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Partnership for Development:
Information and Knowledge for Development

Issues Note

Executive summary

UNCTAD's technical cooperation activities focus on building developing countries' and transition economies' endogenous capacities to formulate, implement and evaluate home-grown policies for the development of their economies. Training (as predominantly vertical dissemination of knowledge) and networking (as horizontal sharing of information) are essential tools for achieving this objective. Recent advances in information and communication technologies (ICT) allow the use of distance learning and the Internet to support networking.

UNCTAD has devised systematic training tools that use in-house pedagogical expertise to integrate the different areas of UNCTAD's work into a broader capacity development framework. Programmes include courses on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda (Paragraph 166 courses) and TrainForTrade. The Paragraph 166 courses reflect the specifics of each region, along with the most recent international developments as analysed by UNCTAD. Longer-term impact is sought through cooperation with universities that will integrate UNCTAD syllabus into their regular curricula. TrainForTrade, UNCTAD's core capacity development programme, develops original training packages based on UNCTAD's analytical work, a systematic course design methodology, training of trainers, and work with national steering committees in beneficiary countries to ensure sustainability of courses after the completion of technical cooperation projects.

Distance learning has been used by TrainForTrade since 1999 to build a standard level of knowledge that prepares participants for subsequent face-to-face training. Its use has resulted in broader access to the organization's training activities, lower costs per participant (which are expected to fall further once course delivery is taken over by countries) and increased flexibility of training for participants.

ICT also offer unprecedented possibilities to enhance the focus of UNCTAD as a knowledge-based institution through networking with and among academic institutions. UNCTAD has developed the concept of academic partnerships to enhance teaching and research in partner universities through exchange among these institutions and closer cooperation with UNCTAD. The ultimate goals are to (1) help equip officials and decision makers in developing countries with the knowledge and understanding of trade, investment and development issues that they need to make informed choices about the economic development of their countries, and (2) enhance the quality and relevance of the organization's policy advice by monitoring developments in member countries.

Contents

Training, networking and distance learning:
The context of capacity development

1.   The development of human resources is an essential part of building capacity and social capital in all areas of development. Its scope ranges from the micro level (ensuring that children have access to schooling) to the macro level (enabling government representatives and private-sector operators to access the knowledge they need to formulate and implement policies and to take decisions in the best interest of their country and its economic and social development).

2.   As is explained in UNCTAD's technical cooperation strategy,[1] capacity development is the main thrust of UNCTAD's technical cooperation activities. The aim is to strengthen the endogenous capacity in developing countries and countries in transition to formulate, implement and evaluate home-grown policies for the development of their productive sector, trade, investment and trade support services, and for international negotiations in these areas. In other words, the overarching target of capacity development is to build the capacity to adapt and apply the generic knowledge produced at the global level by international institutions like UNCTAD to local conditions.

3.   Training is central to capacity development activities. Training is about equipping key economic stakeholders with the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to be able to make decisions and act. This process, as reflected in UNCTAD's "Capacity Development" note,[2] requires supporting both individuals and institutions. In a constantly changing world, training in trade and investment issues is an ongoing process, not one confined to clearly defined spaces marked "education" that stops on the receipt of a certificate. It is also a long-term process that needs to be sustained over time in order to achieve the desired lasting results. The challenge for actors in any country is not simply to access up-to-date information (which is sometimes challenge enough), but in to make sense of it, to use it and to transform it into practical knowledge applicable to local needs. Learning has to be continuous and the training provided has to be responsive and flexible in order to reflect evolving needs.

4.   It is essential that countries be able to participate in the building and sharing of knowledge to develop human resources. To do this, they need to make full use of existing endogenous capacity – higher education, research and training institutions, civil society organizations, established non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and partnerships – and these resources need to be supported. The fostering and development of networks between and among such institutions, Governments and the private sector is a key component, then, of training and capacity building, both nationally and through international networks.

5.   In addition, the potential of new information and communication technologies (ICT) to enable distance and open learning offers additional scope for developing human resource capacity in trade, investment and development.

6.   Training and networking can therefore be regarded as complementary activities in developing and sustaining the human resources of any country. Both of them can then be supported and further enhanced through the appropriate use of ICT and distance learning methods.

