

# 4

## Country Experiences

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### Background

In 2008, the Commonwealth Secretariat commissioned an independent evaluation of all NES projects. The review found the projects ‘to be worthwhile and an initiative that should be continued subject to continued demand from developing country member states’ (Record and Mtonya 2008).

While countries were at different stages of NES development (Box 4), there emerged three key features that the process provided:

- Development of local analytical and conceptual capacity for strategic thinking and planning;
- Providing a platform for fruitful interaction between the different stakeholders;
- Strategy was developed by local working teams, which enhanced ownership of the process and outcome making implementation easier.

The methodology included country visits and interviews with the various stakeholders and the analysis of questionnaires received from countries that were not visited.

#### Box 4: NES project spread and status

Global spread of NES projects supported by the Commonwealth Secretariat as of September 2009



The status of these projects is as follows:

**1. Completed and being implemented**

Botswana, Fiji, Grenada, Nigeria, Samoa, Tonga, Uganda

**2. Completed but experiencing implementation difficulties**

Belize, Swaziland

**3. NES process stalled**

Dominica, Namibia, St Vincent and the Grenadines

**4. NES projects in progress at the time of the evaluation**

Tanzania, Zanzibar (completed in June 2009)

**5. New NES project**

Sierra Leone (launched in July 2009; completed and officially launched by the country's president in June 2010)

## NES Stakeholder Feedback

The review found that experiences varied from country to country and from region to region and offered lessons on a range of NES issues, from mainstreaming in national development to ownership to ease of implementation and constraints in improving export performance.

### *Political commitment essential*

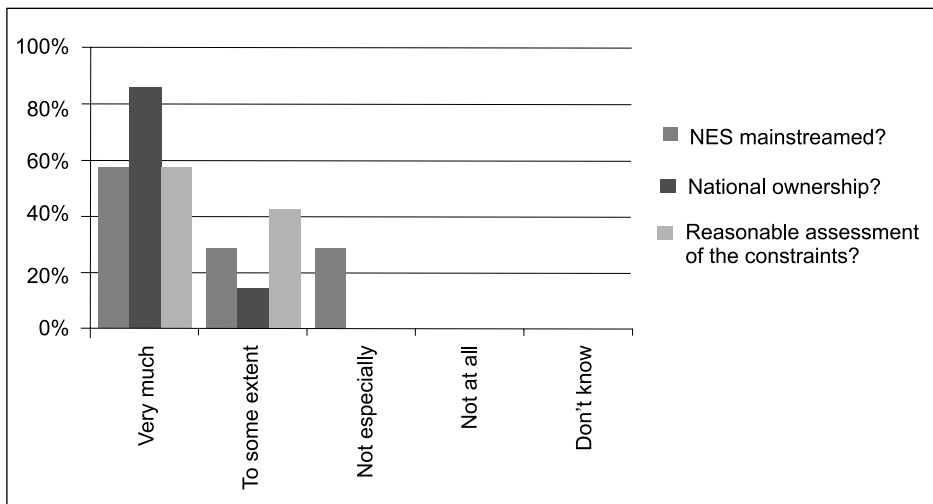
The **Uganda** NES has benefited significantly from the highest level of political commitment. President Yoweri Museveni was briefed at an early stage and he

personally signed the NES foreword during the hour he spent taking part in the public NES launch deliberations. The Cabinet also discussed and endorsed the NES.

The review concluded that this political commitment together with extensive participation during the design process had ‘resulted in real confidence among Ugandan stakeholders that the NES is properly mainstreamed across society, that national ownership is strong, and that the NES represents a fair and reasonable assessment of the constraints to improved export performance’ (Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 12).

The participation of the National Planning Authority in the tri-partite NES secretariat also ensured that the NES was fully incorporated and mainstreamed in the national planning process, with parts of the NES document used directly in the preparation of the national development plan.

