

**Trade and Development Board
Working Party on the Medium-term Plan
and the Programme Budget**

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Progress report on the implementation of recommendations by the independent external evaluation of the courses on key issues on the international economic agenda

Note by the UNCTAD secretariat

Executive summary

At its forty-seventh session, in September 2006, the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget noted with satisfaction the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the independent external evaluation of the courses on key issues on the international economic agenda, encouraged the secretariat to continue its efforts to make further progress in this regard and requested it to report on the progress made to the next session of the Working Party on technical cooperation.

This note reports on the implementation of recommendations between October 2006 and July 2007. 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 achieved with regard to the particular thematic group of recommendations. More detailed information about the delivery of regional courses, as well as about short courses for Geneva-based diplomats, can be found in the annexes.

Introduction

1. At its forty-fifth session, in September 2005, the Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget considered an in-depth evaluation of the training courses on key issues on the international economic agenda. The secretariat reported on the implementation of these recommendations at the forty-seventh session of the Working Party, which noted with satisfaction the progress made in the implementation of the recommendations of the in-depth evaluation, encouraged the secretariat to continue its efforts to make further progress in their implementation and requested it to report on the progress made to the next session of the Working Party on technical cooperation.

2. The present report was prepared in response to this request. For ease of reference, the 22 recommendations put forward in the in-depth evaluation are reported on in thematic groups.

I. Funding for and delivery of the training courses

Recommendation 22

3. Both the evaluation report and the Working Party called for predictable funding for the courses to make it possible to plan and schedule them over a two-year period. In the biennium 2006–2007, the core funding for the courses was provided under the regular programme of technical cooperation (section 22). This covered the cost of participants' stay at the course venue, travel expenses for participants from least developed countries and lower-income countries, the cost of conference facilities, and travel expenses for some staff and resource persons. Travel expenses for other resource persons were paid for by divisions of UNCTAD.

4. The secretariat drew up the plans for six courses to be held during the biennium. Five courses have so far taken place, at the invitation of host-country Governments:

- (a) Course for Western Asian countries, 26 June–14 July 2006, Beirut, Lebanon;
- (b) Course for countries with economies in transition, 18 September–6 October 2006, Belgrade, Serbia;
- (c) Course for Asian/Pacific countries, 13 November–1 December 2006, Bangkok, Thailand;
- (d) Course for African countries, 4–22 February 2007, Cairo, Egypt;
- (e) Course for countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, 18 June–6 July 2007, Lima, Peru.

5. The courses met with considerable interest and the number of candidates nominated for the last three sessions, in Bangkok, Cairo and Lima, far exceeded the number of places available. There were 203 applications to attend the five courses: 119 candidates were selected, and 110 participants from 70 countries actually attended (a more detailed breakdown of the participation in the regional courses organized so far can be found in annex 1).

6. In the case of the Cairo course, there was an overwhelming response from African countries to the call for participation: there were 85 applications for the 27 places on offer. This led the Advisory Body and the Secretary-General to propose holding the same course again. This repeated course, which will conclude the series of regional training courses for the current biennium, is scheduled to take place in Dakar, Senegal, from 22 October to 9 November 2007.

7. Several countries have already expressed an interest in hosting the upcoming series of courses in the biennium 2008–2009. The funding for these courses is expected to be provided from the same sources as in the current biennium, subject to the approval of the General Assembly in December 2007.

II. Course content

Recommendations 2, 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15 and 21

8. As recommended by the evaluators, the duration of the course was extended to three weeks (recommendation 12), and one entire week of the course was dedicated to issues related to trade and the World Trade Organization (WTO), including a

simulation exercise at the end of the week (recommendation 13). Trade and poverty issues were integrated in the course content, in particular in the course for African countries (recommendation 7).

9. A special effort was made to ensure that presentations, data and case studies reflected regional and local experience and were an integral part of the course (recommendations 3 and 15). Regional experiences were presented by 19 resource persons from United Nations regional commissions. Academics from member universities of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute also presented national and regional experiences and case studies. The preparatory missions organized prior to each course were useful in identifying qualified national experts, and 20 such experts enriched the course with their accounts of local experiences. Partnering at the regional and local levels has thus become an inherent feature of the implementation of the courses (recommendation 21).

10. To ensure coherence between regional and local inputs and UNCTAD's presentations, all UNCTAD presenters were in contact with and consulted with the proposed regional and national speakers before the programme for the relevant session was formulated (recommendation 2). Additionally, they met with regional and local experts at the course venue before the session to fine-tune their interventions for maximum coherence. Hence, from the stage of conception, each course was tailored to the region concerned and addressed topics of particular relevance to participants from the region.

11. The coherence of the courses as a whole (recommendation 6) was ensured by organizing meetings for the UNCTAD presenters at which the focus and orientation of the course and its components were discussed and clarified. Additionally, a special brainstorming session of UNCTAD staff involved in preparing and delivering the courses was organized in December 2006.