7.   This paper highlights the connections between training, distance learning and networking and illustrates how they can be integrated to promote sustainable capacity development. It does so by referring to relevant examples of UNCTAD's activities in these areas.

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[1] TD/B/50/L.4/Add.1, 1 October 2003. Available at *www.unctad.org*.
[2] TD/B/50/9, 27 August 2003. Available at *www.unctad.org*.

Training

8.   As the UN system's focal point for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development, UNCTAD is involved in a range of knowledge-building and information exchange activities (such as analytical work, technical cooperation activities, expert meetings, intergovernmental deliberations, information dissemination and familiarization seminars). UNCTAD awareness-raising and training activities are often ad hoc and encompass different disciplines, objectives and subjects. Such activities have included seminars and workshops on the range of topics under UNCTAD's mandate – for example, foreign direct investment, trade and environment, and transport. All of these can have an impact on developing capacity and enhancing human resources in UNCTAD member countries.

9.   UNCTAD is also involved in providing more specifically targeted training activities to address particular needs (at the country, sub-regional or regional level) or in response to specific requests from donors or beneficiary countries.

10.   However, training activities of this type have a number of limitations:

- *Human resource capacity*. There is a limit to the physical availability of UNCTAD's regular staff and to the country-/region-specific knowledge available to them.

- *Adaptability*. UNCTAD's training population is international and diverse. Training material appropriate to one setting may not be suitable to another.

- *Currency*. The arena of trade and investment is constantly changing. Designing and providing training that is both appropriate and up-to-date is a particular challenge. Current, in-depth knowledge of trade and investment that is available in beneficiary countries may not always be known about or used to the fullest in UNCTAD events.

- *Access*. In addition to the above limitations, there are limits to the number of people who can attend UNCTAD events and activities.

- *Cost.* Having training sessions organized directly by UNCTAD staff is expensive, and the cost per participant remains high.

- *Sustainability.* Capacity development is an ongoing process that takes time. Short seminars and ad hoc workshops delivered by international experts, while topical and useful, cannot provide the kind of long-term, consistent support to achieve the desired capacity development impact. Case-by-case training of individuals, while very important, does not in itself build the institutional capacity in local universities, research and training centres, which is crucial to make the results of training sustainable.

11.   To address some of the constraints involved in topic-specific information-sharing events and seminars, UNCTAD has devised systematic training tools that use in-house pedagogical and training expertise and attempt to integrate the different areas of UNCTAD's work into a broader capacity development framework. Among such programmes are the courses on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda and TrainForTrade.

Courses on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda[3]

12.   This training activity launched as an outcome of UNCTAD X[4] is aimed at enhancing the understanding of current issues on the international economic agenda within UNCTAD's areas of competence among middle- and higher-level government and private-sector decision makers and academics from developing countries and countries in transition. It draws on UNCTAD's expertise and analytical work, as well as lessons learned from UNCTAD technical cooperation activities.

13.   The courses are designed to equip participants with knowledge and understanding of the following:

- The main features and trends that determine the international economic agenda from the point of view of development
- The interfaces between trade, investment and development issues and their implications for the formulation and implementation of integrated development strategies with respect to globalization of the trading system
- The use of multidisciplinary approaches in tackling the various aspects of trade and development issues, including monetary and exchange rate policies, trade in agriculture and commodities, manufactures, services, environment and infrastructure development
- Best practices in designing and implementing national, regional and international policies on trade, investment and sustainable development

14.   Audience members are typically all from the same geographical region. To meet participants' needs, the content of the course is always, insofar as possible, customized to the context of the region. Furthermore, the courses are delivered jointly by UNCTAD staff and resource persons from the country or the region that hosts the event, be they from the government, academia or the private sector. Six courses have been organized so far, and two more are planned for 2004.

Courses on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda

Year	Dates	Venue	Audience
2001	20 June – 17 July	Geneva (Switzerland), Turin (Italy)	Worldwide
2002	17 July – 13 August	Geneva (Switzerland), Turin (Italy)	Worldwide
2002	18–29 November	Bangkok (Thailand)	Asia/Pacific
2003	31 March – 11 April	Santiago de Chile (Chile)	Latin America/Caribbean
2003	16–27 June	Beirut (Lebanon)	Arab countries
2004	26 January – 11 February	Réduit (Mauritius)	Africa
2004	12–28 July	Prague (Czech Republic) (planned)	Transition economies
2004	Autumn (date to be determined)	Asia/Pacific venue (planned)	Asia/Pacific

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[3] For more information see the website *r0.unctad.org/p166*.

