

TD(X)/Misc.12
18 February 2000

Original: ENGLISH

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
Tenth session
Bangkok, 12 - 19 February 2000

ROUND TABLE ON THE HUMAN DIMENSION OF DEVELOPMENT

“Empowering entrepreneurs for the 21st century”

Summary

Prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat. Not an official record.

Panellists' presentations

To complement the general debate at the Conference this Round Table presented seven first-person accounts of men and women who have overcome difficult conditions to succeed in business. The panel was composed of the following entrepreneurs: Mrs. Boutheyna Iraqui (Morocco), Mr. Lucas Izoton (Brazil), Mr. Reda Mehigueni (Algeria), Ms. Julia Muntu (Uganda), Mr. Narayan Murthy (India), Mr. Peter Petrov (Russian Federation) and Ms. Khunying Chanut Piyaoui (Thailand).

Opening the Round Table, Mr. Ricupero, Secretary-General of UNCTAD, said that this event introduced a new, concrete dimension to the debates of the Conference, namely the lessons that can be drawn from people who have managed to change their lives through entrepreneurship. Mr. Ricardo Marquez, Vice-President of Peru, who chaired the meeting, said it was important to move from global macroeconomic approaches to a consideration of microeconomic issues of concern to SMEs.

The participants gave a short account of their respective experiences in setting up their businesses, which ranged from the software industry to dairy products and tourism. Explaining the reasons behind their success, many mentioned education, hard work and self-confidence; others stressed perseverance, team-building and well-targeted government support. Several agreed that learning from one's mistakes and the capacity

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to rebound is essential. Two of them said they had benefited, at the beginning of their careers, from UNCTAD's technical cooperation support activities.

Ensuing discussion

The discussions highlighted a number of issues, expectations and desires, in which two common features were apparent: (i) that the State should assume a more supportive role in helping entrepreneurs to play the game of globalization intelligently; and (ii) that the human dimension of economic activity and development should not be ignored. Participants, while not explicitly referring to the notion of empowering entrepreneurs, implied it in many of their statements.

All participants perceived entrepreneurship as a key element for human development. Most stressed their preference for a minimal role for the State if this involves bureaucracy and obstacles to enterprise creation. However, they agreed that, for themselves in their existing business, as well as for future generations of entrepreneurs, the State should create a business environment, which not only facilitates competitive supply, but also encourages ("empowers") individual economic actors and mobilizes their talents and motivation for the creation of wealth.

It was generally felt that the role of the Government of any country that is committed to encouraging private investment and entrepreneurship should be threefold. First, it should create a level playing field and a favourable environment for enterprises (including an appropriate legal framework, access to affordable credit, fair competition and tax policies), so that minimum conditions for achieving competitiveness are offered to all. Secondly, it should foster the development of talent, through the education system and other initiatives aimed at encouraging innovation and entrepreneurship, as well as providing ethical leadership. Thirdly, the Government should use and promote the technological capacities necessary to facilitate business decision-making and action, in particular, as one participant stressed, to satisfy the vital need for trade-related information.

Two other participants underlined the importance of facilitating access of the poor to information technologies as a tool for promoting entrepreneurship. It was also pointed out that there is a need for continuous adaptation of the institutional framework to the evolving context of globalization.

Reflecting on their different experiences and expressing their hope for a form of globalization with a human face, the speakers revealed some of the more important expectations of civil society. One of these, in particular, is the need for dialogue and a partnership between those who produce and those who are in a position to create fair conditions for production.

These views were warmly encouraged by Mr. Ricupero, who recalled the importance of ensuring that the "aspirations" of all be heard and taken into consideration in the economic sphere, just as they are, in democratic countries, in the political sphere.

The testimonies offered by the invited entrepreneurs highlighted the importance of nurturing individual advancement, and of enabling everyone's personal "fairy tale", as one participant recalled, to materialize. Some of the participants considered that a full understanding of the conditions for success and the benefits of globalization is key to innovation and enterprise development.

Participants differed in their views on the implications of globalization for their enterprises. Some thought that globalization offered unprecedented perspectives for business expansion; others feared that, if not properly managed, it could result in a loss of equity and defeat the purpose of people-centred economic development.