

UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT

**UNCTAD Virtual Institute
on Trade and Development
Progress report**

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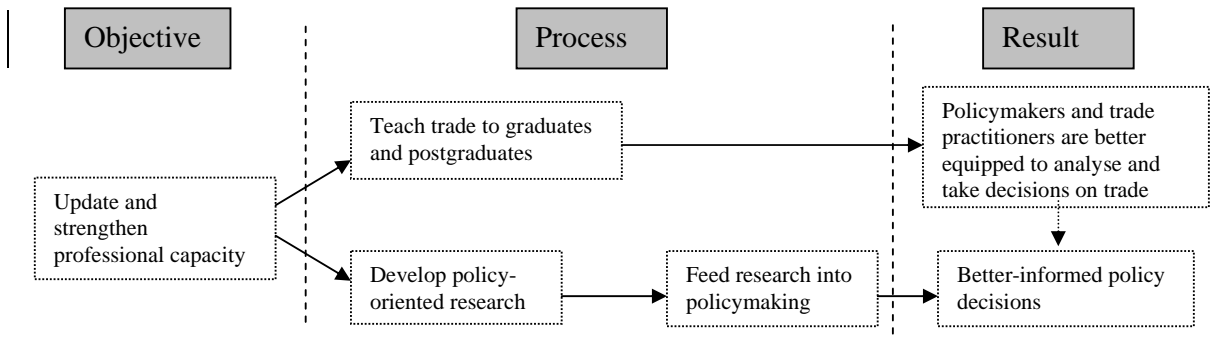
UNITED NATIONS

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1. INTRODUCTION

Between the annual meeting of its university members in July 2005 and the upcoming meeting in October 2006, the UNCTAD Virtual Institute (Vi) continued to implement its mission. Briefly stated, this is to work with (a network of) universities, particularly in developing countries, to enhance their capacity to conduct teaching and research in the area of trade and development, which responds to the needs of policymakers and other relevant stakeholders in their countries. The logic and stages of the implementation of this mission are schematically reflected in the chart below.



In the first place, the Vi focused on personalized support to its current university (institutional) members and the implementation of activities agreed with them at the annual meeting in 2005. Five areas were then identified for cooperation among the members, namely (a) development and exchange of teaching materials; (b) research, peer review and publication; (c) exchange of professors and students; (d) strengthening of the content and use of the Vi website; and (e) mutual advice and support.

Additionally, with a view to reaching out to a larger audience, a new category of members, so-called associate (individual) members, was introduced, primarily encompassing teachers or researchers from universities that, as institutions, are not members of the Virtual Institute. Several services have been developed, mostly using the Vi website, that target this specific audience.

The underlying intention was to build a customizable set of services and activities from which both categories of members can choose so that they participate in those which best meet their needs, provided that funding required for their implementation is available. This approach was adopted because of the wide diversity of both university and associate members and their needs, which cannot be met by using a "one-size-fits-all" approach.

The Vi has therefore developed the following set of services and activities:

1. Online library of trade documents
2. Online forum
3. Vi teaching materials
4. Professional development and networking workshops
5. Study tours to Geneva-based international organizations
6. Vi fellowships
7. Curricula advice and support to course delivery
8. Research
9. Exchanges among members
10. Vi newsletter

Since the inherent role of the Virtual Institute team in Geneva is to conceive, catalyse and facilitate the activities and services of the network, it is important to underline here that the delivery of many Vi services is only possible with contributions from, and in cooperation with, Vi university members, other UNCTAD divisions and programmes and Vi partners in other international organizations, and in a number of instances, donor support. Such support and cooperation are acknowledged in each specific case in the text of the report below.

Among international organizations, the current Vi partners are the World Trade Organization, the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (in particular their research network ARTNeT), the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, and the South Centre. Additional partners include the World Health Organization, the International Labour Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization, all of which have contributed to specific Vi activities, in particular study tours for students of post-graduate programmes at Vi member universities.

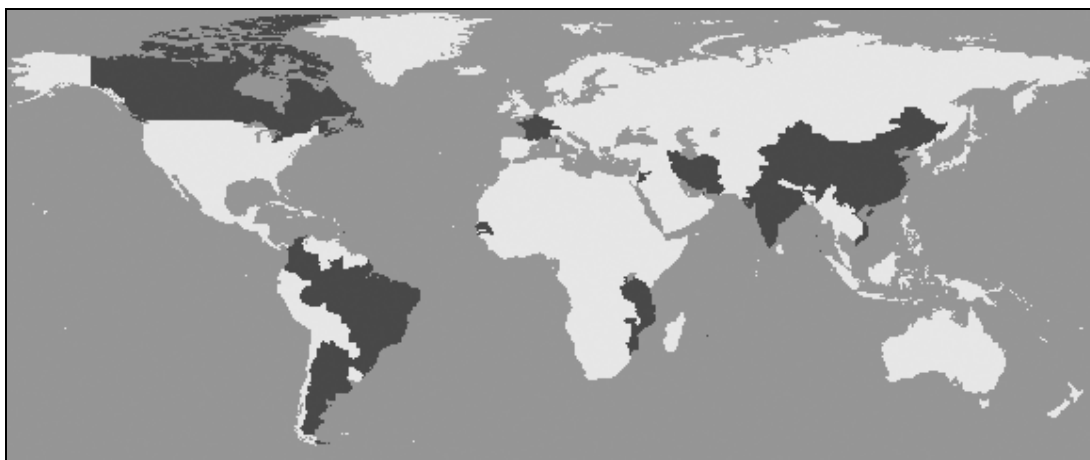
During the period under review, the programme benefited from financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), backing from the Governments of Japan and Finland for specific Virtual Institute activities, and in kind contribution of staff from the Carlo Schmid Foundation in Germany. Two Vi activities were also partly sponsored by the UNCTAD's Special Programme for Least Developed, Landlocked and Island Countries. Most recently, the Virtual Institute received a grant from the United Nations Development Fund that will support some of its projects and activities in the coming two years.

