs' share of global exports by 2020

17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development

C. Scope of the Evaluation

10. The evaluation will cover the duration of the project from **18 May 2018 to 31 December 2020**.

11. The evaluation is expected to address the following questions under the following criteria:

a) *Relevance*

- Did the project design, choice of activities and deliverables properly reflect and address the development needs of participating countries, taking into account UNCTAD's mandates?

- Were the actual activities and outputs of the project consistent with the overall goals and intended outcomes and how have the different activities complemented each other towards the intended results?

- What is UNCTAD's comparative advantage in this area and to what extent did this project optimize it?

b) *Effectiveness*

- Are there indications that the project achieved, or is likely to achieve, planned objectives and outcomes as enunciated in the project document, as well as the SDG targets supported by the project?

- What are the lessons learned or best practices for similar future interventions?

c) *Efficiency*

- Have project implementation modalities, and internal monitoring and control been adequate in ensuring the achievement of the expected outcomes in a timely and cost-effective manner?

- Has the project leveraged in-house expertise, previous research and technical cooperation outcomes, existing databases, and other internal resources of UNCTAD and/or external collaboration from international development partners and mechanisms?

d) *Sustainability of results*

- Is there evidence that beneficiary countries are committed to continue working towards the project objectives beyond the end of the project and/or have there been catalytic effects from the project both at the national/regional levels?

e) *Gender and human rights*

- To what extent the design and implementation of the project incorporated gender mainstreaming considerations, and can results be identified in this regard?

- To what extent does the project advance UNCTAD's efforts to promote equitable development?

f) *Partnerships and synergies*

- How has the project advanced partnerships with national and regional counterparts, international development partners, the civil society and/or the private sector in support of results, and sustainability of results?

D. Deliverables and Expected Outputs

- The evaluation, on the basis of its findings and assessments made on the above criteria, should

draw conclusions, make recommendations and identify lessons learned from the implementation of the project.

- More specifically, the evaluation should:

- Highlight what has been successful and can be replicated elsewhere;

- Indicate shortcomings and constraints in the implementation of the project while, at the same time, identifying the remaining challenges, gaps and needs for future courses of action;

- Make pragmatic recommendations to suggest how UNCTAD's work in this area can be strengthened in order to deliver better results in addressing beneficiaries' needs and create synergies through collaboration with other UNCTAD divisions, international organizations and development partners, and other international forums;

- Draw lessons of wider application for the replication of the experience gained in this project in other projects/countries;

12. Three deliverables are expected out of this evaluation (following EMU templates):

- An inception report;

- A draft evaluation report; and

- The final evaluation report.

13. The inception report should summarize the desk review and specify the evaluation methodology, determining thereby the exact focus and scope of the exercise, including the evaluation questions, the sampling strategy and the data collection instruments.

14. The final report of the evaluation must be composed of the following key elements:

- Executive summary;

- Introduction of the evaluation, a brief description of the projects, the scope of the evaluation and a clear description of the methodology used;

- Findings and assessments according to the criteria listed in Section 3 of this ToR, with a comparison table of planned and implemented project activities and outputs; and

- Conclusions and recommendations drawn from the assessments.

15. All the evaluation assessments must be supported by facts and findings, direct or indirect evidence, and well-substantiated logic. It follows that proposed recommendations must be supported by the findings and be relevant, specific, practical, actionable, and time-bound recommendations.

E. Methodology

16. The evaluation will adopt a theory-driven approach, guided by the project-results framework, and ensure a gender and human rights responsive evaluation. The evaluator is required to use a mixed-method approach, including qualitative as well as quantitative data gathering and analysis as the basis for a triangulation exercise of all available data to draw conclusions and findings.

17. In view of the current global pandemic situation, innovative methods for data collection are required. Hence, methods for data gathering for this evaluation will likely include, but should not be limited to, the following:

- Desk review of project documents and relevant materials;

- Collect and analyse relevant web and social media metrics related to the outputs of the project, as appropriate;

- Interviews with relevant UNCTAD staff;

- Telephone/skype interviews with a representative balanced sample of project participants, funding partner and other project partners, and other relevant stakeholders;

- Online surveys of beneficiaries of the project, and other stakeholders, as may be required; and

- Observe virtual meetings to be implemented by the project during October-December 2020.