[4] At its tenth session, held in Bangkok in February 2000, UNCTAD adopted a Plan of Action (TD/386) that in its paragraph 166 states the following:

"166. UNCTAD's existing capacity-building programme should be strengthened. This would enable officials and other individuals from developing countries and some interested countries with economies in transition to become better informed, through regular training courses in cooperation with the United Nations Staff College, of key issues on the international economic agenda, in particular with development dimensions within UNCTAD's field of competence. These courses would draw on the expertise and policy analysis work of the UNCTAD secretariat, with the support of an advisory body to be established by the Trade and Development Board. In course delivery, cooperation and coordination would be assured with relevant research and academic institutions and with other relevant international organizations, taking into consideration the commitment of UNCTAD to the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance for the LDCs…".

15.   Particular strengths of the courses on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda with regard to the desired features of training are the following:

- *Currency.* This training utilizes the latest research and analytical inputs from UNCTAD so it can quickly reflect the most recent developments in areas of interest to participants. It also provides an opportunity to build and share knowledge with high-level policy makers at the regional level regarding the most pressing issues and needs of the countries concerned.

- *Relevance.* Feedback from participants and their supervisors immediately after the training and six months later shows the usefulness of the training for participants' work. This is also documented by the fact that a number of alumni have gone on to hold senior positions in government, both in the country and at its diplomatic representations to international organizations. This shows that the objective of the courses – to provide knowledge to those who will be in a position to take decisions to influence the economic policy of their countries – is being achieved.

- *Sustainability.* To make the course less dependent on international speakers from UNCTAD, the course is organized in cooperation with a regional or national institution that is positioned to increasingly absorb the knowledge disseminated through the course and spread it in the region. In the beginning, this role was played by UN regional commissions. However, because training is not their primary mandate, starting this year the courses are being delivered in cooperation with universities in the regions concerned. That was true of the first 2004 course (in Mauritius) and will also be true of the course for countries with economies in transition to be held in Prague (Czech Republic) in July 2004. The idea is that the universities will integrate elements of the course into their curricula and that it will be delivered on a more permanent basis, including to students from other countries of the region.

Economic diplomacy course at the University of Campinas, Brazil

In 2002, a professor of economics from the University of Campinas, São Paulo, Brazil, did a two-month internship at UNCTAD, after which he attended the course on Key Issues on the International Economic Agenda. Subsequently, he designed a master's-level programme on international economic diplomacy based on the syllabus of the UNCTAD course. This programme, which customizes UNCTAD inputs, is now offered by his university. It takes an integrated approach towards trade, investment and development issues and focuses on different aspects that are subject to international economic negotiations, including financial, commercial (market access, commodities, services, etc.), investment- and environment-related ones. The structure of individual modules accommodates lectures by university staff members and practitioners, as well as videoconferences with UNCTAD experts. The course is targeted at business executives and government officials dealing with international economic issues. The University of Campinas and UNCTAD have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding about cooperation in research and training in areas of UNCTAD competence.

TrainForTrade[5]

16.   TrainForTrade is UNCTAD's core capacity development programme that collaborates with UNCTAD's substantive divisions to provide high-quality tailor-made training. TrainForTrade develops original training packages based on UNCTAD's analytical work using a systematic course design methodology. It also trains local trainers with a view to developing and sustaining human resources in the key UNCTAD subject areas in beneficiary countries. Local ownership and suitability of courses for local conditions are ensured through work with national steering committees, which are created to support the implementation and sustainability of TrainForTrade project activities.

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[5] See *www.unctad.org/trainfortrade*.