The perception of the stakeholders in Uganda on the country’s NES was positive as reflected in their responses to the three questions included in the review questionnaire (Figure 2).



**Figure 2:** Uganda NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 12

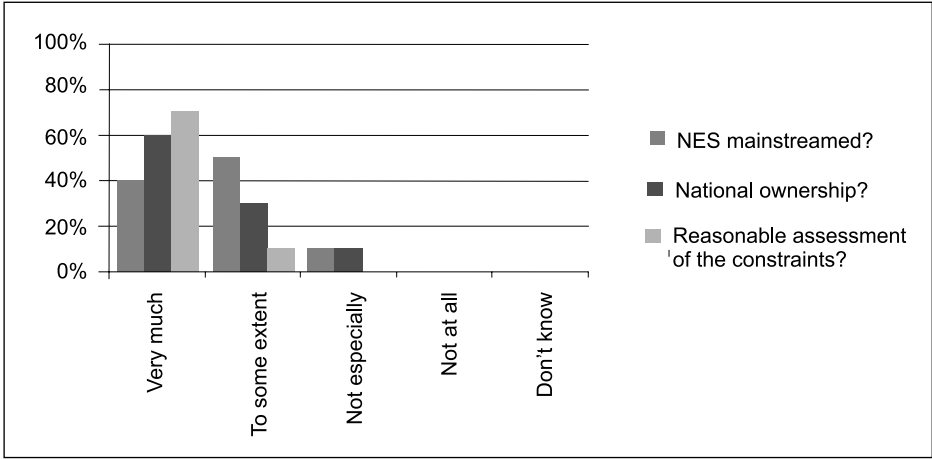
### *Private sector emphasis*

The **Grenada** NES design process had a very strong private sector emphasis and almost all of the sector design teams were chaired by the private sector. Stakeholders praised the width and depth of consultations, which resulted in genuine

enthusiasm among the business community for the national export strategy and a real sense of national ownership. Stakeholders also highlighted the ‘good calibre’ of core team participants, although they felt that the process would have been strengthened with more direct participation from actual enterprises rather than representative associations. A key success feature identified by the Grenada team was the fact that cabinet endorsed the NES design team and process right from the start, and this was a key step in demonstrating (particularly to the private sector) the importance of the initiative. Throughout the design process, the core team met regularly (once a month, sometimes more often) and frequently invited ministers and parliamentarians to attend meetings and to make presentations when appropriate sectors were being discussed.

Senior public officials frequently mentioned the Grenada export strategy in policy statements including the Minister of Finance who mentioned it a number of times in his budget statement. The cabinet endorsed the Grenada export strategy, which was also cited as an indication of how the NES had been mainstreamed into national policy. It was recognised by senior officials that with expectations in the private sector so high, the pressure to implement was keenly felt.

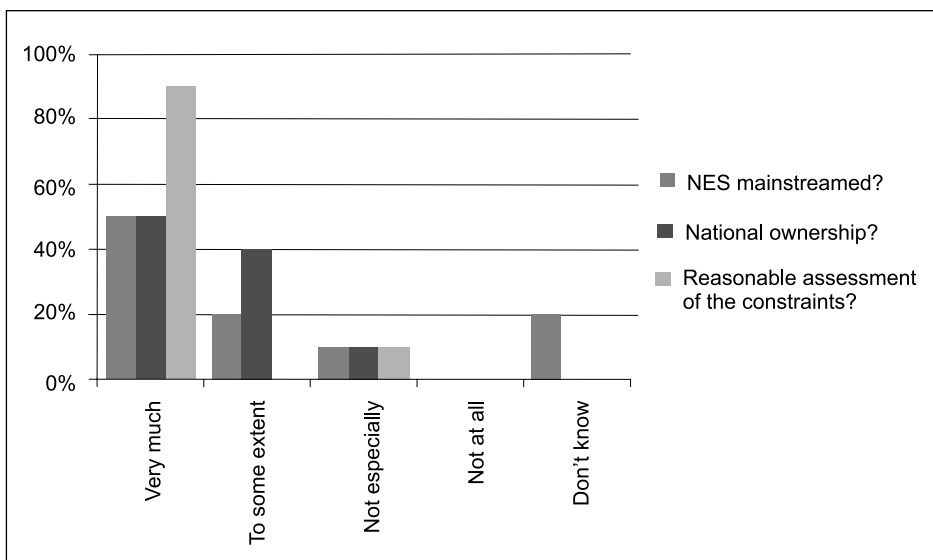
According to Record and Mtonya, ‘All of the stakeholders interviewed, bar one, felt very strongly that the final Grenada Export Strategy presents a fair and reasonable assessment of the constraints to improved export performance. Such universal praise is a remarkable result and does credit to the thorough and inclusive process carried out by the Grenada team’ (2008, p. 14). See Grenada stakeholder’s responses in Figure 3.



