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IN THIS ISSUE:

- *Civil society to play major role in UNCTAD XI*1
- *NGO network monitors LDC III follow-up*2
- *Civil society participates in organic agriculture task force*.....2
- *Policy dialogue on biotechnology applications and trade*3
- *Civil society to play enhanced role in trade negotiations capacity building*.....3
- *Developing-country academics participate in commercial diplomacy courses*.....4
- *Commission focuses on SME competitiveness, transport efficiency and e-commerce*.....5
- **NEW PUBLICATIONS**.....6

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From UNCTAD's Civil Society Outreach

UNCTAD's Trade and Development Board continues to focus on preparations for the quadrennial conference to be held in Brazil in June 2004. Close involvement by civil society actors, not only in the conference but also in its preparations, is bound to enhance its outcome. We encourage you to participate actively in the process, and also to send us your input and ideas for this newsletter.

RECENT AND UPCOMING EVENTS

Civil society to play major role in UNCTAD XI

Addressing the Board's thirty-first executive session on 10 March, UNCTAD Secretary-General Rubens Ricupero shared his ideas on preparations for the conference. He proposed an assessment of major global economic developments and initiatives since UNCTAD X and how these should be reflected in UNCTAD's work programme. For example, the Millennium Development Goals, with their emphasis on poverty reduction, will have an important impact on UNCTAD's work. Other major events shaping the international development agenda over the past four years have been the Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, the UN Conference on Financing for Development, and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. UNCTAD will also follow up on the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar, which placed the development dimension at the forefront of the trade negotiations agenda. Implementation of the outcomes of these global conferences must become an important part of UNCTAD's work within its mandate and its areas of competence, said Mr. Ricupero.

He said that a "one size fits all" approach to policymaking was increasingly untenable and inappropriate for tackling the complex problems of development. He called for an "increase in the involvement of stakeholders in the development dialogue, in particular international business and civil society organizations". Their involvement could encourage consensus regarding the shared responsibilities of stakeholders in achieving internationally agreed development goals.

Last September UNCTAD invited non-governmental actors to a discussion of civil society involvement in preparations for UNCTAD XI. In a letter to the Secretary-General, participants asked UNCTAD to ensure that they would be fully involved in intergovernmental preparatory meetings. UNCTAD will make a special effort to ensure the active participation of Civil Society in the conference and its preparation.

For more information on this TDB session, please see [Documents](#).

NGO network monitors LDC III follow-up

On 27 and 28 February Daphne Davies, former coordinator of the NGO Forum at the Third UN Conference on the Least Developed Countries, and Arjun Karki, a former member of the forum's steering committee, discussed with UNCTAD the active involvement of the NGO community in implementing the Programme of Action adopted by the conference. Ms. Davies and Mr. Karki are part of a group of NGOs that were active at the conference and have now formed an "LDC Watch" network of NGOs to monitor implementation of the conference outcome. The two met with staff members from UNCTAD's Special Programme for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries, the Secretary-General's office, and Civil Society Outreach.

The LDC III Conference was attended by a broad range of civil society actors, particularly NGOs, parliamentarians and enterprise associations. NGOs also organized an NGO Forum that took place prior to and in parallel with the conference. There was a consensus that civil society should also be involved in implementation of the Programme of Action and the specific commitments made by the conference within this context. In addition to lobbying in connection with the follow-up to LDC III, LDC Watch intends to lobby for the concerns of LDCs at other UN conferences and meetings. The network is based with Rural Reconstruction in Nepal and the Ligue des Consommateurs in Burkina Faso. Its coordination committee includes the League of Women Lawyers (Benin), AWEAPON (Uganda), Eurostep (Belgium) and Vivat International (United States). LDC Watch has opened a small coordination office in Brussels.

For more information, please contact Ms. Daphne Davies at ldcwat@attglobal.net or Mr. Arjun Karki at akarki@rrn.org.np.

Civil society participates in organic agriculture task force

The International Task Force on Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture was launched on 18 February in Nuremberg, Germany. A joint initiative of UNCTAD, the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the Task Force will facilitate dialogue between public, private and civil-society actors involved in trade and regulatory activities in the organic agriculture sector, with the goal of facilitating international trade.

The task force will address difficulties faced by organic producers and exporters in the form of hundreds of different organic regulations, standards and labels worldwide. It was established in response to recommendations by the Conference on International Harmonisation and Equivalence in Organic Agriculture held by the three organizations in 2002 (see related [document](#)).