17.   The TrainForTrade approach addresses some of the problems identified with training and capacity-building work at UNCTAD in the following ways:

- *Human resource capacity.* Concomitantly with the development of training and materials in specific UNCTAD subject areas, TrainForTrade projects identify, train and develop future potential trainers and partner centres in which the courses are subsequently delivered. This "train the trainers" approach can create a cascade effect and facilitate longer-term human resource and institutional development.
- *Effectiveness.* TrainForTrade is based on a systematic methodology for designing, implementing, validating and evaluating training programmes so as to enhance the impact of training and the capacity of local trainers. The use of this methodology, particularly through the production of detailed instructor's tools, makes the delivery less dependent on the person of the trainer, with greater reliance on the quality of the training package itself.
- *Access and cost.* Delivery of courses by local trainers after the completion of a TrainForTrade project makes it possible to reach a wider audience and decreases the cost of training for national and regional participants.
- *Sustainability.* TrainForTrade projects work with local stakeholders to assess training needs and plan and implement training activities. A national steering committee is set up to oversee training activities. The committee is essentially responsible for the ownership and direction of the programme, with support from the TrainForTrade central team in Geneva, and for taking over the training activities upon completion of the UNCTAD technical cooperation project. As a rule, steering committees are required to mobilize funds in the country to cover local costs associated with the organization of courses. This model, which can also rely on attendance fees, makes it easier for the committee to take over the course and continue delivering it on its own after completion of the project. For instance, in Mali and Benin, the national steering committees collect fees from participants; in Mali, one training event per month is thus organized for specific audiences. Also contributing to the sustainability of the training is the fact that TrainForTrade trains instructors who can subsequently deliver the training autonomously.

Distance learning

18.   Additional possibilities for addressing some of the challenges of training and capacity development in the areas of UNCTAD's mandate are offered by the tools and techniques of distance learning. Although distance learning has a long history going back to the use of correspondence courses in the nineteenth century, the development of technologies enabling synchronous and asynchronous communication across time and distance has vastly increased the potential of and interest in distance learning. The growth of the Internet and other digital technologies has expanded the opportunities provided by distance learning in terms of access, quality and support and offers new avenues for the capacity development activities of UNCTAD.

19.   UNCTAD's TrainForTrade programme embarked on distance learning in 1999 and has since been implementing distance-learning activities in accordance with the UNCTAD Distance Learning Strategy.[6] Six distance-learning training packages in several languages comprising CD-ROMs, videos and electronic tests have been developed on "Implementation of a competition law and policy", "The modern management of ports", "Trade, environment and development", "Intensive training for negotiators of international investment agreements", "Commercial diplomacy" and "Distance learning instructors workshop". These packages have been adapted to three regional contexts – French-speaking Africa, English-speaking Africa and Asia. Missions to identify suitable training facilities and qualified technical tutors took place and steering committees were set up in beneficiary countries to

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[6] A link to the document (which was last revised in January 2004) appears on the website *r0.unctad.org/trainfortrade/uk/DistanceLearning/indexDLUk.htm*.

oversee the implementation of distance-learning activities. Training using distance-learning techniques has been delivered in Benin, Cambodia, Guinea, Laos, Mali, Togo, Viet Nam and Zambia. In addition, a number of countries[7] have benefited from regional distance-learning and subsequent face-to-face seminars. Two other training courses are being converted into the distance-learning format – "Legal aspects of e-commerce" and "Practice of e-commerce".

20.   While the introduction of distance learning techniques into the organization's capacity development activities has had substantial benefits, UNCTAD has had to find ways of overcoming constraints associated with the new teaching tools and methods.

Human resource capacity

21.   Distance learning as such can increase human resource capacity in two ways. Firstly, through the production of training materials that can be reused and adapted to different places and training situations. Secondly, distance learning can also enable the distribution and appropriate pedagogical use of training through Internet or e-mail forums, chats and video conferencing (online lectures or seminars), but also through the distribution of pedagogical materials on CD-ROMs. An example of how these two elements can be combined to extend existing human resource capacity might be a video presentation of a seminar on trade in agriculture embedded in a presentation, distributed via the Internet or on a CD-ROM allowing trainees to post online questions about the presentation to an Internet forum. Potentially, distance training can reach more people than a seminar traditionally limited to 15-20 participants. The planning, design and organisation of distance learning activities can result in human resource capacity and knowledge being used more efficiently.