**Figure 3:** Grenada NES stakeholder responses  
*Source:* Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 14

### NES template useful

The **Botswana** NES team utilised ITC's national export strategy template (Box 1). It was noted that while the template was very technical and complex, it gave a sense of integration to the various components. The template involved other sectors and this led to a greater appreciation of the role of these sectors by stakeholders. The priority sectors under the NES were identified using an NES 'situation analysis' study, and studies under the DFID Trade and Poverty Programme. Stakeholders were satisfied that the NES presented a reasonable assessment of constraints to improved export performance. They were also satisfied that the NES was widely viewed as 'mainstreamed' into Botswana's national development aims, and that it was 'nationally owned' and enjoyed a good level of political commitment (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** Botswana NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 19

### Pitfalls of external consultancy

Virtually all of the survey respondents in **Belize** were happy with the extent of stakeholder participation in the process. However there were criticisms from the private sector that the process lacked endorsement from the highest levels of the public sector so the good level of participation was wasted.

Stakeholders in Belize viewed the appointment of a national consultant with mixed feelings. The NES Review quoted directly from a respondent:

The appointment of a national consultant can have a disincentive for engagement where the NES design process has not received endorsement from the highest levels of the public sector. In the case of Belize, key stakeholders refused to provide inputs or flatly objected to the articulation and development of sectoral export strategies because they felt that should have been the work of the national consultant. This created a sustained impasse in the design process and without public sector endorsement it proved very difficult to move beyond this. In addition, many questions were raised about the utility of the strategy if it would not be integrated into the broader medium term economic strategy.

Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 15

The use of paid consultants in an environment where civil servants are poorly remunerated, yet critical to the process can also be counter-productive with corresponding demands from participants for some kind of compensation for time committed to the design process. Another criticism voiced by stakeholders was that the process of developing sector strategies took too long due to the ‘team approach to writing’. Some also felt that the strategy could have been more focused. The recommendation was to form small core teams to produce drafts for discussion by the wider group. It is important when developing strategy documents in any context that a balance is struck between being comprehensive, and not losing momentum.

Given the above failings, it is perhaps unsurprising that the stakeholders gave mixed views as to the extent to which the Belize NES was either mainstreamed into national development planning, or nationally owned (Figure 5).

