



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Expert meeting in preparation for the twelfth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development: identifying issues and priorities for least developed countries for action during and beyond UNCTAD XII

22–24 October 2007

Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania

Background note

Introduction

1. The eleventh session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XI), which took place in June 2004 in São Paulo, Brazil, adopted the São Paulo Consensus, the outcome document that guides the engagement of UNCTAD in advancing the trade and development interests and objectives of developing countries in an increasingly interdependent and globalizing world economy. UNCTAD XII will take place in Accra, Ghana, in April 2008, and will hold deliberations on trade and development challenges, prospects, policies and strategies from the perspective of developing countries. At the Conference, member States are expected to reach consensus on desirable policies and strategies for action at the national, regional and international levels, and adopt the programme of work for the UNCTAD secretariat for the coming years.

2. The participation of the least developed countries (LDCs) in major conferences and summits, despite some improvement in recent years, is still weak. Their effective participation in global conferences such as UNCTAD XII requires, among other things, an adequate assessment of their needs and a clear identification of their common interests during the preparatory process and at the Conference itself.

3. Effective participation of LDCs at UNCTAD XII should be based on a detailed, objective and systematic analysis of development problems. Such an approach should aim to respond to questions such as the following: (a) What should be done to help LDCs achieve the Millennium Development Goals and the goals of the Programme of Action? (b) What modalities exist to convert the growing political attention and support in favour of LDCs into real socio-economic and policy gains? (b) Why has LDCs' share in world trade remained low and even declined, despite improved market access for their exports? (c) What are the respective roles of internal and external factors in determining socio-economic performance in LDCs? (d) What policy lessons can be drawn from the experience of the last three decades of liberalization, adjustment and economic reforms undertaken by LDCs?

4. Informed and meaningful participation of LDCs can also assist in identifying policy options and actions to effectively address broader questions such as the following: (a) What are the key priority areas for intervention by the international community and UNCTAD to assist LDCs in their efforts to reverse their continued marginalization in the global economy? (b) What ingredients of alternative policies and strategies do LDCs need to put in place to attain sustained economic growth and development? (c) How should future UNCTAD research and policy analysis, in particular capacity-building activities, contribute to structural transformation in LDCs? Obviously, the response and actions required to address these challenges vary from country to country (based on specific prevailing conditions and circumstances), as there cannot be a single prescription for all LDCs.

5. Taking the above-mentioned issues and concerns into account, UNCTAD, with the financial support of the Government of Austria, will organize an expert level meeting, scheduled for 22–24 October this year. While the focus will be on shared needs, specific needs of individual LDCs will also be taken into account, to the extent possible. The expert meeting is part of the UNCTAD project “Assisting the participation of LDCs in the preparatory process for and at UNCTAD XII: identifying issues and priorities for least developed countries for action during and beyond UNCTAD XII”.

Specific issues to be addressed

6. In responding to the series of questions highlighted in paragraphs 3 and 4 above, the expert meeting will:
 - Assess key trade and development challenges and opportunities facing LDCs, including those related to trade and trade capacity development;
 - Deliberate on the current national and international policies and strategies, including their strengths and weaknesses, to address challenges; and
 - Identify new policy options and actions required at the national, regional and international levels, to effectively address the trade and development challenges facing LDCs, and enable them to take advantage of opportunities arising from globalization.

Expected outcome

7. The expected outcome of the meeting will be a set of policy proposals and recommendations clearly identifying LDCs’ urgent needs and priorities for action at the national and international levels. This will help them formulate a common platform that will provide a basis for their effective participation in the preparatory process for UNCTAD XII, and at the Conference itself, with the view to advancing their trade and development agenda.

Participants

8. LDC experts, who will be invited to participate at the meeting in their personal capacities, are expected to have proven expertise in the areas of trade and development policies, and may be selected from Government, academia, the private sector or non-governmental organizations. UNCTAD will cover the cost of participation (travel and daily subsistence allowance) for LDC experts, in accordance with the rules and regulations of the United Nations. In addition, experts from international and regional organizations dealing with issues of trade and development interest to LDCs will be invited to participate in the meeting, to share their operational and substantive experience in the field. Also, specialized agencies, intergovernmental bodies and bilateral development agencies working in LDCs are encouraged to participate in the meeting.

9. At the meeting, participating national experts will make presentations on the most important trade and development challenges facing their respective countries, and policy responses required to deal with them. Their presentations should clearly identify and articulate policy recommendations for action at the national and international levels. The recommendations will be part of inputs into the negotiating platform of LDCs during the preparatory process and at UNCTAD XII. Similarly, international experts in the field – those from regional organizations, specialized agencies, bilateral development agencies and non-governmental organizations – will provide their views on the issues under deliberation.