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TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD
Commission on Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities
Expert Meeting on Universal Access to Services
Geneva, 14–16 November 2006

PROVISIONAL AGENDA AND ANNOTATIONS*

I. Provisional agenda

1. Election of officers
2. Adoption of the agenda and organization of work
3. Universal access to services
4. Adoption of the report of the Meeting

* This document was submitted on the above-mentioned date as a result of processing delays.

II. Annotations to the provisional agenda

Item 1: Election of officers

1. It is recommended that the Expert Meeting elect a Chairperson and a Vice-Chairperson-cum-Rapporteur.

Item 2: Adoption of the agenda and organization of work

2. The provisional agenda is reproduced in section I above. A detailed programme will be made available one week before the meeting.

Item 3: Universal access to services

3. At its tenth session, in February 2006, the Commission on Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities decided to convene an Expert Meeting on Universal Access to Services, in pursuit of the mandate contained in the São Paulo Consensus of June 2004.

4. Discussions will serve to provide UNCTAD member States with a better understanding of the important role that universal access plays in efforts aimed at improved living conditions, economic growth, domestic supply capacity building and trade in developing countries. This will be achieved through a discussion of policy options and associated regulatory frameworks that aim at enhancing the contribution of universal access to development and other national policy objectives.

5. The Meeting will explore key services sectors that are essential from an infrastructural and human perspective. It will look at their trade and development contributions and at the crucial role that they can play in achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals. The Meeting will review experiences in specific service sectors such as education, energy, health, telecom and water services, aiming to identify common, cross-cutting features, goals, policies and challenges, as well as trade-related considerations.

6. Discussion will address the role of government and the private sector in these services. It will review the challenges faced in ensuring that adequate services are provided to the poor and marginalized members of society and the kind of policy tools needed to achieve universal access in these sectors.

7. The Meeting will consider national experiences and policies for ensuring access, analysing how they may differ across countries and sectors in line with specific national policy objectives (e.g. different emphasis in universal access goals on affordability or increased access; efficiency; budgetary considerations). It will also consider specific policy tools that are used, including universal services obligations and subsidies, experiences in their implementation, and results.

8. Finally the Meeting will review linkages between universal access policies and international rules on services trade, including services commitments under the GATS. In that context, it will review the state of play of WTO services negotiations, focusing on negotiations to increase market access and for future disciplines on domestic regulation. The Meeting will consider ways

in which developing countries may harness the services sector, both domestically and internationally, to improve universal access to essential services, and it will examine what challenges are likely to arise.

9. Presentations by experts, representatives from the private and public sector, regulators and trade negotiators will contribute to a better understanding of the options available to developing countries when pursuing further trade and development objectives in these sectors.

Documentation

TD/B/COM.1/EM.30/2 Universal access to services: Note by the UNCTAD
secretariat

Item 4: Adoption of the report of the Meeting

10. The report of the Expert Meeting will be submitted to the Commission on Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities at its next session. The Expert Meeting may wish to authorize the Rapporteur, under the authority of the Chairperson, to prepare the final report after the conclusion of the Meeting.

Experts nominated by member States are expected to submit brief papers (approximately five pages) as contributions to the work of the Meeting. Papers should be submitted to the UNCTAD secretariat in advance of the Meeting. These papers, which will draw on experts' experiences, will be made available at the Meeting in the form and language in which they are received. An expert paper may address one or more of the following issues:

- What does the concept of universal access (UA) to services entail, including for specific sectors and countries? What are specific UA goals? What is the role of UA to services in terms of a nation's well-being – economic, social and developmental?
- What are the cross-cutting aspects of UA and UA policies – across services sectors and countries (e.g. their equity-related nature, their close relationship with each other, the need to ensure flexibility, the potential to build on technological advances and challenges arising from targeting and monitoring)?
- What role has the Government played, and what role can it play, in providing UA to services. What has the track record been so far?
- What are the policy and regulatory options Governments may explore to facilitate and finance the provision of UA? How do they differ across sectors and countries?
- What is the likely impact of private sector participation in the pursuit of UA goals?
- What competition-related issues may affect the provision of UA to services?
- What are national experiences in the pursuit of UA, whether more or less successful? What are the reasons behind this track record?
- What are linkages between UA policies and the GATS? How is the concept of UA dealt with in the GATS (e.g. in terms of services supplied in the exercise of governmental authority, subsidies, domestic regulation, specific obligations and commitments made in relevant sectors, and the right to regulate)?
- What are UA-related trends in the negotiation of specific commitments, particularly for developing countries?
- What issues arise at the interface between domestic regulation and the implementation of UA policies, and what are particular challenges for developing countries?

Experts are requested to submit papers by 30 October 2006 to Ms. Elisabeth Tuerk
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