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UNCTAD: UN Coordinator for Trade Efficiency

Interview with the Director of the Trade Efficiency Division

John Burley was appointed Director of the Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency (SITE) in April 2003. He was previously in charge of UNCTAD's technical cooperation section and head of the Resources Management Service.

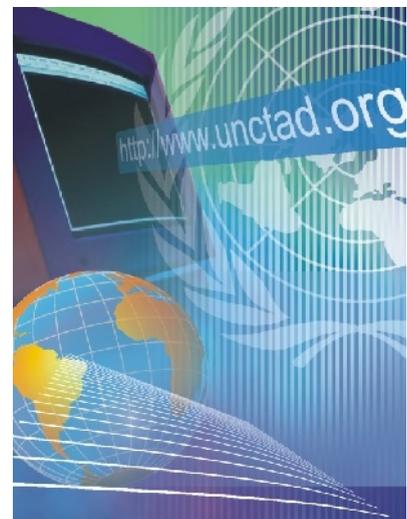
UNCTAD: You have taken over a division that was born out of the World Summit on Trade Efficiency in 1994. Almost 10 years on, where does the division stand in its approach to trade efficiency?

JB: The trade efficiency programme was launched by UNCTAD to propose ways and means to reduce trade transaction costs incurred by developing countries, and to make trading as a whole more efficient. This implies the use of information technology (IT) and greater participation of micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises in international trade. The approach remains very valid but naturally has to be updated in light of recent developments.

The well-known programmes on customs automation (ASYCUDA) and cargo tracking (ACIS) are much appreciated by beneficiary countries for their effectiveness in improving procedures, enhancing management and reducing costs both in terms of time and money. Our work on transport is also highly regarded, and our annual Review of Maritime Transport is considered an authoritative and reliable guide to developments in maritime transport.

UNCTAD is the UN systemwide coordinator on trade facilitation and the quality and usefulness of this work are well recognized by other international organizations. We play, for instance, an important role in international negotiations on private law matters affecting trade and transportation.

At the same time, other fields of work have expanded and become more important. The issue of electronic commerce is now a major activity of the division, as is the development of distance learning training programmes.





John Burley

So the challenge today is to enhance the synergies among the various components of the division's work along policy directions that are as clearly defined as possible. The application of knowledge through training programmes and the use of information and communications technologies (ICT) for trade-supporting services and business, would be key elements in ensuring stronger coherence among activities.

UNCTAD: You mentioned e-commerce. What are the issues your division is working on in this area?

JB: The expansion of the use of the Internet for trade and business operations continues unabated. This has had a direct impact on UNCTAD's work: we have established a special branch on e-commerce, and every year we publish a report on E-Commerce and Development. The main thrust of our work in e-commerce and ICT is to help developing countries better understand the opportunities created by the Internet and ICT in trading and business operations. We also undertake a limited amount of capacity-building work: the SITE seminars and advisory services help countries to find ICT strategies and solutions for their own development.

This year, the division is collaborating very closely in the preparation of the [World Summit on the Information Society \(WSIS\)](#), which will be held in Geneva in December, with a second phase in Tunisia in 2005. The summit will be a major effort by the international community to apply ICT to development, which is naturally UNCTAD's particular concern and vantage point.

The E-Commerce and Development Report is a successful new addition to the range of UNCTAD publications. The two earlier reports, and the next one due out later this year, clearly demonstrate that the application of ICT and e-commerce does help businesses become more competitive. The reports show that, while Internet use continues to expand very rapidly worldwide, only a handful of developing countries are able to exploit fully the opportunities offered by the Internet and ICT. Most developing countries continue to lag far behind.

UNCTAD: What can you tell us about the 2003 E-Commerce and Development Report to be out in November?

JB: This year's report will show that the policies and strategies to use ICT opportunities need to be carefully and correctly exploited if the new technologies are really to serve development. For example, there is a review of the possibilities but also the constraints inherent in using the Internet and online operations for the marketing of agricultural commodities. The report also explores the implications of using software whose source codes are publicly available, as an alternative to proprietary software. This is in fact a policy issue, not a technical one. Open-source software will affect the production and distribution of software. If so, what then are the best interests of developing countries that seek to customize software to meet their own commercial, regulatory, cultural and linguistic requirements? The practice of outsourcing business operations is another issue of importance to an increasing number of developing countries. Companies in developed countries are taking advantage of the growth in IT capacities in developing countries to commission online services. We know of several instances of this kind: telephone directories, airline services, even online information services. This year's report will explore these issues and look at how developing countries can continue to exploit these opportunities.



UNCTAD: Your division is responsible for the "partnerships for development" segment of UNCTAD XI, to be held in São Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004. What do you hope to achieve in São Paulo?

