

**Multi-Agency Support Team (MAST) Meeting on Non-Tariff Measures
(NTMs) Classification**

5-6 October 2016, UNCTAD

The Secretary General of UNCTAD, Dr. Mukhisa Kituyi opened the plenary session noting the increasing importance of non-tariff measures. Very importantly NTMs have greater impact on smaller and vulnerable countries. Recent research, for example, has shown that LDCs lose an additional \$23 billion of exports per year beyond the challenges that all countries face due to their specific difficulties to comply with NTMs.

With the rising importance of NTMs, the significance of availability of comprehensive, transparent, consistent and comparable information on NTMs globally was stressed by the panelists. In this regard, the work of the Multi Agency Support Team (MAST) on the development of a common language of NTMs, as well as the official NTMs data collection work coordinated by UNCTAD were pointed out to be of utmost importance. It was noted that having a common “language” of NTMs in order to increase transparency and understanding of trade control measures and regulations would in its turn foster policies to promote sustainable development, as there is a direct linkage between NTMs and the SDGs.

UNCTAD presented its database of NTMs covering more than 80% of world trade. It was noted that NTMs data collection has been finalized for 57 countries with high quality, the target being ensuring comprehensiveness of NTMs data, comparability of data across countries and accessibility of data. Data collected is disseminated through various tools, e.g. TRAINS through I-TIP.

It was stressed by the panelists, that in many cases, having legitimate objectives, NTMs are extremely important policy measures. The danger arises when these measures (to protect health, environment etc.) are designed without consideration of their impact on trade, which then might create unnecessary obstacles to trade. For example, it was noted that the EU has a new approach, whereby the impact of every single measure

including on trade is considered while designing the measure, by trade impact assessment process.

Large scale surveys of importers and exporters conducted by ITC was pointed out. It was stressed that the size of companies determine the level of challenges posed by burdensome NTMs, with small and medium size firms facing more difficulties in complying with the requirements of NTMs.

Accordingly, the importance of international standards as the basis for domestic regulations, harmonization and convergence of requirements to the extent possible was emphasized.

It was noted that there is increasing South-South contingent protection. UNCTAD database on NTMs shows that NTMs have increased in ASEAN. However, measuring the impacts of NTMs was said to be very challenging, and the large number of registered NTMs do not necessarily show the restrictiveness, but can also be an indicator of transparency.

It was stated that some years ago there was very limited availability of data on NTMs, not allowing for econometric analysis on the impact of NTMs. This has changed and now it can be said that we have all the technical capabilities to conduct data analysis. The PRONTO project, a collaborative research project on regulatory barriers to trade supported by the EC, tries to integrate NTMs from a number of sources and to assess the socio-economic effects of NTMs.

The Secretary-General of UNCTAD and the panelists converged on the view that NTMs have to be designed in such a way to have the least possible negative impact on trade. It was reiterated by the panelists that the work of MAST on the development of the taxonomy of NTMs and the global data collection of NTMs coordinated by UNCTAD is the foundation for international organizations, researchers, and policy makers to better understand, analyze and design NTMs.

The plenary session was followed by the sessions on different Working Groups that are devoted to different Chapters in the NTMs Classification.