

Preface

This handbook draws on the experiences of the Commonwealth Secretariat in delivering technical assistance to Member States in the area of export development. Three approaches have been used to deliver this assistance. One approach has been to engage a consultant on a short-term basis to provide support to a member country in producing a framework for export development. Another has been to engage a consultant to work with a member country on a more long-term basis, usually two years, during which time an export development plan is produced and the first phase of its implementation is achieved. From the beginning of 2006, a third and now more preferred approach was adopted. This approach involves the technical staff at the Commonwealth Secretariat working closely with stakeholders in member countries in addressing the impediments to export competitiveness and developing strategies to improve export performance. The output of this exercise is the national export strategy document. Sometimes, but not always, the Secretariat engages an external consultant to provide support for the exercise.

This handbook includes lessons learned from a series of national export strategy projects undertaken by the Commonwealth Secretariat, individually as well as in collaboration with the International Trade Centre (ITC). The collaboration developed from a recommendation made by representatives of some 28 countries and territories at the 'Small States in Transition: From Vulnerability to Competitiveness' workshop in Port of Spain, 18-21 January 2004.¹ The recommendation was for the Secretariat and the ITC to explore ways of working more closely to help small states and other Commonwealth member countries formulate policies and strategies to improve their export performance.

In January 2005, the Secretariat and the ITC agreed on a collaborative framework to jointly deliver technical assistance to an increasing number of countries that were seeking to develop national export strategies. Both organisations provided technical staff to support the projects. ITC provided a regional consultant to give specific support to the projects in the various regions while the Secretariat covered the cost of a national coordinator. In addition, the ITC made available its CD-ROM on strategy (Box 1) to the countries and provided training on its use. The Secretariat used its extensive network in Member States to engage both the public and the private sectors at the highest levels. Some of the countries to benefit from this collaboration were Belize, Botswana, Fiji, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Swaziland and Uganda.

Box 1: The ITC ‘Secrets of Strategy’ template

The ITC’s ‘Secrets of Strategy’ template is an interactive CD-ROM developed in 2003 to respond to two concerns raised at various ITC-organised executive forums. The first concern was that many developing countries lacked comprehensive national export strategies. The second concern was that where such strategies existed, implementation remained highly ineffective.

The template was designed as a process tool for developing a relevant national export strategy based on a realistic assessment of national capacities, competitive position, the resources available to devote to the export priority, and a clear understanding of what works and what does not.

The template covers all the important aspects of strategy development. It addresses the issue of political commitment to export development. It provides detailed parameters for the preparation of sector level strategies. It includes step-by-step approaches to the design of strategies for essential cross-sectoral support service. The template also provides guidelines for managing the strategy.

Source: www.intracen.org

In 2008 an external review was conducted of all the national export strategy projects (Record and Mtonya). The review sought to establish whether project activities were achieving project objectives, whether inputs were being efficiently applied and contributing to national priorities, and whether there was any merit in changing the design and mode of delivery of the technical assistance. It assessed the venture as ‘successful’ and recommended ‘that the Commonwealth Secretariat continue to respond positively to country requests for assistance to develop a national export strategy.’

The review made two key recommendations. The first was to arrange a learning workshop to facilitate greater dialogue between beneficiary stakeholders. The second was to develop a publication describing the Secretariat’s experiences and lessons learned from supporting national export strategy projects across Member States.

The National Export Strategy Learning Workshop was held in London in May 2009. It brought together public and private sector representatives from across the Commonwealth to share their experiences on designing and formulating national export strategies. The objectives were to review and critique the existing approach to developing an NES, identify the factors that contribute to successful design and develop an enhanced approach that is effective, efficient and all inclusive. The workshop focused on preparing for the future by learning from the past, and establishing good practice. Discussions covered how to improve the delivery of projects and how the NES process could become more effective in building national capacity within a changing environment.

The countries represented² varied in size and state of development. They included Nigeria, which has 150 million people and is one of the largest oil producing and exporting countries in the world, and Tonga, a least-developed country with a population of 100,000 people. They represented island nations, coastal states and land-locked countries, some rich in minerals and others primarily reliant on agriculture, fisheries or tourism.

Participants established that within their diversity they shared many common developmental challenges. They faced similar constraints including the recurring question: How to make things happen? While it is clear that there is no one-size-fits-all prescription there are some very clearly defined factors that lead to a successful NES design process.

This handbook reflects these and other key insights and lessons learned in the development and implementation of NES projects. It is geared towards countries that are either planning to develop or are developing or implementing national export strategy projects, but it will also be useful for all those interested in international trade development.

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Notes

1. Participating countries: Antigua and Barbuda, The Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Botswana, Cyprus, Fiji Islands, Grenada, Guyana, Jamaica, Kiribati, Lesotho, Maldives, Malta, Mauritius, Namibia, Papua New Guinea, St Lucia, St Vincent and the Grenadines,

Samoa, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, Swaziland, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Tuvalu; participating territories: Montserrat, Niue.

2. Participants came from Belize, Botswana, Grenada, Namibia, Nigeria, Samoa, St Vincent and the Grenadines, Sierra Leone, Swaziland, Tanzania, Tonga, Uganda and Zanzibar.