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**A PARTNERSHIP FOR TRAINING, DISTANCE LEARNING  
AND NETWORKING**

**Interactive Thematic Session**

17 June 2004 – Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The session was chaired by Mr. Mbaye Diaye, First Counsellor of the Permanent Mission of Senegal in Geneva, and moderated by Dr. Juma Ngasongwa, Minister of Industry and Trade, Tanzania. The following panellists then intervened in the debate:

- H. E. Mr. Juan Pablo Lohlé, Ambassador of Argentina in Brazil
- Prof. Jacques Vauthier, Directeur de l'Ecole d'Ingénierie de la Formation à Distance, Centre National d'Enseignement à Distance, France
- Dr. Carlos Lopes, Resident Coordinator, UN Brazil
- Mr. Rubens Ricupero, Secretary-General, UNCTAD
- Prof. Mário Ferreira Presser, Coordinator, Economic Diplomacy Programme, Institute of Economics of the State University of Campinas (UNICAMP), Brazil
- Prof. Azad Parahoo, Director, Centre for Distance Learning, University of Mauritius

2. The increasing globalization of the world economy makes knowledge a crucial factor for social and economic development. The meeting therefore stressed the need for developing countries to have access to and to produce the knowledge that would allow them, among other things, to formulate and implement home-grown economic policies and to make decisions that reflected and served their national interests and priorities. This would help them maximize the opportunities and benefits to be derived from globalization. It was recognized that building such capacities so that a country had a critical mass of qualified decision makers was a long-term process achievable only through systematic efforts over time.

3. The contributions from panellists and delegations stressed the need to integrate the building of such skills in trade and development into regular educational activities – in particular, graduate and post-graduate programmes and research at universities. Universities play a key role in building knowledge and expertise in all areas of economic and political life by educating future and current decision makers, by providing expertise to governments on issues relating to national economic policies, and by increasing awareness of trade, investment and their contribution to wider

development goals. This knowledge and expertise should be built through working with other stakeholders and civil society actors.

4. Programmes and research conducted by universities must recognize the multidisciplinary nature of international trade, investment and development issues and treat them in an integrated manner. An important point raised during the meeting was that such endeavours should draw on existing local knowledge and expertise and expand it by adapting knowledge acquired from other countries to local conditions and needs so that the training programmes were relevant and up-to-date.

5. Recent advances in information and communication technologies can facilitate the process of capacity development by providing access to a wider range of sources of information and educational programmes, and by facilitating international contacts and discussions with individuals and institutions in other countries. In particular, Internet-facilitated networks have the potential to be used as an empowering capacity development tool, owing to their participatory and demand-driven nature. At the meeting, there was special emphasis on the promotion of cultural diversity and the related need for the creation of local content and its sharing among developed and developing countries.

6. The development of capacities in developing countries at the individual, institutional and societal levels has become both a major focus and a major challenge of technical cooperation activities. To increase the impact of these activities, countries need to take responsibility for and ownership of this process and to set their own priorities. This will enable them to shift from a one-way transfer of knowledge to more purposeful interactive knowledge acquisition, and to localize international knowledge so as it is appropriate for the country concerned. Technical assistance programmes need to foster South-South discussion and to accept that this process requires a long-term commitment to capacity development.

7. It was noted that UNCTAD had a key role to play in the building of national capacities for economic policy making. Since it was established 40 years ago, the organization has been a unique think tank on trade and development issues and has also delivered successful programmes to support the building of local capacities for trade and development. The effectiveness of UNCTAD's analytical work can further benefit from an active integration of its results into countries' own training, research and education programmes, which will transform this work into an effective development tool. In this context and at the end of the session, the Secretary-General of UNCTAD officially launched the UNCTAD Virtual Institute for Trade and Development, designed to become the main instrument of systematic cooperation between UNCTAD and academic institutions in member countries.

8. The Institute aims to assist these institutions, particularly in developing countries, to enhance their capacity to design and deliver high-quality courses and to conduct research in the areas of trade and development. It does so, first, by giving them access via the Institute's website to selected UNCTAD substantive resources and by providing guidance for using the material to support independent training and educational activities. Second, it offers qualified academic institutions the possibility to become members of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute Network and thereby enhance their curricula and research work by exchanging and adapting resources (course materials and research) and experiences with other members and by strengthening their cooperation with UNCTAD. With its focus on capacity development for decision making, particularly in the area of policy, the Institute will also help strengthen the link between academia and government in member countries.

9. The delegations welcomed and expressed their support for the creation of the Institute, which they considered a useful contribution to their efforts to develop home-grown decision-making capacities and strengthen teaching and research in their countries. They felt that by helping academic institutions build trade-, investment- and development-related education into their regular curricula, the Institute would contribute to and increase the long-term impact of UNCTAD's work on capacity development in member countries.