22.   UNCTAD's Distance Learning Strategy is built upon a hybrid approach, that is, it blends face-to-face training with distance learning techniques. Distance learning is used in the preparatory phase of training where it allows trainees to acquire a certain minimum level of knowledge that is a prerequisite for the attendance of the second phase of training, the face-to-face course. The latter can then be shorter, focus on more advanced topics and be conducted more efficiently than without the distance-learning preparatory phase. This also allows reducing the time of direct involvement of UNCTAD staff in training. At the same time, however, due time and effort has to be devoted to advance planning and organization of the sessions.

Currency

23.   The systematic approach to the design of courses and learning materials that distance learning requires means that courses are constantly revised and updated and that learning objectives and outcomes are clearly stated. This builds into the training and capacity-building process the opportunity to adapt and refine materials. The UNCTAD material is updated every six months. Annexes to the training modules and case studies can be added more often, depending on the need for updating and the availability of subject matter expertise inside UNCTAD. National instructors are also requested to propose updates to the training material, and the most qualified of them are asked to contribute to such updates.

Access

24.   Distance learning can widen participation in training activities and therefore lower the cost per participant. It can allow people to engage in training when they are unable to physically attend

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[7] Countries included Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Egypt, Ethiopia, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Haiti, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Tunisia, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

courses and seminars. This is particularly relevant in countries with limited educational resources and infrastructure, with a shortage of qualified teaching personnel and where people need to work while they study. In UNCTAD distance learning courses, of the trainees admitted to the first, distance-learning phase, a smaller number who qualify are given the possibility to continue with face-to-face seminars or workshops.

Use of distance learning for training on International Investment Agreements

The distance-learning part of the International Investment Agreements course gives participants the common basic knowledge they need in order to follow the second part of the training, which consists of a face-to-face intensive regional workshop. Participants for the regional workshop are selected according to their results in a series of online evaluations during the distance-learning phase. This phase gives the country an opportunity to train more people than could be accommodated by the regional workshop, and thus to create, at a lower cost, a pool of competence to better manage staff turnover in the ministries.

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25. In designing and implementing distance learning with ICT support, it is essential to consider the broader framework in which the training will be occurring and the additional assistance that may be necessary. For example, having a training centre with video conferencing facilities in a setting that lacks a reliable Internet connection would be counterproductive. In many of the countries in which UNCTAD operates, even a reliable electricity supply cannot be taken for granted. UNCTAD distance training therefore uses affordable and easily available technologies. Materials are Web-enabled so that they can run on an Internet browser or use Internet-based videoconferencing. They are also made available on CD-ROM so that they are accessible regardless of Internet connections.

26. In addition, if the target training population is not familiar with self-study methods and the use of ICT, providing an Internet address or a CD-ROM and expecting participants to learn independently could be counterproductive. The solution used by UNCTAD is to make trainees come to a distance-learning centre to engage with the modules together in a structured way with support from a technical tutor. This enables trainees to ask questions and support each other and takes into account the differing levels of IT capability that individuals as well as institutions may have, especially in least developed countries (LDCs).

> In the Competition Law and Policy training in Benin, Burkina Faso and Mali, trainees, assisted by a technically proficient tutor, attended four half-day sessions over a period of one month. Each session included an online chat where subject experts from UNCTAD answered participants' questions and participants could exchange opinions. Case studies and more complex questions were dealt with in an Internet forum created for this purpose.

27. UNCTAD's experience suggests that people adopt new technologies when they feel such technologies can help them. After experiencing the benefits and the potential of the Internet – to share experiences, to communicate via e-mail, to save time at work – training participants are more committed to adopting and advocating its use. A benefit of ICT use in distance learning is that, in addition to enhancing training and capacity development in the areas of trade and investment, it also builds capacity in ICT and develops IT literacy.

Distance learning as a tool for developing IT literacy

For many participants in UNCTAD's distance-learning sessions, the experience made it possible to subsequently use ICT in their daily work, thus improving their qualifications and making their work more efficient. For instance, during the distance learning on port management in Dakar (Senegal), one participant used a computer for the first time in his life. Since he understood the usefulness of computers for his own work, after the training he decided to take an office productivity course. Now he is able to use IT tools available at his port to enter data. In Burkina Faso, a participant who was confident with IT teamed with a senior officer who was less well versed in the subject. By the end of the training, both had benefited from the teamwork dynamics. Since the training-of-trainers workshop in Togo, some participants have been using e-mail as a tool to communicate daily with UNCTAD and with others worldwide.