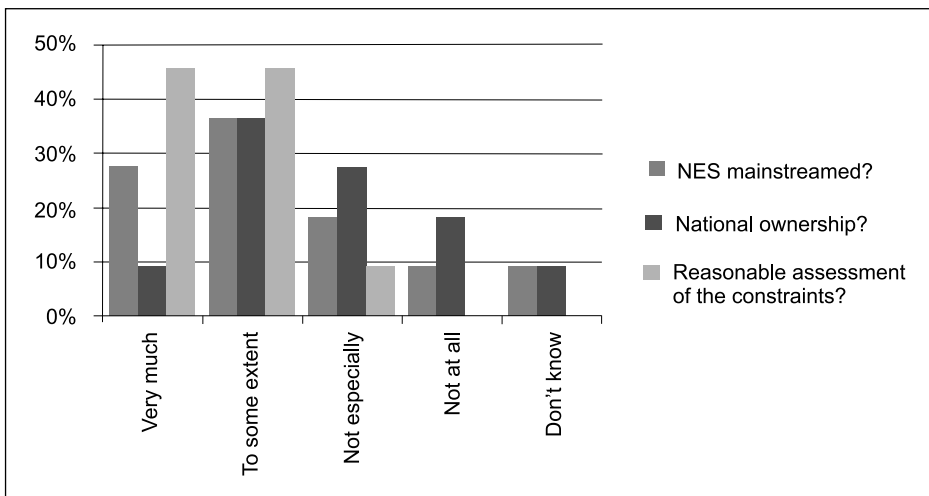


Figure 5: Belize NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 22

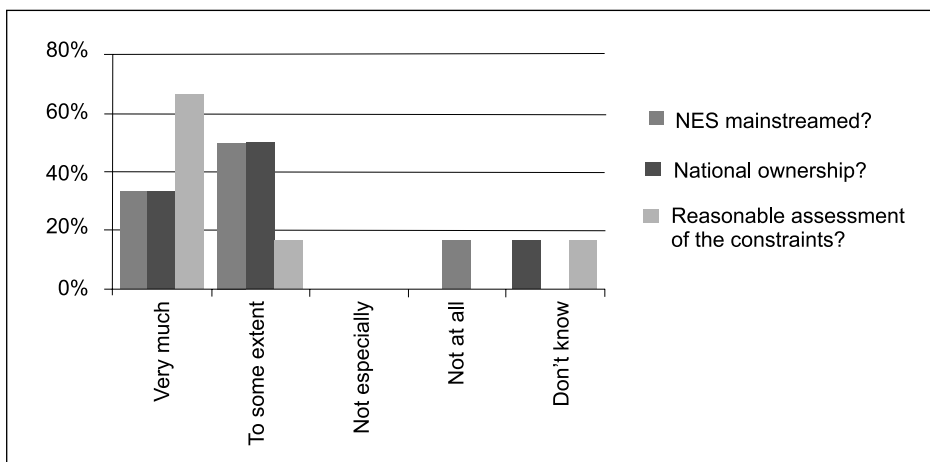
### Quality leadership and participation

As of March 2008, the **St Vincent and the Grenadines** NES remained unfinished with sector strategies for agriculture, services, tourism, information and communications technology, and cross-cutting issues still in draft form. Several stakeholders felt that the process might have been more successful had the team benefited from 'better leadership', a 'more rigorous commitment to completing the process on time', and the employment of a 'more resourceful' national consultant.

One particularly critical stakeholder wrote:

*I/we have spent considerable time on the NES, but nothing has come out of it. I sure hope that I am wrong. Some stakeholders who were not interested in participating from the beginning because they believed that it would only be talk and no actions would come out of it, are now telling me that they have been right from the beginning...A year has passed by since the last meeting about the NES, and I have the impression that they, indeed, have been right.'*

With such sentiments, it is understandable that views were mixed as to the extent to which this NES is mainstreamed, nationally owned, or presents a fair assessment of the constraints to exporting (Figure 6).