JB: We will first need to see what advice member States provide on this issue when they begin to review the Secretary-General's report to the conference. We all know that development requires collaboration, convergence and coherence from all of the development actors, whether Governments, NGOs, the private sector, research, academia or trade unions. But member States will wish to consider how, in practice, this collaboration should be developed in UNCTAD.

The approach suggested in the report is to regard partnerships as a major practical outcome of the conference: a limited number of specific partnerships would be developed with several different stakeholders to follow up and act on the results of the conference. Such partnerships are not intended as a substitute for intergovernmental agreements at the conference, but would seek to complement and supplement the work the member States themselves will undertake in São Paulo. At present, the approach is to develop partnerships in the coming months with multi-stakeholders in several key areas of UNCTAD's work on trade and commodities, investment, the application of ICT to development, and capacity-building and training programmes.

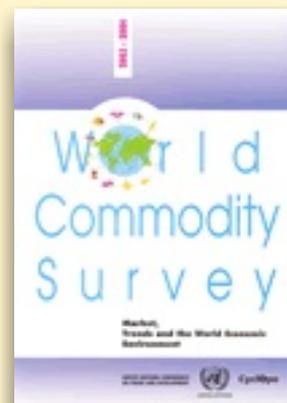
NEW GUIDE TO COMMODITY MARKETS

Information on more than 80 commodities, from metals to farm products to energy, is available in the newly published [World Commodity Survey 2003-2004](#). This third edition of the Survey analyses the principal trends in raw materials, the evolution of the oil market and the role of the state. It also examines the factors that have had an impact on commodity markets and have contributed to their instability.

Three quarters of the rural population depend directly on the commodity sector for their livelihood. At a time when market fluctuations have hit the sector badly, improving commodity management has become essential. Furthermore, with the liberalization of these sectors in developing countries, producers, importers and exporters face many obstacles, including the lack of basic information to help them negotiate prices, apply quality standards and understand underlying market mechanisms.

The Survey will help policy makers in developing countries improve their commodity earnings by giving them insight into spot markets, the structure of different commodity sectors, and major raw material consumer markets.

UNCTAD's technical assistance programme, INFOCOMM, has also developed an international electronic portal that includes analyses and practical information on market structures for a number of commodities: cashew nuts, cocoa, jute, natural gas, nickel, olive oil, petroleum, platinum, rice, tea, temperate zone timber and zinc.



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TRAINING.....

Trade support and e-business training for Asian LDCs

Between May and August 2003, 400 decision makers and middle managers from Bhutan, Cambodia and Nepal participated in a series of eight UNCTAD trade support and e-business workshops.

The purpose of the workshops was to give Asian LDCs the skills and know-how they need to help local companies take full advantage of international trade and e-business opportunities, as well as to understand the potential and risks of using new information and communication technology (ICT) tools.

Events were organized in cooperation with national Governments. They were financed by Japan and the United Nations Development Programme through a WTO accession project.

Port operators trained in Africa

UNCTAD's TrainForTrade programme is organizing a port management workshop in Leixões, Portugal, from 15 to 26 September. Port operators from French-speaking Benin, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Guinea, Senegal, Togo and Tunisia will be trained to use UNCTAD's distance learning methodology to coach port officials in their own countries in modern port management techniques. Participants are all senior port managers who have already delivered [UNCTAD Port Management courses](#).

A similar train-the-trainers course for Portuguese-speaking senior port managers will be organized in early 2004.

Unicamp to pioneer first economic diplomacy course in Latin America

The University of Campinas (Brazil) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UNCTAD to organize a [postgraduate course](#) on economic diplomacy for Latin America. The syllabus draws on UNCTAD's expertise in trade and development policies, financial flows and macroeconomic management, investment and technology, trade facilitation measures, and electronic commerce and development.

A similar arrangement exists with the [Getulio Vargas Foundation](#) (FGV), a Brazilian research institute based in Rio de Janeiro. Together, UNCTAD and FGV will prepare training materials and conduct training courses, seminars and workshops throughout Brazil on a variety of trade, investment and management issues.

In recent years, agreements have also been signed with the International Institute for Trade and Development in Bangkok, Thailand, and the [Trade Law Centre for Southern Africa](#) (TRALAC) in Stellenbosch, South Africa.

The UNCTAD-Unicamp course is the first of its kind in Latin America and is open to postgraduate students from all developing countries.



LOOKING AHEAD.....

September meetings

24-26 September Expert Meeting on Development of Multimodal Transport and Logistic Services

29 September - 1 October Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on International Standards of Accounting and Reporting, Twentieth session

October meetings

6-17 October 2003 Trade and Development Board, Fiftieth session

29-31 October 2003 Expert Meeting on FDI and Development

For more information visit UNCTAD's website:

<http://www.unctad.org>

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