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28.   UNCTAD's distance-learning activities have proved that using distance learning for training in developing countries, even LDCs, is a valid alternative to traditional training. It is not necessary to wait until countries have sophisticated telecommunication infrastructures. If training activities are properly planned and managed, a simple telephone line linked to a local Internet provider is enough to provide quality training.

Cost

29.   The use of distance learning promises lower costs per participant than its face-to-face equivalent. This is true as long as the course is delivered to a large number of participants. At the same time, it is important to realize that the up-front costs of distance learning in terms of materials development can be significant if high quality is required. For example, the Open University in the United Kingdom develop courses using structured design teams that may spend up to three years and as much as £1 million on a new course.[8] Furthermore, the costs do not stop after the development phase; there are recurrent updating costs. Implementing a distance-learning programme, like any training activity, also requires time for tutors to plan, prepare, moderate forums and provide feedback to trainees.

30.   In UNCTAD's blended training model, the cost-saving element is the possibility of involving a larger number of participants in the preparatory phase for face-to-face learning. Because participants have the opportunity to reach a certain standard level of knowledge, the distance-learning techniques help increase the efficiency of the training.

31.   In some work environments, sending two or three people to a face-to-face training programme can disrupt the work of a section, division or department. Distance-learning delivery at the rate of one half-day a week enables people to continue their work while they receive training. For UNCTAD, distance delivery involves almost the same amount of work and money whether it is targeted to one or several countries at a time, and hence it can generate significant savings. Moreover, such training can be delivered more frequently once the material is developed and the setting is prepared. Later transferring the distance-learning training to partners in the country concerned permits further economies of scale.

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[8] Potashnik M and Capper J (1998). Distance education: Growth and diversity in finance and development. *Finance and Development*. Washington, International Monetary Fund.

Flexibility

32.   From a pedagogical point of view, distance learning offers the trainees flexibility – flexibility of scheduling, the possibility of proceeding at one's own pace, the opportunity to study without having to travel and, in the best funded programmes, individualized attention from the instructor.[9] At the same time, distance learning, when reduced to individualized self-study, can be isolating. Much of education consists of dialogue; the lack of a formal structure and timetable in distance learning can be detrimental to the training experience and lead to poor motivation and high dropout rates. One method of combating these problems is to integrate distance learning into workshop activities where trainees can meet each other and discuss questions and problems. This is the approach adopted by UNCTAD: trainees come at regular intervals to a training centre in the country, where they are supported by a tutor and can interact with other participants.

Sustainability

33.   Distance learning in UNCTAD is undertaken in the context of capacity development, where sustainability is a major preoccupation. To ensure local ownership and longer-term impact, UNCTAD always works in collaboration with partner institutions. These include partners representing various stakeholders involved in the particular subject matter, as well as suitably equipped centres where the participants can come for distance-learning sessions. A local steering committee is set up to help identify suitable training centres with IT facilities to work with on an ad hoc or permanent basis (partner centres) to implement distance learning. The intention is to build distance-learning capacity in the country so that it can continue providing delivering courses autonomously after completion of the project.

34.   Owing to the requirement to finance the local costs of training sessions, countries are implementing business models, including participation fees, that will enable them to continue the training activity after the UNCTAD project is completed.

Benin's Steering Committee for Distance Learning

In Benin, UNCTAD manages two training programmes with a distance-learning component, one for negotiators of international investment agreements and one on commercial diplomacy that provides an introduction to trade in services. To implement these activities, a steering committee has been set up with the key training stakeholders – the Ministry of Commerce, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the Investment Promotion Centre, the port, the university, and the UNDP country representatives. This committee ensures that potential participants are identified and are informed of events, that facilities are available, and that registration material and feedback are transferred to the central team in UNCTAD. The committee is also responsible for securing funds to cover local training costs, including by charging a participation fee.