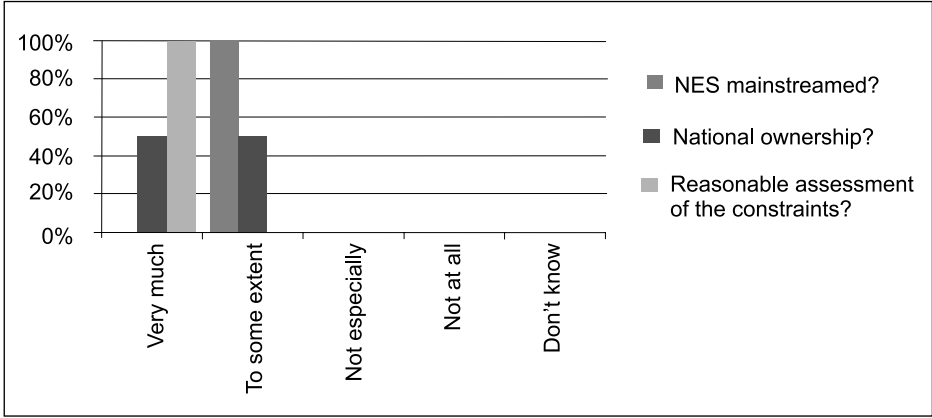
**Figure 6:** St Vincent and the Grenadines NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 24

### Focused national team, strong participation

The design of the **Swaziland** NES was co-ordinated by a small and focused national team, comprising representatives from key ministerial departments and private sector representative groups. Stakeholders felt that the process benefited from strong participation throughout and they responded positively when surveyed on mainstreaming, ownership and assessment of constraints (Figure 7).

In addition stakeholders welcomed the role played by the Commonwealth Secretariat in terms of the quality of its technical assistance. According to one respondent the Secretariat ‘served as a catalyst in the development of the strategy. Were it not for their persistence, we would not have finished the exercise’ (Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 27).



**Figure 7:** Swaziland NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 26

*Public sector engagement weak*

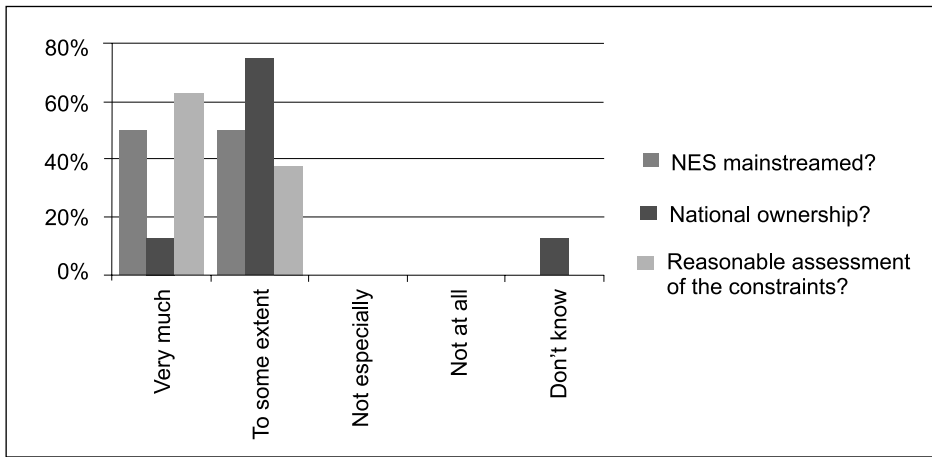
In **Fiji** the NES process generally appears to have been conducted in a participatory and effective manner, and while implementation presents a major challenge, there are promising signs that the NES might be already having beneficial effects on the country’s exports.

Virtually all stakeholders surveyed felt that the Fiji NES design process benefited from wide ranging stakeholder participation. The private sector appears to have become especially engaged and developed real enthusiasm for the process. However, some did feel that the public sector engagement was not as good as it might have been. In particular, one stakeholder noted:

*The general lack of information sharing and co-ordination between ministries is a frequent cause of ambiguity regarding the priorities of policy-makers. The NES helped to identify immediate needs to the development of exports, which, often due to lack of government funds, were not being acutely addressed within the Ministry budgets. The NES process resulted in a better appreciation by government of the specific needs of the private sector, when talking about export enhancement (Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 28).*



A general lack of appreciation of the needs of exporters among civil servants, particularly those outside of trade ministries, is a common complaint made by the private sector in developing countries. Fiji appears to be no different in this case. Nevertheless, as a result of the strong consultative process, the enthusiasm generated among the private sector and high-level cabinet endorsement, stakeholders surveyed show strong confidence that the NES is mainstreamed, nationally owned and paints a reasonable assessment of the constraints to improving export performance (Figure 8).