12. In order to make the course more interactive and increase the possibility of active learning, particular attention was paid to the use of case studies, discussions and exercises (recommendation 14). For instance, in some modules, one session per day, usually the concluding one, was devoted to a group discussion or debate on a particular issue related to the development aspects of the presentations. In other sessions, participants were requested to work in groups on the analysis of case studies and report back to the other participants with their findings. In other cases, they reviewed country submissions to the WTO negotiations and worked on enhancing proposals for the negotiations. A simulation exercise on national consultations on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) (tourism services) was also carried out at the end of the course. Participants were divided into groups representing various national stakeholders (government ministries and agencies, the private sector, the local community, non-governmental organizations, etc.) and had to negotiate and agree on a national position for their country on the WTO negotiations on this issue. Finally, participants were requested to bring to the course information on issues faced by their countries in the area relating to the topic of the paper submitted with their application for the course. This information was discussed with other participants and experts. This approach was particularly successful in providing an opportunity for collective problem-solving and for sharing experiences and best practices.

13. With regard to the potential use of distance-learning techniques to ensure that participants were uniformly well-prepared for the course (recommendation 8), the

secretariat developed a new website on which participants had easy access to carefully structured course materials. In order to enable participants to find their way through this pre-course material and to focus on the basic knowledge required for the course, items on the reading list were classified into two categories: suggested reading, limited to the essentials needed to follow the course; and further reading, providing additional information for those wanting more details on a particular topic. In order to further prepare the participants for the course, the secretariat has begun to develop “basic knowledge” teaching aids to be made available on the website. This work is most advanced in the field of teaching support and the glossary on trade and transport facilitation, which should be completed in time for the next course for African countries.

14. Simultaneous interpretation was provided for the courses for countries in Africa (into French) and Latin America and the Caribbean (into Spanish) (recommendation 9). Training materials and background reading were provided in all the official languages of the United Nations.

III. Course impact

Recommendations 1, 10, 11, 16, 17, 18, 19 and 20

15. The secretariat devoted increased attention to identifying ways to increase the impact of the course.

16. First, the selection of candidates was treated as an important factor in maximizing the impact of the course. An effort was therefore made to identify the candidates who would derive the maximum possible benefit from the course (recommendation 1). In addition, the courses were marketed over a broader range of channels to reach a wider and more varied audience of potential participants. These channels included former participants, contacts in ministries, offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in beneficiary countries, and the network of members and partners of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute.

17. Second, efforts were made to build up sustainable local capacity to conduct training and research in trade and development topics, based on or inspired by the course. A special effort was made to secure the participation of academia in the course (recommendation 3). Accordingly, 18 academics (out of a total of 110 participants), mostly associated with the Virtual Institute, attended the courses. This mixed audience of policymakers and academics was highly appreciated by participants due to the opportunities it provided for interaction and improved mutual understanding. It thus constituted an initial contribution to efforts to encourage and facilitate home-grown research and its use in policymaking (recommendation 19), an objective pursued by the UNCTAD Virtual Institute through its professional development workshops for university teachers and researchers from developing countries. Such workshops pay special attention to the link between research and teaching, on the one hand, and the needs of policymakers and other stakeholders representing the “clients” of the academic community, on the other. The September 2006 workshop on methods and tools for trade and trade policy analysis, jointly organized by UNCTAD, WTO and the International Trade Centre (ITC), devoted a special session to a discussion on research questions of relevance to policymakers and on ways to present the conclusions of research to policymakers. The workshop adopted a series of recommendations in this regard. Another workshop, on trade and

poverty, will be organized in Dar-es-Salaam from 19 to 23 November 2007, in a cooperative effort by the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes and the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities.

18. The Virtual Institute has also been instrumental in fostering partnerships with universities from developing countries (recommendation 20). Two universities joined the institute after attending one of the courses on key international economic issues – one university from a host country (Cairo University, Egypt) and one whose representative had attended the course (Belarus State Economic University). To date, the Virtual Institute has 21 core and 11 affiliated university members that have access to its teaching and research resources and services.

19. Third, in order to capitalize on the experience of the regional delivery of courses and following a request from member States, as well as one of the recommendations in the evaluation report (recommendation 18), in February 2007 the secretariat launched a series of short courses for Geneva-based diplomats on selected trade and development issues. Six such courses have so far been organized and have been attended by 93 diplomats from 61 Geneva-based missions. Three more are planned for the autumn of 2007. In evaluation questionnaires (returned so far by 34 per cent of participants) and personal conversations, the participants invariably stated that the courses had raised their awareness of trade topics and an overwhelming majority of them had found the courses directly useful in their work (more detailed information about the short courses can be found in annex 2).