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35.   In its distance-learning activities, UNCTAD recognizes and strives to integrate existing expertise in each particular subject area. UNCTAD works with international,[10] regional and local organizations that have a country presence and/or expertise to ensure complementarity and coordination of activities. Such an approach is much more likely to have a lasting impact. During the preparatory mission to the country, UNCTAD helps the steering committee to identify potential partners for the distance-learning centre with which the committee will subsequently conclude a

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[9] Adler HJ (2003). *The Riddle of Distance Education: Promise, Problems and Applications for Development.* Geneva, UN Research Institute for Social Development.
[10] Such as the World Trade Organization and the World Bank.

Memorandum of Understanding defined according to the country law and context. At the international level, UNCTAD participates in distance-learning networks such as EDUSUD[11] and Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF)[12] and cooperates with regional institutions like COMESA, whose training centre is used for the delivery of UNCTAD distance learning. A similar cooperation model is being discussed with ECOWAS.

36.   Distance learning today relies heavily on the use of ICT. However, it should always be borne in mind that ICT alone are not enough. Technology should be developed to meet pedagogical or capacity-building needs, not the other way around. Any solution to training and capacity-building needs that relies overly on a particular kind of software or application will inevitably be limited by the parameters of that application, not least licensing and other costs. UNCTAD distance learning is therefore not restricted to one programme or type of learning management software. This keeps the cost down and builds in flexibility. UNCTAD is also committed to exploring open-source solutions.

37.   Distance learning cannot rely for its benefits on the promise of technology alone but requires organization of human resources (e.g. assigning tasks and responsibilities to tutors), careful matching of training objectives to production of training materials (e.g. considering which medium is most appropriate for conveying a particular piece of information) and proper consideration of the use of and access to Internet tools (e.g. whether in a particular country there is access to sufficient bandwidth to support Web-based video or audio). In developing countries, UNCTAD's distance-learning programmes have been doing their best to meet this challenge.

Networking for training: Building academic capacities

38.   Unlike training that relates mainly to vertical dissemination of knowledge, networking provides an effective possibility of sharing knowledge horizontally. In this sense, training and networking are two complementary sides of one coin. Networking involves building mutually beneficial relationships between individuals, institutions, sectors and interest groups (e.g. partnerships between government and the non-governmental sector).

39.   Like distance learning, networking has been a fundamental part of social and economic exchange for centuries, but the impact of new technologies and the changes in the flow of information have influenced the means and modalities of networking and exchange. Internet access does not inevitably lead to the sharing of resources, but it does represent a new capacity and opportunity to facilitate these practices; the Internet is a tool that can facilitate communication, knowledge sharing and South-South cooperation. The educational potential of ICT in networking resides in their capacity to transform the production, circulation and ownership of knowledge. Although ICT present many pedagogical possibilities, on its own they cannot provide the necessary long-term institutional support for training and capacity development.

40.   For sustainable, long-term capacity development to occur, no organization can work alone. UNCTAD must create partnerships with organizations in the countries with which it works so as to build on existing knowledge and expertise. Such partnerships can be used to promote coherent capacity building across different government sectors, and they should involve other supporting institutions so that there is a collaborative approach to developing economic policies.

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[11] See *www.edusud.org*.
[12] See *www.auf.org*.

41.   Aware of the opportunities provided by networking in general and recent advances in ICT in particular, and building on its experience with training, networking and distance learning, UNCTAD has developed the concept of academic partnerships for research and higher learning in the form of a global network of relevant institutions, with the ultimate goal of equipping future generations of decision makers with the capacity to make informed choices about the economic development of their countries.

42.   As a matter of fact, in the area of economic policy, academic institutions often act as think tanks for Governments. If properly equipped in terms of research capacities, they can play a very useful role in providing governments with qualified home-grown advice and support. By the same token, academic institutions educate future and sometimes (through post-graduate courses) current decision makers. High-quality teaching can prepare those decision makers to analyse the economic environment effectively and take decisions that correspond to their best interests.

43.   While UNCTAD is not specifically a training institution offering qualifications and accreditations, it does have research and analytical capacity that can support and stimulate the work of other institutions. In partnership with academia, UNCTAD inputs can be used to develop teaching and research that support the aims of capacity development in training and equipping officials and decision makers in developing countries with the knowledge of trade, investment and development issues that they need in today's globalized world.

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