**Figure 8:** Fiji NES stakeholder responses  
 Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 29

### *Stalled process*

The **Dominica** NES process had an encouraging launch with wide representation from stakeholders in both the public and private sectors, and with cabinet approval of the NES design initiative. However, the process become somewhat stalled with little progress made by the various teams set up. Unfortunately, Hurricane Dean struck Dominica in August 2007 causing serious damage to the island’s infrastructure and this coupled with a cabinet reshuffle and a change of minister at the ministry of trade caused further setbacks and delays in the process of developing an NES. The limited commitment from the ministry of trade was identified as a problem.

Given that the NES process stalled at a fairly early stage in Dominica, few general conclusions can be drawn. However, one important lesson for other countries would be that a genuine public sector commitment to following through the strategy design initiative from start to finish is a pre-requisite to a successful NES project.

### Localised methodology

Namibia originally began the process of developing a national export strategy in 2005. Concerns were raised at the outset that the standard methodology would be inappropriate for Namibia given the historical context, poor relations between the public and private sectors, and the capacity gap that exists between the public and private sectors. The launch went ahead, but the process quickly became stalled amid frustration with the approach.

In late 2007, following a suitable pause and changes in key personnel, the ministry of industry and trade indicated it was ready to restart the process, but with a localised methodology that would better take into account the in-country circumstances. Namibia re-launched its NES development process in March 2008. It is yet to be seen whether or not the new efforts will result in a more favourable conclusion.

### Public/private sector commitment

Stakeholders surveyed in Tonga felt there was real and genuine commitment to the NES design process on the part of the private sector. However, there was some concern within the private sector that this commitment was not totally matched by counterparts in the public sector. However, as one stakeholder commented,

*The development of the NES document has required public and private sector people to work together closely for the first time in such a public/private partnership. This has definitely improved communication between the public and private sectors (Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 32).*

While stakeholders praised the level of participation during the early phases of the design process, there was poor attendance at the national symposium. It was felt that the process suffered from poor management.

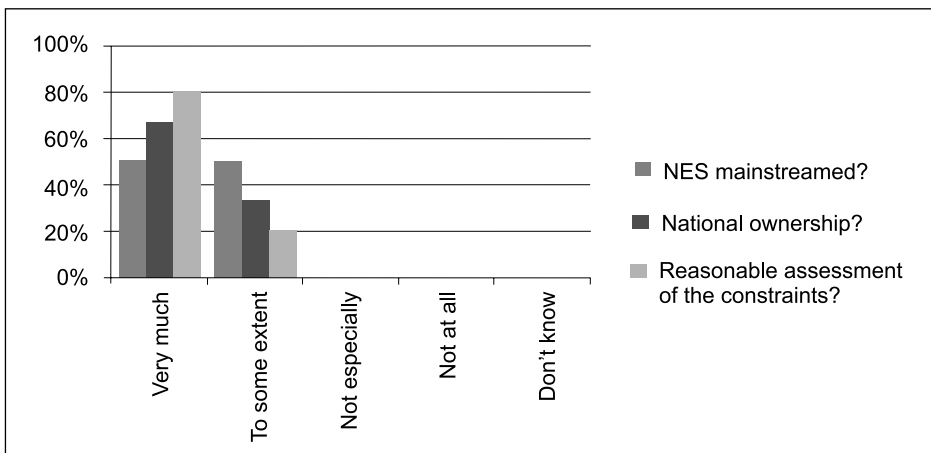


Figure 9: Tonga NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 33

Although the Tonga NES design process had not yet been completed at the time of the review, there was a strong sense that the NES is helping to mainstream export issues, that the process is nationally owned, and that a reasonable assessment of the constraints is being made (Figure 9).