20. Fourth, in all courses, the secretariat took the opportunity to raise awareness of the possibilities for further technical cooperation with UNCTAD (recommendation 17). This was done in the presentations of different course topics or through dedicated presentations of UNCTAD's technical cooperation activities. Additionally, wherever possible, UNCTAD resource persons held meetings with local UNDP officers to present UNCTAD's work and explore opportunities for technical cooperation. A comprehensive memorandum of understanding detailing areas of technical cooperation to be provided by UNCTAD to Peru was signed by the Government of Peru, UNCTAD and the UNDP office in Peru while the regional course was being held in Lima. Some participants requested specific assistance for their countries, for instance, in developing an investment promotion agency or in the WTO accession negotiations. A number of them also made direct contact with resource persons to ensure further follow-up to their queries and requests.

21. Fifth, to make sure that access to information and knowledge – and hence the impact of the course – is not limited to participation in the course, it is important to promote the exchange of information and follow-up events and to facilitate the creation of a network of participants after completion of the course (recommendation 16). The secretariat therefore sought feedback from course participants on the kind of follow-up and networking activities they thought would be useful in their work. With regard to UNCTAD, participants wished to be updated on its substantive work. Pending the development of an UNCTAD-wide mailing list and a system for the dissemination of hard copies of publications, possible synergies with the UNCTAD Virtual Institute were explored. The institute offers access to a virtual library of up-to-date trade-related documents from UNCTAD and the institute's partners and gives users the option of receiving automatic e-mail notifications whenever a new document is posted on the site in a category of interest

to the user. Course participants are now able to register for this service too. As far as the facilitation of networking among participants is concerned, the technical feature enabling group discussions and information-sharing is now available on the course website, and a database containing contact details for all former participants has been shared with all of them.

22. As pointed out in the evaluation report (recommendation 10), it is important to continuously evaluate the course with clearly-defined impact indicators. In addition to an ongoing evaluation of the programme aimed at continuously integrating feedback and suggestions into the programme for each course, formal evaluations are conducted both throughout and at the end of each course, and six months after the conclusion of each course. The end-of-course evaluations provide information about how participants felt about the content and delivery of the course. In the case of the five courses conducted so far during the biennium 2006–2007, participants were highly appreciative of the integrated approach to development taken by UNCTAD in designing a course that covered the financial system, international trade, investment, technology, trade logistics, entrepreneurship, etc. Trade officials pointed out that they had a better understanding of the design and implementation of national policies and international negotiations in these areas, as well as of the role played by central banks, government departments and other actors with an influence on policymaking. Academics were particularly pleased with the opportunities to learn from policymakers, and with the access to data, analysis and case studies and other exercises made available during the course, which they said had increased their understanding of the technical aspects of trade policy development and implementation.

23. In order to gauge the longer-term impact of the course, it is necessary to solicit feedback from participants once they have had the opportunity to use the knowledge and skills gained on the course in their workplace. This is why an evaluation is conducted six months after the end of each course. The main impact indicator used is the percentage of course participants who state that attendance at the course has been beneficial in their work. Information is also sought on the use of the knowledge acquired at the course, be it in the participants' own work (participation in decision-making, policy formulation, drafting of position papers, provision of advice, etc.) or in sharing the materials and knowledge with other colleagues. The responses to the questionnaire sent to participants on the Beirut 2006 course six months after the course ended are still being received by the secretariat. However, the 35 per cent of participants who have responded so far say that their knowledge of international economic issues has been enhanced by attending the course, and that the course content has been of direct relevance and benefit to their professional work. One academic from the University of Jordan, a member of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute, reported that he had been asked by his faculty to design a course on international trade policies based on the course programme. A systematic effort was made to ensure as high as possible a response to the questionnaires (recommendation 11): participants were regularly reminded, by e-mail, fax and telephone, of the importance of the questionnaire for gathering information about the course impact, and were requested to complete and return the questionnaire.

IV. 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 UNCTAD Deputy Secretary-General, directors and focal points, and was reflected in two recommendations in the external evaluation. Directors were encouraged to recognize the work and commitment of focal points and resource persons from individual divisions through the Performance Appraisal System. The UNCTAD Secretary-General expressed his desire to see the continued development of the course by dedicated staff members in the secretariat and commended the course organizers and resource persons for their coordinated efforts to make the courses a success.

Annex I

Summary of regional courses on key international economic issues

June 2006–July 2007

Venue	Date of course	Number of applications received	Number of candidates selected	Number of participants attending
Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia, Beirut, Lebanon (for Western Asia)	26 June–14 July 2006	21	18	17 ^a
Ministry for International Economic Relations, Belgrade, Serbia (for countries with economies in transition)	18 September–6 October 2006	21	19	17 ^b
International Institute for Trade and Development, Bangkok, Thailand (for Asia and the Pacific)	13 November–1 December 2006	38	29	27 ^c
Institute for Diplomatic Studies, Cairo, Egypt (for African countries)	2–22 February 2007	85	27	27
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Lima, Peru (for Latin America and the Caribbean)	18 June–6 July 2007	38	27	22 ^d

^a Candidate from Bahrain withdrew from the course due to last-minute professional assignment.