18. As part of the desk review, which will lead to an Inception Report, the evaluator will use the project document as well as additional documents such as mission reports; progress reports, financial reports, publications, studies - both produced under the project as well as received from national and regional counterparts. An exhaustive list of donors, project beneficiaries as well as other partners and counterparts involved in the project will be provided to the evaluator.

19. The evaluator will further elaborate on the evaluation methodology in an Inception Report, determining thereby the exact focus and approach for the exercise, including developing tailor-made questions that target different stakeholders (based on a stakeholder analysis), and developing the sampling strategy and identifying the sources and methods for data collection. Contribution analysis could be undertaken in particular to assess project results.

20. The evaluator is required to submit a separate final list of those interviewed in the Annex of the evaluation report. The evaluator is to ensure a wide representation of stakeholders, bearing in mind the need to include those in a disadvantaged or minority position as appropriate.

F. Description of Duties

21. The evaluator reports to the Chief of EMU. S/he will undertake the evaluation exercise under the guidance of the EMU and in coordination with the project manager. The evaluator is responsible for the evaluation design, data collection, analysis and reporting as provided in this TOR. The evaluator will submit a copy-edited final report to UNCTAD.

22. The evaluator shall act independently, in line with United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) Ethical Guidelines and in her/his capacities and not as a representative of any government or organisation that may present a conflict of interest. S/he will have no previous experience of working with the project or of working in any capacity linked with it.

23. The evaluator should observe the UNEG guidelines, standards, and norms for evaluations in the UN system, as well as UNCTAD's Evaluation Policy, in the conduct of this assignment. The evaluator needs to integrate human rights and gender equality in evaluations to the extent possible. The evaluator needs to ensure a complete, fair, engaging, unreserved, and unbiased assessment. In case of difficulties, uncertainties or concern in the conduct of the evaluation, the evaluator needs to report immediately to the Chief of EMU to seek guidance or clarification.

24. The project team will support the evaluation, by providing desk review documents (following EMU desk review documents guidelines), contact details of project stakeholders as well as any additional documents that the evaluator requests. It is the responsibility of the project manager to ensure senior management engagement throughout the evaluation and timely feedback in the

quality assurance and factual clarification process coordinated by the EMU. The project team will review and provide comments on the inception, draft and final reports with a view on quality assurance and factual accuracies.

25. The EMU acts as clearing entity during the main steps of this evaluation. It endorses the TOR and approves the selection of the proposed evaluator. EMU reviews the evaluation methodology, clears the draft report, performs quality assurance of the final report and participates in disseminating the final report to stakeholders within and outside of UNCTAD. EMU engages the project manager throughout the evaluation process in supporting the evaluation and validating the reports.

G. Timetable

26. The total duration of the evaluation is equivalent to 45 days of work and will take place from 5 October to 29 January 2021

H. Monitoring and Progress Control

27. The evaluator must keep the EMU informed of the progress made in the evaluation on a regular basis.

28. The evaluator will submit the inception report on 9 October 2020.

29. A project closing workshop is currently planned for early December 2020. The evaluator could be invited to present preliminary findings and recommendations for discussion with the project stakeholders in attendance, including national counterparts and the donors.

30. The first draft of the report should be presented to the EMU by 18 December 2020 for quality assurance purposes. The revised draft report will then be shared with the project manager/team for factual clarification and comments.

31. The deadline for submission of the final report will be 29 January 2021.

32. The contract concludes, and payment issued, upon satisfactory receipt of the final report.

Qualifications and Experience

- Education: Advanced university degree in economics, trade, development or related field.

- Experience: At least 10 years of experience in conducting evaluations, preferably on interventions in the areas of trade and development. Experience with multi-stakeholder partnerships desirable. Experience in gender mainstreaming as well as experience of the Asia-Pacific region is also desirable.

