



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: Limited
12 June 2008

Original: English

Twelfth session

Accra, Ghana
20–25 April 2008
Agenda item 8 (d)

Summary of interactive thematic round table 9*

Strengthening UNCTAD: enhancing its impact and institutional effectiveness

1. The round table was chaired by H.E. Mr. Joe Baido-Ansah, Minister of Trade and Industry of Ghana, and moderated by Mr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, Secretary-General of UNCTAD. The panellists were H.E. Mr. Gonzalo Gutierrez Reinel, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs of Peru; Ms. Anna Kajumulo Tibaijuka, Executive Director of UN-HABITAT and Director-General of the United Nations Office at Nairobi; H.E. Mr. Andrej Ster, State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Slovenia; and Mr. Ransford Smith, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth.

2. Ms. Margaret O. Blamberg, NGO Committee on Financing for Development, Conference of Non-Governmental Organizations, spoke on behalf of the Civil Society Forum. Other discussants included the representatives of Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Islamic Republic of Iran, Egypt, France and Turkey.

3. Most panellists agreed on UNCTAD's continuing relevance, citing its key contributions over the years. An organization like UNCTAD would always be needed by humankind, to raise the voice of the voiceless and be the conscience of the United Nations system and of the world. Like other global institutions, UNCTAD was constantly shaping and reshaping itself in response to events. Unlike some institutions, however, its mandate was becoming more, and not less, relevant to the times, especially in today's era of deepening globalization. It should be helped to implement that mandate.

4. UNCTAD's institutional effectiveness had nonetheless diminished over the past 20 years, according to some views expressed at the round table. Several panellists said it had been clearly undermined by the growing resource constraints imposed since the 1970s, which continued to act as a stranglehold on the Organization. Those reductions had been accompanied by calls for greater focus, but that conflicted somewhat with the integrated, cross-cutting approach to the issues required under the mandate. The budget should be increased in accordance with the

* Issued under the responsibility of the Chair of the round table.

growing mandate, and the Organization must have the capacity to prevent its mandate from suffering as a result of budget cuts.

5. Institutional effectiveness could also be improved by focusing on work that had an impact on daily life and on a more limited number of topics; by choosing experts not influenced by political considerations; by involving national technical specialized entities in its work; and by conducting periodic assessments.

6. Speakers repeatedly stressed that UNCTAD should more closely align the three pillars of its work, consolidate its role as a knowledge-based organization and support trade-related capacity-building and technical assistance to developing countries. It should better define its priorities, objectives, expected deliverables and follow-up based on performance measures identified jointly with member States. It should strengthen its quality assurance mechanisms, such as clearance and peer review.

7. With regard to priorities, one discussant said that relations among States were driven increasingly by negotiations, the success of which depended heavily on technical capacity, quality, and timeliness of information. Many developing countries were limited in that respect and thus relied on UNCTAD to undertake the kind of critical research and analysis they could not carry out. UNCTAD should also give priority to access to technology, in particular environmentally friendly technology, since technology would be a critical factor driving production processes in the future.

8. In order not to lose its *raison d'être*, panellists said, UNCTAD would have to show proof of courage, integrity, honesty and humility in discussing the issues of the day, no matter how controversial or irrelevant they might appear. It was inconceivable, for example, that UNCTAD not deal with such problems as the trade and development aspects of climate change, the food crisis, the sustainable development of Africa, and urbanization. The development landscape was littered with prescriptions, strategies and recommendations that had not worked. That called for increased efforts to get development right – efforts in which UNCTAD's role would continue to be crucial.

9. Regarding UNCTAD's research and analysis, as the economic arm and think tank of the Organization, panellists were of the view that UNCTAD's role was to advise on trade and development and related cross-cutting issues, including jobless growth, growing income disparities, financial and monetary problems, and the global governance crisis. UNCTAD's true comparative advantage lay in identifying the linkages and connected issues of trade and development and in alerting developing countries in particular to how those issues, and their anticipated and unanticipated consequences, affected national interests. However, those consequences would not be fully analysed unless there was an organization with a role that specifically required it do so, and that was mandated to consider them in the integrated manner required. Clearly, that was for the United Nations to do; and within the United Nations system, UNCTAD alone possessed the mandate.

10. UNCTAD's role was also to stay ahead of the curve and push other United Nations entities into action with its rigorous, independent and multidisciplinary analysis. Research should be informed by country analysis, which was currently missing from the Organization's work, according to one panellist. UNCTAD must also provide quality statistics, modelling and projections. It should improve its capacity for networking, especially with developing-country institutions. It should not only communicate effectively but place a premium on feedback and input. And it needed to be more effective in disseminating its research and to make its publications more readily accessible online.

11. Regarding UNCTAD's technical cooperation, trade and development issues needed to be included in national development strategies and in United Nations fieldwork; here, the Organization could deliver more effectively by working on the ground with other partners through the One United Nations initiative. UNCTAD's work in that pillar should be demand-driven, and fundraising should be improved. The work should be situated within the technical cooperation framework of recipient countries and should exploit synergies with donors, especially those active at the country level. There should be a clear division of labour with other international organizations, both within and outside the United Nations system, as well as greater complementarity and deepened cooperation with non-State actors. Civil society, for example, which played a watchdog role, must be given the status of a full-fledged partner of UNCTAD, drawing its legitimacy from its experience on the ground in developing countries.

12. Many of the smaller technical assistance operations should be consolidated, streamlined and rationalized, one panellist said. In that regard, the Trade and Productive Capacity Cluster of the United Nations Chief Executives Board, launched at UNCTAD XII, was a step in the right direction.

13. As to UNCTAD's intergovernmental machinery, one panellist urged that the deliberations should be well prepared in close cooperation between the secretariat and member States but noted that flexibility was needed on the agenda, depending on the type of outcome envisaged. While it was desirable to have practical, implementable outcomes from meetings, the value of forums that analysed new and unfamiliar issues in particular should not be underestimated. Such discussions might make it easier subsequently to negotiate the same issues in more formal settings. Consensus-building was worthwhile, even when it was laborious, and should be undertaken more gradually in order to be more solid. UNCTAD also needed to adapt to the emergence of new institutions such as the WTO and take account of new attitudes towards what its own intergovernmental machinery could offer.
