

TRADE POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT MEETING

6-8 October 2015, Geneva, Switzerland
Room XXIV, Palais des Nations

Concept Note

Introduction

1. The United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) will organize its Trade Policy and Sustainable Development Forum for developing countries, particularly for African countries, from 6 to 8 October 2015 at the Palais des Nations in Geneva, Switzerland. It will bring together senior trade and development policymakers, trade negotiators, experts, academia and other stakeholders to examine the role of trade policy in reaping developmental benefits from trade and improving the welfare for the population in the post-2015 development context.

Background

2. The Forum will come at a particularly opportune moment for the international trade and development community. The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda will be held from 25 to 27 September 2015, in New York. This will set an important context in which the preparations for the Tenth World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC10), 15-18 December, Nairobi, Kenya, will start and accelerate in earnest. Within the United Nations system, UNCTAD serving as the focal point for the integrated treatment of trade and development, and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development will, from 14 to 18 March 2016, hold its 14th Quadrennial Conference (UNCTAD XIV), in Lima, Peru, which will provide an excellent opportunity to further forge international consensus on the contribution of trade to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

3. International trade, and by implication trade policy, has a central role in the means required to revitalize a global partnership for sustainable development, based on strengthened global solidarity. It is expected to act as a powerful enabler of the desired transformative shifts to attain the emerging 17 goals and 169 targets under the SDGs, enhancing their interlinkages and integrated nature, and the new universal agenda for development. Goal 17 on the means of implementation explicitly confirms the role of trade, through targets to promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the WTO; to promote exports from developing countries, in particular LDCs; and to implement duty-free, quota-free (DFQF) market access for least-developed countries (LDCs). Other goals and targets implicitly recognise the contribution of international and regional trade, in particular goal 1 on ending poverty; goal 2 on achieving food security and eliminating all forms of export subsidies that cause agricultural trade distortions; goal 3 on providing access to essential medicines in accordance with the Doha Declaration on TRIPS and public health; goal 4 on universal access to energy; goal 8 on higher levels of productivity through diversification, technological upgrading and innovation, and also on increasing Aid for Trade support for developing countries; goal 9 on

developing regional and trans-border infrastructure and increasing access to financial services; goal 10 on implementing special and differential treatment (SDT) for developing countries and by reducing transaction costs of remittances; and goal 14 in prohibiting fisheries subsidies to conserve and sustainably use the oceans. Also of relevance to trade are those goals and targets related to the promotion of responsive and accountable global governance architecture. The formulation of trade policy in the post 2015 period must integrate these global and local concerns to support developing countries' more effective and quality integration into the global economy and trading systems.

4. The multifaceted contribution of trade to various SDGs requires policies supporting a coherent interface between trade and related public policies, including development, regional integration, employment, health, infrastructure development, energy, water, education, gender, transport, finance, technology, environment and migration. Mitigating the risks for the poor through trade adjustment mechanisms is important. It is fundamental that trade policy, including multilateral and regional negotiations, be made coherent with those public policies and integrated into a coherent development policy framework.

5. UNCTAD implements a long-standing work programme on trade policy formulation and implementation, and trade negotiations, to support developing countries' efforts in maximizing the contribution of trade to development. Under UN Development Account projects¹, UNCTAD assists developing countries to develop coherent and best-fit national trade policy frameworks (TPFs) that are geared towards meeting broader development goals and targets as set out under the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the emerging SDGs, with greater emphasis on the imperative of enhancing trade and productive capacities and creating productive employment. These TPFs entail undertaking in-depth assessment of countries' trade performance, existing trade and related policies and their engagement in the international trading system. TPFs aim at identifying economic, policy and institutional constraints facing the countries in drawing effective benefits from trade and meeting the SDGs' targets, and providing a set of policy recommendations to address these constraints to better take advantage of trade and development opportunities within a coherent development-oriented trade policy framework towards a desired structural transformation, economic resilience and economic diversification.

6. Developing countries assisted to date on TPFs include Algeria, Angola, Botswana, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Namibia, Panama, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Tunisia and Zambia. Experiences gained and lessons learned from some of these TPFs will be discussed at this Forum, together with other countries' experiences in national trade policy formulation and implementation.

Objectives

7. Against this backdrop, the objectives of the Forum are the following:

¹ "Capacity-building for the formulation and implementation of MDG-oriented trade policies in developing countries contributing to accelerating achievement of MDGs in the context of multiple and interrelated development challenges" and "Addressing the impact of trade and trade agreements on employment in developing countries"

- To share experiences and lessons learned from UNCTAD's TPFs, other country experiences, and related work of other organizations to identify best practices;
- To dialogue on ways that would ensure that trade policies be made more effective, coherent, smart and useful for national development objectives and strategies, including employment creation;
- To discuss ways in which trade policies will effectively contribute to achieving the goals and targets under the SDGs and post 2015 development agenda, and other goals set by Governments, and;
- To reflect upon the interaction between national and international trade policy formulation and implementation at regional and multilateral levels, with a particular focus on the preparation for WTO's MC10 and the Doha Round, as well as regional integration processes, particularly in Africa.

Participants

8. Participants would include senior trade policy makers, trade negotiators and other stakeholders from developing countries as well as international organizations, international experts and development partners dealing with trade policy issues.

Dates and venue

9. The meeting will take place from 6 to 8 October 2015 at the room XXIV of the Palais des Nations, Geneva, Switzerland.