



**United Nations
Conference
on Trade and
Development**

Distr.
GENERAL

TD/B/WP/189
5 July 2006

Original: ENGLISH

TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT BOARD

Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and
the Programme Budget
Forty-seventh session
Geneva, 11–15 September 2006
Item 4 of the provisional agenda

**PROGRESS REPORT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF RECOMMENDATIONS
BY THE INDEPENDENT EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF THE COURSE ON
KEY ISSUES ON THE INTERNATIONAL ECONOMIC AGENDA**

Note by the secretariat*

Executive summary

At its forty-fifth session in September 2005, the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget considered the in-depth evaluation of the training courses on key issues on the international economic agenda, and requested the secretariat to report back on progress in implementing them by no later than its 47th session.

This note reports on the implementation of recommendations between October 2005 and June 2006. For the purpose of the note, the recommendations have been grouped according to the main areas covered, namely (a) funding for and planning of the training courses; (b) development of course content; (c) course impact; and (d) other issues. Each section provides details of progress made with regard to the particular thematic group of recommendations.

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

1. At its forty-fifth session in September 2005, the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget considered the in-depth evaluation of the training courses on key issues on the international economic agenda.[†] Following the examination and discussion of the report's findings, it adopted agreed conclusions in which it expressed general satisfaction with the achievements of the training courses so far, particularly their integrated and coordinated approach that made them unique, and encouraged the secretariat to continue its effort in this regard.[‡] The Working Party also endorsed the recommendations contained in the evaluation report and requested the secretariat to report back on progress in implementing them by no later than its 47th session.[§]

2. The present report was prepared in response to that request. For ease of reference, the 22 recommendations made in the evaluation are reported on in thematic groups, and whenever appropriate, they are complemented by specific provisions of the agreed conclusions from the forty-fifth session of the Working Party.

Funding for and planning of the training courses

(Recommendation 22 of the evaluation report; para. 3 of the Working Party's agreed conclusions)

3. Both the evaluation report and the forty-fifth session of the Working Party called for predictable funding for the courses that would make it possible to plan and schedule them over a two-year delivery period.

4. The regular programme of technical cooperation (Section 22) provides for the cost of participants' stay at the venue of the course, travel for those from the least developed countries and those from the lower-income countries among the middle-income countries, and the cost of conference facilities. Its availability was confirmed in January and the funds were made physically available in February 2006. A decision was taken in May 2006 to fund the travel of UN staff preparing/servicing the courses, as well as presenters, from regular budget travel allocations of individual Divisions.

5. The secretariat consequently prepared a two-year plan under which it intends to deliver six regional courses, as follows:

1. Course for Arab countries, 26 June – 14 July 2006, Beirut, Lebanon;
2. Course for countries with economies in transition, 18 September – 6 October 2006, Belgrade, Serbia;
3. Course for Asia/Pacific countries, November–December 2006, Bangkok, Thailand;
4. Course for African countries, February 2007, Cairo, Egypt;
5. Course for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 2007, venue to be determined;
6. Course for Arab countries, 2007, Beirut, Lebanon.

[†] "In-depth evaluation of the training courses on key issues on the international economic agenda", TD/B/WP/182, and Annexes, TD/B/WP/182/Add.1.

[‡] "Report of the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and Programme Budget on its forty-fifth session", TD/B/WP/184, p. 3, para. 2.

[§] "Report of the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and Programme Budget on its forty-fifth session", p. 4, para. 6.

6. Missions have been undertaken to Beirut, Lebanon, and Belgrade, Serbia, to ascertain political support, prepare the logistical aspects of the courses, and discuss possible local/regional contributions to the course content. The work on the preparation of both regional deliveries is well on schedule, and initial steps have been taken with regard to the subsequent deliveries.

7. Both sources of funding are subject to the budget cap decided by the Fifth Committee of the General Assembly in December 2005 and will be governed by future decisions in this regard.

Development of course content

(Recommendations 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14 and 15; para. 5 of the Working Party's agreed conclusions)

8. As recommended by the evaluation, the duration of the courses has been extended to three weeks starting from the next delivery in Beirut. One whole week of each course will be devoted to WTO issues, including a final simulation exercise. UNCTAD's Special Programme for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries is being approached to provide content relating to trade and poverty as appropriate.

9. A special effort has been made to secure presentations, data and case studies reflecting regional and local experience and to integrate them organically into the programme of the courses. For all courses, the secretariat is liaising with UN regional commissions, with a view to strengthening regional content in each course. Whenever feasible, courses will be held at the headquarters of regional commissions in order to facilitate the contributions by regional experts. In other cases, videoconferences will be used to bridge the physical distance between the regional commission and the venue of the course. The preparatory missions are paying particular attention to introducing and explaining the course to regional and local partners, and identifying suitable speakers who will provide regional/local expertise. For instance, the forthcoming course in Beirut will benefit from active participation in the programme by seven regional/local experts from ESCWA and the host country.

10. To ensure the coherence of regional/local inputs with UNCTAD's presentations, all UNCTAD presenters are in close contact and consultation with the proposed regional/national speakers prior to the formulation of the programme of their respective sessions. Additionally, physical meetings between them and regional/local experts take place at the venue of the course before the sessions, with a view to fine-tuning the coherence of interventions. The coherence of the entire course is ensured through meetings of all the UNCTAD presenters, where the focus and the ensuing message of the course and its components are discussed and clarified. From an early conception stage, each course is tailored to the region in that it addresses topics that are of particular relevance to countries in that specific region.