### *Strengthened co-ordination*

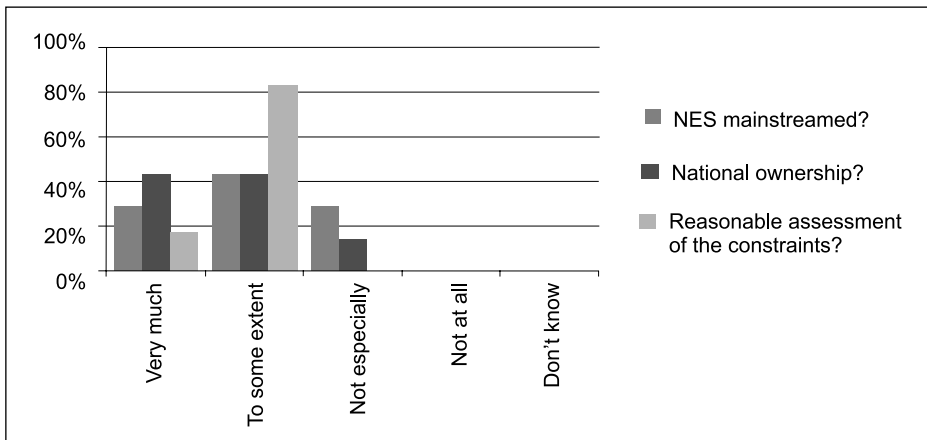
A key outcome of a successful NES process is often strengthened co-ordination between actors in the trade support network, and an improved understanding among the various agencies as to what else is being done. This can help eliminate gaps and overlaps in export service delivery. In the case of **Samoa**, there were early and encouraging signs that co-ordination had already begun to improve.

One stakeholder felt that the NES process had ‘...definitely shed some light on the importance of having all these actors, agencies and ministries working together, if exports are to improve.’

Another stated:

*The NES has the potential to really play an important role in improving co-ordination among actors supporting trade and private sector development. By saying this, I am now more confident that most of the key businesses and private sector actors are now in a closer relationship with the government ministries, unlike before. (Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 36).*

Figure 10 shows an early indication of stakeholder opinions as to the extent to which the NES process has been mainstreamed, is nationally owned, and is undertaking a realistic assessment of the constraints to improved export performance.



**Figure 10:** Samoa NES stakeholder responses

Source: Record and Mtonya 2008, p. 36

### *Importance of flexibility, existing structures*

The NES process was completed in both **Tanzania** mainland and **Zanzibar** in June 2009. (Zanzibar opted for a separate process due to the unique economic structures that exist in Tanzania.) Challenges remain on how effective implementation will be. However the process was intensively and extensively consultative and it is hoped that this will make implementation much easier.

The review drew two lessons from these processes. First was the importance of adopting a flexible approach in-country that builds upon and is harmonised with existing initiatives, given that there is rarely sufficient policy space for parallel trade support initiatives in developing countries. Second was the need to utilise (and augment) existing working groups and teams wherever possible, rather than setting up new NES national teams, to ensure continuity and strengthen ownership in the process of developing a national export strategy.

### *Implementation impeded by structural change*

In early 2005 **Nigeria** became the first country among those receiving assistance from the Commonwealth Secretariat to complete the development of a national export strategy framework. However, a restructuring of the main implementing agency in 2006 impeded the implementation phase. Specifically, the restructuring exercise led to the closure of the zonal offices that had been identified as crucial to the effective implementation of the strategy. The restructuring was reversed in May 2009 and since then Nigeria has been making good progress in pursuing the strategic objectives developed in the strategy.

### *A good foundation*

The NES process for **Sierra Leone** was launched in July 2009. The commitment demonstrated by all those involved in the kick-start workshop that followed – Government, the private sector and civil society – has provided a very good foundation for development of the NES. The challenge will be the implementation phase.