- Language: Fluency in oral and written English.

I. Conditions of Service

33. The evaluator will serve under a consultancy contract as detailed in the applicable United Nations rules and regulations. The evaluator will not be considered as staff member or official of the United Nations but shall abide by the relevant standards of conduct. The United Nations is entitled to all intellectual property and other proprietary rights deriving from this exercise.

ANNEX VII. IMPORT AND EXPORT PROCEDURES IN TRADE PORTALS

The following table shows the import procedures published by each country during the project. Some categories of procedure have been combined for ease of display. For example, the category motor vehicles and machinery includes procedures for both new and used vehicles.

Category of Import Procedure	Cook Islands	Kiribati	Nauru	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu
Motor vehicles and machinary	1	1	1	1	1	1	1		2
Food and beverages	1				1		1		
Animals and Animal products		1		1		1		1	2
Mobile phones		1							
Electrical Appliances					1	1			
Plants and Plant Products			1	1	1	1			1
Timber					1				1
Ozone depleting substances			1		1			1	1
Pesticides					1				
Dangerous drugs									1
Liquor	1								
Other goods									1
Personal effects									1
Appliance energy labels and standards									1
TOTAL	3	3	3	3	7	4	2	2	11

The following table shows the export procedures published by each country during the project. Some categories of procedure have been combined for ease of display. For example, the category 'Food and Beverages' includes some procedures for individual products such as vanilla, honey and coffee. The table also highlights where procedures are particularly relevant to women producers (shaded in grey), due to higher levels of women's involvement in the production of certain exports

Category of Export Procedure	Cook Islands	Kirbati	Nauru	Niue	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Tuvalu	Vanuatu
Food and beverages*				2	2	1		4	1
Fish and fish products	1				1	1	1	1	1
Animal and animal products									2
Plant products	1								4
Marine products	1	3							
Agricultural products		2			1		2		
Recycled products		1							
Phosphate			1						
Scrap metal			1						
Handicrafts				1			1	1	
Tobacco products					1				
General animal, food and plant products								1	
Timber									1
Other goods									1
TOTAL	3	6	2	3	5	2	4	7	10

ANNEX VIII. WEB METRICS DETAILS

Mentions of PACER Plus key terms online since 2010, by country

		Country	**Total of mentions**	**Total of mentions after national workshops**
The web	Beneficiary Countries	Vanuatu	83	19 (23%)
		Niue	1	0 (0%)
		Tonga	23	5 (22%)
		Samoa	15	2 (13%)
		Solomon Islands	12	1 (8%)
		Cook Islands	10	1 (10%)
		Nauru	1	0 (0%)
	Control cases	Papua New Guinea	70	3 (4%)
		Fiji	68	7 (10%)
Online newspapers[4]	Beneficiary			
		Vanuatu	14	3 (21%)
		Tonga	4	0 (0%)
		Samoa	9	5 (56%)
		Solomon Islands	31	16 (51%)
		Cook Islands	10	3 (30%)
	Control cases	Papua New Guinea	9	0 (0%)
		Fiji	12	3 (25%)

Mentions of PACER Plus key terms online since 2010, by country

| | | Country | **Mentions per month in average** | |
			Before national workshops	After national workshops
The web	Beneficiary Countries	Vanuatu	0.55	1.05
		Niue	0.01	0.00
		Tonga	0.15	0.31
		Samoa	0.11	0.13
		Solomon Islands	0.09	0.06
		Cook Islands	0.07	0.20
		Nauru	0.01	0.00
	Control cases	Papua New Guinea	0.57	0.18
		Fiji	0.52	0.42
Online newspapers[4]	Beneficiary			
		Vanuatu	0.09	0.17
		Tonga	0.03	0.00
		Samoa	0.03	0.32
		Solomon Islands	0.13	1.00
		Cook Islands	0.05	0.59
	Control cases	Papua New Guinea	0.08	0.00
		Fiji	0.08	0.18