At the first meeting, representatives of 10 countries, six international organizations, and civil society agreed on terms of reference and a work plan for 2003. Work will begin with a review of existing standards, regulations and conformity assessment systems. Next, the Task Force will strive to formulate concrete proposals for

mechanisms to achieve harmonization and equivalence in the organic sector and easier access to organic markets, particularly by developing countries and smallholders.

For more information, please visit UNCTAD's [Trade, Environment and Development site](#) or contact Ms. Sophia Twarog at sophia.twarog@unctad.org.

Policy dialogue on biotechnology applications and trade

Genetically altered organisms are a concern for many NGOs active in fostering agricultural development. UNCTAD, in collaboration with the UN University's Institute of Advanced Studies, organized a policy dialogue on biotechnology applications and trade as part of its Science and Technology Diplomacy Initiative.

The event, which took place on 11 March in Geneva, focused on the opportunities and risks that biotechnology presents for developing countries. It highlighted key issues in the application of biotechnology to agriculture and health in developing countries. It also addressed trade-related issues and legal and regulatory regimes connected with biotechnology, and their implications for meeting the priority needs of developing countries.

Rubens Ricupero, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD, addressed and chaired the meeting. Keynote speakers were Prof. Werner Arber, winner of the Nobel prize for his work in biotechnology; Prof. Gary Sampson, chair of international economic governance at the UN University's Institute of Advanced Studies; and Prof. Ingo Potrykus, inventor of the genetically modified "golden rice" that could address Vitamin A deficiencies among people in developing countries where rice is a staple of daily diets.

For more information, please contact Mr. Mongi Hamdi at mongi.hamdi@unctad.org or visit the site of the [Science and Technology for Development Network](#).

Civil society to play enhanced role in trade negotiations capacity building

The multilateral trading system (MTS) and international markets have become highly complex. The new elements of the MTS require major investments in institutional and human capacity and a multidimensional strategy for integration into the global economy. Developing countries need to frame a broad set of trade initiatives within an appropriate macroeconomic environment and a comprehensive approach to development. Governments, private sectors and civil society in many countries need to develop the institutional and human resource capacities required to deal with the complexity of the MTS and the demands of regional, bilateral and multilateral trade agreements. They cannot achieve these objectives without substantial support from the international community, as was reiterated at the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha, Qatar.

The Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme (JITAP), a capacity-building programme involving a coalition of bilateral and multilateral donors and selected African countries, is implemented jointly by UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre (ITC), and the WTO. JITAP aims to reduce the marginalization of African countries in the world economy through capacity building at three key levels (government, institutions, and enterprise) and to enhance the development opportunities of African-country partners by enabling their more effective participation in the MTS. By addressing the most pressing needs of participating countries, JITAP strives to build national capacity to do the following:

- understand the evolving MTS and its implications for external trade
- adapt the national trading system to the obligations and disciplines of the new MTS
- seek maximum advantage from the new MTS by enhancing the readiness of exporters

Eight countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Kenya, Tunisia, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania) participated in JITAP's first phase from 1998 to 2002. Eight more countries (Botswana, Cameroon, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Senegal and Zambia) are participating in the second phase from 2003 to 2006.

JITAP's achievements thus far have included setting up or strengthening dedicated institutional frameworks to prepare countries' negotiating positions. Public- and private-sector as well as civil society organizations are involved in this process. JITAP also helped train numerous professionals in all technical aspects of the multilateral trade agreements, with participation by academia, researchers and civil society organizations. Sectoral strategies were also formulated using a unique coaching approach that helped bring together exporters and the public sector to expand the countries' supply capacity in order to capitalize on market opportunities generated by the MTS. Under JITAP 2, such support will continue and civil society's involvement will be enhanced.

For more information, please visit the [JITAP site](#).

Developing-country academics participate in commercial diplomacy courses

In February and March, UNCTAD's Commercial Diplomacy Programme organized a series of training and capacity-building activities for trade policy makers and negotiators from developing countries to enhance their participation in the ongoing WTO negotiations. Government officials based in Geneva and in country capitals, as well as academics from Bolivia, Haiti, Venezuela and Viet Nam, participated in these courses and seminars. Many of the programme's training and capacity-building activities are open to participation by civil society organizations, particularly the academic communities of developing countries and economies in transition.

Launched in 1999 as UNCTAD's main training and capacity-building instrument in the area of multilateral and regional trade negotiations, the Commercial Diplomacy Programme is based on a customized approach. Each activity is designed, in consultation with the beneficiary countries, to fit the national or subregional trade agenda. The contents of the training activities are regularly updated to reflect

changes in ongoing negotiations as well as the evolving interests and concerns of developing countries and economies in transition. Effective participation by developing countries in the negotiating process is necessary to ensure that new trade rules reflect the development dimension. This requires effective technical assistance tools and a new role for trade-related capacity building.