^b Candidate from Slovenia withdrew due to last-minute professional assignment. UNCTAD met the travel expenses for the candidate from Tajikistan who left early because of language problems

^c One of the two candidates from the Islamic Republic of Iran withdrew due to a death in the family. The participant from the Federated States of Micronesia withdrew his application at the last minute before the start of the course. UNCTAD was to have paid this participant's travel expenses

^d Five candidates withdrew: those from Bolivia, Jamaica, Guatemala, Peru and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, mostly on account of last-minute professional assignments. UNCTAD was to have paid the travel expenses of the candidates from Bolivia and Guatemala.

Annex 2

Summary of short courses for Geneva-based permanent missions

February–July 2007

1. During the period under review, the secretariat organized a series of regular (one per month) half-day courses for delegates from the permanent missions, with contributions from all divisions of UNCTAD. Interpretation into French was provided as from the third course.

2. The following six topics were covered:

- “Managing global integration and interdependence” (26 February 2007), delivered by the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies
- “Building productive capacities in LDCs as a means to reduce poverty” (26 March 2007), delivered by the Division for Africa, Least Developed Countries and Special Programmes
- “Promoting growth and development through information and communication technologies” (23 April 2007), delivered by the Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency
- “Enhancing competitiveness through trade and transport facilitation” (29 May 2007), delivered by the Division for Services Infrastructure for Development and Trade Efficiency
- “Attracting FDI through international investment agreements” (25 June 2007), delivered by the Division on Investment, Technology and Enterprise Development
- “The interface between competition policy, trade, investment and development” (23 July 2007), delivered by the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities

3. The courses were attended by a total of 93 delegates, including seven ambassadors. Some 50 per cent of delegates attended one course in the area of their main interest, and another 21 per cent attended two courses. The remaining 29 per cent followed three or more courses, including two participants (from Bangladesh and Cameroon) who completed the entire series.

4. Course participants represented the permanent missions of 61 member States, including 18 least developed countries. The highest number of participants came from missions of African countries (34 participants, including five ambassadors, representing 18 countries) and Asian countries (23 participants, including one ambassador, representing 13 countries). The course was also attended by representatives of countries from the Latin American and Caribbean region (14 participants, representing 11 countries), countries with economies in transition (10 participants, representing 10 countries) and Arab countries (9 participants, including one ambassador, representing 7 countries). Three representatives of developed-country missions also attended the courses.

5. Attendance was highest at the first course, on “Global integration and interdependence”, which attracted 52 participants. Participation in the remaining courses ranged between 25 and 32 delegates.

6. So as to facilitate access to information and course material, the secretariat devoted a special section of the website of the courses on key international economic issues to the short courses for Geneva-based permanent missions. Course participants and those who were interested in a particular topic but could not attend the course could access and download all the documentation distributed at the course, biographical information on presenters and lists of participants. CD-ROMs with materials for each course were also produced and made available to delegates.

7. In the 32 questionnaires returned by participants so far, 88 per cent of delegates stated that the courses had raised their awareness of trade topics and had been useful in their work. Two comments sum up the response: “Courses were very useful, well organized and professionally presented. Thank you!”; and “Les sujets abordés ont été pertinents, c’est un choix très intéressant et très utile.” The remaining 12 per cent of delegates found the courses had raised their awareness of trade topics even though they had not directly contributed to their work.

8. Participants also made useful suggestions with regard to the organization of the course, as well as topics that they would wish to see covered in future courses. They would like the courses to include, for example, practical country experiences and best practices, case studies, analysis of agreements with a focus on their strengths and weaknesses, and presentations of competing views. Proposals for the topics of future courses included: regional integration; intellectual property and development; globalization, trade and environment (including trade in environmentally friendly products); energy services; Aid for Trade; problems of landlocked countries; South–South cooperation; and best practices in attracting foreign direct investment.

9. In response to these suggestions, the secretariat reflected two of the themes in the programme of short courses for the remainder of the year. The programme for September–November 2007 will thus offer the following courses:

- “Development dimensions of intellectual property rights” (21 September 2007), to be delivered by the Division on Investment, Technology and Enterprise Development
- “How to make debt safer” (30 October 2007), to be delivered by the Division on Globalization and Development Strategies
- “The development interface between the multilateral trading system and regional trade agreements” (23 November 2007), delivered by the Division on International Trade in Goods and Services, and Commodities