11. In order to make the course more interactive and increase the possibility of active learning, particular attention is being paid to the use of case studies, discussions and exercises. For instance, in the Beirut course, one session per day, usually the concluding one, is devoted to a group discussion. In addition to numerous case studies included in presentations, two video projections to present cases and concepts are scheduled. Also, participants have been requested to gather information on specific issues/cases addressed by

the modules relating to the situation in their own countries so that they are better prepared for knowledge sharing and exchange of experience.

12. With regard to possible use of distance-learning techniques, the secretariat has developed a new website for the course, through which the participants have access to all the course materials organized in a structured form and accessible in a user-friendly manner. In order to further homogenize the level of participants' knowledge before the course, the secretariat took initial steps towards developing "basic knowledge" teaching supports that will also be made available through the website. The questions on which the participants are asked to work in preparation for the course are also directed towards enhancing their knowledge in those areas of which they may be less aware and thus attaining a more uniform starting level of knowledge for the course.

13. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided for the courses for countries in Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean. The training materials and background readings will be provided in all the UN languages into which they have been translated.

Course impact

(Recommendations 1, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21; para. 4 of the Working Party's agreed conclusions)

14. The secretariat has devoted increased attention to the identification of areas of course impact and means by which it could be increased.

15. To start with, the selection of candidates is an important factor influencing the potential impact of the courses. A wider range of channels for the marketing of the courses is therefore being used in order to reach a broader and more varied audience of potential participants. Such channels include former participants, direct contacts in ministries, UNDP offices in beneficiary countries, and the network of members and partners of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute. A special effort is being made to secure participation by academia. In the selection process, due attention is being paid to the benefit which may accrue to their institutions from the knowledge acquired by participants. This approach has been fruitful, in that, for instance, two academics (from Jordan and Iraq) will participate in the Beirut course.

16. In order to capitalize on the experience and materials developed for the courses, the secretariat will organize, for Geneva-based diplomats, additional sessions consisting of short courses on selected trade and development issues. To update the information already collected, a further questionnaire for the missions is in preparation, its purpose being to ascertain interests and identify topics that would be requested as a matter of priority.

17. The sessions of the courses also invariably touch upon UNCTAD's technical cooperation in the particular area covered by each specific module. The impact of each course can thus be broadened beyond the course itself, towards a potential provision of technical assistance related to the subject matter dealt with in the sessions.

18. To ensure that the access to information and knowledge — and hence the impact of the course — is not limited to participation in the course, it is important to facilitate the network of participants once the course is finished. The technical features for group communications and sharing have been recently developed and are already available on the

current website of the course. A database with contact details of all former participants is also being developed and will be made available to all of them through the site.

19. Synergies are also being explored with the UNCTAD Virtual Institute, which provides inter alia access to a virtual library of up-to-date trade-related documents from UNCTAD and Virtual Institute partners and the possibility of registering for a service that advises the user by automatic e-mail whenever a new document is posted on the site in the category of his/her interest. The possibility of registering for this service could also be offered to alumni so as to facilitate their keeping up to date with new developments in their areas of work.

20. An important issue in the effort to enhance the impact of the courses is the building of a sustainable local capacity to conduct training and research on trade and development topics, based on or inspired by the courses. For this reason, the marketing of the courses is being expanded to systematically include an academic audience. At the same time, the impact of the courses is being complemented by capacity-building initiatives of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute targeted at academia. These include professional development workshops for university teachers and researchers from developing countries, which are conducted in cooperation with the relevant UNCTAD Divisions and Programmes. To date, three such workshops have been conducted with a particular focus on LDCs, thanks to the funding provided by the Governments of Japan and Finland, and a contribution from UNCTAD's Special Programme for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Developing Countries. Two workshops for French- and English-speaking African countries focused on the economics of commodity production and trade, and one workshop for Asian countries dealt with economic and legal aspects of foreign direct investment.

21. In all the workshops, special attention is being paid to the link between research and teaching on the one hand, and the needs of policymakers and other stakeholders that represent "clients" of the academic community on the other hand. The workshop on methods and tools for trade and trade policy analysis, scheduled for September 2006 and organized in cooperation between UNCTAD, WTO and ITC, will devote a special session to the discussion of research questions of relevance to policymakers and the ways of presenting the conclusions of research to a policymaking audience.

22. The Virtual Institute has also been instrumental in networking between UNCTAD and its member universities and among universities themselves, through its website and through physical meetings such as the workshops mentioned above or the annual meetings of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute. Currently, the Virtual Institute has 15 institutional (university) members and 140 individual (associate) members, who have access to the teaching and research resources and services of the Virtual Institute.

23. It is important to conduct a continuous evaluation of the course, as well as other activities that can broaden its outreach. This is done through evaluation of individual events, both as they conclude and six months afterwards. A systematic effort will be made to ensure as large as possible a response to the questionnaires. Additionally, there is an ongoing self-evaluation of the programme aimed at continuously integrating the feedback and adjusting the service in the direction and through the means that are deemed appropriate.

Other issues

(Recommendations 4 and 5)

24. The issue of recognition and incentives for staff working on the preparation and delivery of courses was raised at a meeting between the Deputy Secretary-General, Directors and focal persons held on 20 May 2005, and was reflected in two recommendations of the external evaluation. Directors were encouraged to recognize the work and commitment of focal and resource persons from individual Divisions through the Performance Evaluation System.

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