Workshops in the coming months will cover topics related to trade negotiations and will use various modalities - for example, supporting developing countries' academic communities in delivering postgraduate training on trade and development policies. Please visit the [Commercial Diplomacy site](#) for further details.

For more information please write to commercial.diplomacy@unctad.org.

Commission focuses on SME competitiveness, transport efficiency and e-commerce

The economic consequences of new security initiatives being introduced into the legal framework for international trade may have a considerable impact on developing countries. Their competitiveness could be affected by increased freight costs (Total freight payments for developing countries already account for a higher percentage of total import value than the corresponding value for developed countries). To help countries address these difficulties (including at the grassroots level), UNCTAD's Commission on Enterprise, Business Facilitation and Development met in Geneva from 24 to 27 February to consider three areas of trade and business facilitation: the competitiveness of small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs); trade facilitation measures; and e-commerce strategies to foster economic development.

Experts emphasized that macro-level policies must be complemented by enterprise, technology and competition policies if developing countries were to improve their competitiveness. Developing countries were urged to aim for the "high road of competitiveness" - that is, competitiveness based on innovation, quality and high value added. A video titled "Business Linkages for Sustainable Development" and produced in Penang, Malaysia, was screened as an example of how a developing country could adopt a focused government strategy including foreign direct investment, export processing zones, and business linkages.

Access to financing and access to new technologies are the two most important ingredients for enhancing the competitiveness of SMEs. However, developing-country enterprises find it very difficult to obtain financing for technology investments from private sources. Therefore, public-sector measures to support technology financing should be considered. However, these measures may conflict with existing WTO and other international agreements.

The meeting also discussed the importance of efficient transport and trade facilitation in improving the participation of developing countries in international trade. Experts presented empirical data that illustrated the effect of transport costs on the marketing of exports and highlighted the need for investment and improved productivity in this sector. An extremely important issue linked to transport and trade facilitation involved the recently adopted measures related to security, health and environment. Concerns were voiced regarding the possible marginalization of some countries and ports because of new security requirements. Security policies and

proposals, as well as technical norms for agricultural imports, should be based on multilateral agreements. The Commission agreed on the topic "Development of multimodal transport and logistic services" for the Expert Meeting that will be held in Geneva from 24 to 26 September.

The discussion of e-commerce focused on two issues: measuring e-commerce and open-source/free software. Recommendations included assisting developing countries in adopting information and communication technologies (ICT) and e-business practices; designing national and regional e-strategies for development; carrying out research and analysis of the developmental dimensions of e-commerce; and analysing issues related to the measurement of e-commerce and the use of ICT by enterprises. The measurement of e-commerce was selected as the topic for the next Expert Meeting. There was also great interest in how UNCTAD might make a substantive contribution to preparations for the World Summit on the Information Society and might follow up on its outcome.

For more information on the Commission's session, please see [Documents](#).

NEW PUBLICATIONS

Study focuses on market access in merchandise trade

UNCTAD recently published *Back to Basics: Market Access Issues in the Doha Agenda*. This study focuses on the market access issues in merchandise trade that developing countries will face in the upcoming negotiations. The conclusion is that, while developing countries as a group potentially have much to gain from improved access, the extent and distribution of these gains depend a great deal on the extent to which developing countries participate in the liberalization process and on the agreed negotiation targets and modalities.

The study also states that, "using new data on preferences within the framework of the computable general equilibrium (CGE) model, it is estimated that a 50 per cent reduction of tariffs in agriculture would increase world welfare by about \$20 billion".

Specific sections address issues related to theoretical linkages between trade and development; the post-Uruguay multilateral agenda; market access issues particularly relevant for developing countries (tariff peaks and tariff escalation) and the evolution of their trade patterns; and conclusions reached during the Fourth WTO Ministerial Conference in Doha that are likely to affect future market access conditions. Section 5 implements several liberalization scenarios, using a CGE modelling framework, and section 6 summarizes major findings and policy conclusions.

For more information on UNCTAD publications, please check [Main Publications](#).

Upcoming events

- Commission on Science and Technology for Development, sixth session (ECOSOC), 5-9 May 2003

For more information, please check [Events and Meetings](#).

NGOs enjoying observer status with UNCTAD automatically receive official notifications inviting them to participate in and contribute to the debate and discussions of Expert Meetings, sessions of the Commissions of the UNCTAD Trade and Development Board, and quadrennial sessions of the Conference. Competent and relevant NGOs interested in contributing to UNCTAD's programmes and activities may wish to consider applying for observer status.

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For more information, please visit UNCTAD's website:
www.unctad.org