

Multi-year Expert Meeting on Transport, Trade Logistics and Trade Facilitation

Third session

Small Island Developing States: Transport and Trade Logistics Challenges

Geneva, 24-26 November 2014

Welcome Remarks

by

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Distinguished delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to welcome everyone especially our distinguished speakers who came from Geneva and abroad and agreed to share with us their insights and contribute to this expert meeting which deals with transport and trade logistics in SIDS – a critical issue that can significantly determine SIDS ability to achieve sustainable growth and development. Bearing in mind the special case of SIDS in terms of sustainable development today's meeting offers a renewed opportunity to further consider relevant challenges facing the Transport and trade logistics of SIDS and reflect on how best these can be effectively addressed.

I would also like to align myself with the statement of our Secretary-General and to further emphasize that the momentum brought about the international year of SIDS and the Samoa Conference is a continuing one that is further strengthened by ongoing parallel processes that have direct relevance to SIDS, including in particular, the UNFCCC COP 20 (Lima, December 2014), and 21 (Paris 2015), the Post-2015 Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (Hyogo Framework), and the negotiation process of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Indeed, today's expert meeting is taking place at a pivotal juncture since it allows us to step back and reflect on the transport and trade logistics situation of SIDS while taking into account the Samoa conference and its outcomes as well as other developments that are currently reshaping the international policy agenda on climate change, sustainable development goals and disaster risk reduction.

The strategic importance of transport, in particular maritime and air transport, for SIDS cannot be overemphasized. Transport is a strategic sector in its own right that generates employment, revenue, and income. This sector also underpins SIDS trade and other productive sectors such as tourism, agriculture and fisheries. To best illustrate the role of transport as the lifeline of SIDS and the backbone driving their economies one can only recall the proportion of SIDS consumption needs that are met through transport-intensive imports. For example, in Cape Verde, over 90% of all food consumed is imported while fuel imports into Tonga account for 50% of the country's total imports.¹ Another case in point is strong nexus between tourism – a sector which accounts on average for up to 50% of GDP and (much higher in some islands) and transport (in particular air travel but also cruise shipping and containerization which supports consumption needs of the tourism industry). Other cross-sectoral linkages, including with fisheries and agricultural production further underscore the importance of transport for SIDS.

UNCTAD is a pioneer in recognizing the special case of SIDS and in taking concrete action across its three pillars of work to help address underlying challenges facing SIDS including in transport. With its long-standing expertise in the field of transport, in particular maritime transport, UNCTAD is well positioned to assist SIDS in mainstreaming their transport and trade logistics concerns into the policy agendas of policymakers, private sector stakeholders and development partners.

Supporting SIDS in their efforts to ensure sustainable and resilient transport for the future has become increasingly important for UNCTAD over recent years; thus, the Accra Accord

¹ WTO Trade Policy Review of Tonga

(2008) requires UNCTAD *“Through its research and policy analysis, [to] help developing countries make informed policy choices to address the environmental challenges in relation to transport strategies and to help identify associated capacity-building needs and appropriate regulatory responses”* (para 168). The Doha mandate (2012) more specifically recognizes the special case of SIDS and directs UNCTAD to *“advise SIDS on the design and implementation of policies addressing their specific trade and trade logistics challenges linked to their remoteness and geographical isolation”* (para 56 (j) and paras 6 and 48). This transport specific mandate relating to SIDS is an important development that is worth noting as it is indicative of an increasing recognition - as part of the broader development agenda - of the special challenges facing SIDS.

Bearing this in mind, I am pleased ladies and gentlemen, to highlight briefly some recent activities carried out as part of the work of the Trade Logistics Branch:

1. Last July we convened an Ad Hoc Expert Meeting on *“Addressing the Transport and Trade Logistics Challenges of the Small Islands Developing States (SIDS): Samoa and Beyond”*. The meeting was held in the run-up to the Samoa Conference and provided an important opportunity to identify some of the key concerns relating to the transport and trade logistics of SIDS. It was particularly insightful and the views expressed have provided useful guidance and input into UNCTAD’s contribution to the Samoa Conference. Discussions at the meeting, and issues highlighted as being of particular importance, have also helped shape the programme of this Multi-year Expert Meeting.
2. As just mentioned by Mr. Secretary-General, UNCTAD had the privilege to co-organize a joint high level event with the Pacific Islands Forum Secretariat entitled **“Harnessing the Oceanic Wealth of small island developing states through sound trade specialization and sustainable and resilient maritime transport”**. The event provided an excellent opportunity for UNCTAD to highlight the importance of sustainable and resilient transport and trade logistics for SIDS. On the same occasion, UNCTAD presented an advance copy of its report **“Closing the Distance: Partnerships for sustainable and resilient transport systems in SIDS”**. Drawing largely on the insights gained and recommendations obtained at our July Ad Hoc

Expert Meeting, the report is currently undergoing final technical adjustments but will be available soon. [for those of you interested in obtaining a copy, please get in touch with my colleagues in TLB or leave your contact details]. In the interim, we are pleased to share with you some highlights of the report as set out in the Advance Copy of its Executive Summary. [please note that the Executive Summary is available in the room for you to take]

3. The 47th issue of the Annual Review of Maritime Transport, one of UNCTAD's flagship reports, was launched four days ago, with a special chapter (chapter 6) being dedicated to the maritime transport situation in SIDS. The chapter considers among other aspects, trade and shipping services, liner shipping connectivity and configuration, ports issues as well as cross-cutting concerns such as disaster risks and climate change as well as the associated need for integrated strategies for disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation.
4. As part of its technical assistance to SIDS and building on the secretariat's earlier work, ahead of the curve, on climate change adaptation for ports (see unctad.org/ttl/legal under "Climate change and Maritime Transport"), UNCTAD is beginning implementation of a four-year project, funded under the UN Development Account which focuses on the important issue of enhancing the capacity of SIDS, in particular Caribbean SIDS, to adapt their coastal transport infrastructure to the impacts of climate change on (UNDA 9th tranche 2014-2017, "Climate change impacts on coastal transport infrastructure in the Caribbean: Enhancing the adaptive capacity of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)"). Another new project being implemented by UNCTAD that involves the SIDS is the UNDA funded project on sustainable freight transport and finance. This project focuses on building capacities and providing advisory services to developing countries to enable the development of sustainable freight transport infrastructure and services.
5. Also, please allow me to also underscore UNCTAD early visionary work on energy efficiency and sustainability which was developed back in 1980s in the Pacific with the collaboration of UNESCAP and UNDAT (United Nations Development Advisory Team for the Pacific). The aim was to explore the potential for developing sustainable shipping and energy efficient vessels in the region. I am glad to note in

this respect, that UNCTAD is currently reviving this work in collaboration with the University of the South Pacific.

Last but not least, this intergovernmental expert meeting represents another effort by UNCTAD intended to improve the understanding of SIDS transport and trade-logistics related challenges and to consider effective ways forward. To this end, the meeting also brings together a number of international organizations and development partners to share their insights and inform expert delegates about relevant work carried under the auspices of their respective organizations.

With these remarks, I would like to thank you for your attention and wish you constructive and forward looking discussions and deliberations. We look forward to your active participation and engagement for these various efforts to bear fruit and help make a difference.