2. MEMBERSHIP

With regard to university membership, the strategy over the period under review was to increase the number of new members only moderately, favouring the consolidation of the current membership and the building of a broader base of individuals participating in the Vi project within each university. The underlying reason for this was the wish to provide high-quality personalized support to these members within the limited resources available.

Consequently, the number of university members increased only moderately, from 12 in July 2005¹ to 15 in September 2006. Among the new members are the Foreign Trade University, Hanoi, Vietnam; the EAFIT University, Medellín, Colombia; and the Eduardo Mondlane University, Maputo, Mozambique. At the same time, it has been possible to involve a higher number of staff and students in Vi activities, following the first Vi annual meeting in July 2005, as well as in connection with Vi professional development workshops and study tours. Currently, a number of staff are registered on the site and have direct access to Vi resources and services: nine from Senegal, six from Tanzania, five from Mauritius, and four from Viet Nam and Canada each. Additionally, 18 Masters students from the University of the West Indies and 25 students (plus the five junior lecturers, who are at the same time completing the Masters studies) from the University of Dar-es-Salaam can benefit from Vi online services.

¹ These 12 members include the Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO), Buenos Aires, Argentina; University of Campinas, Brazil; Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada; University of International Business and Economics, Beijing, China; Université Pierre-Mendès-France, Grenoble, France; Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India; School of International Relations, Tehran, Iran; University of Jordan; University of Mauritius; Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal; University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania; and the University of the West Indies.



Global distribution of Vi member universities, including the Vi team in Switzerland

Additionally, in order to increase the outreach and potential impact of its activities in a non-resource-intensive manner, the Vi introduced the category of associate membership. A promotional campaign targeting a wider academic audience was organized in autumn 2006 to attract such members. The opportunity of associate membership was also publicized at the professional development workshops organized by the Vi and in its contacts with academia. Consequently, as of 1 September 2006, the Virtual Institute had 152 associate members from 64 countries (for details see Annex 2), largely drawn from universities and research institutes. Associate members receive a set of standardized services, such as (a) access to the Vi library and related e-mail alerts; (b) access to Vi web forums; and (c) the quarterly Vi newsletter. They are also informed about professional development opportunities organized by the Vi or its partners which might be of interest to them.

3. SERVICES

The following overview presents the progress achieved in the implementation of the Vi's different services. In addition, Annex 1 lists Vi university members and the services and activities that took place with them during the period under review. Annex 2 then details all countries whose academics have been involved in Vi activities, be it as university members, associate members or participants in Vi events.

3.1 Online library of trade documents

The online library is part of the new website of the Virtual Institute (<http://vi.unctad.org>) developed using public domain software (Free and Open Source Software) thanks to the funding provided by the Canadian International Development Agency. Technically speaking, the library consists of a relational database storing trade documents, a search engine allowing for search by title, category and key words, browsing by thematic category, as well as an e-mail alert system automatically advising users whenever a new document or information has been posted in the category to which they have subscribed.



The Vi makes available reports and documents from UNCTAD, WTO, UNECA, UNESCAP and the South Centre.

The library contains a selection of documents on trade and development issues (research reports, discussion papers, chapters of books, flagship reports, presentations, etc.) of potential interest to an academic audience. To facilitate the browsing of resources, each document record has a corresponding description that not only shows the information about the content of the document but also suggests in what type of courses it could be used and how. For ease of search, the documents are classified into categories, whose number currently stands at 18². New categories are being added whenever there are a sufficient number of documents on a specific new topic. One document can be listed in several categories, provided that it touches on several subject areas.

At present, the library mainly contains documents produced by UNCTAD and Vi members. The Vi has made a special effort to compile sets of documents and presentations on topical issues dealt with at UNCTAD expert meetings, such as the contribution of corporations to development, non-tariff barriers or trade facilitation, and make them available to an academic audience on the website and on CD-ROMs. At the same time, in order to provide the most informative selection of resources, the Vi has concluded agreements with WTO, UNESCAP, UNECA and the South Centre authorizing it to post substantive documents from these organizations on the Vi site. Some documents have already been uploaded and work is under way to systematically follow suitable resources that are being published by partners and make them available to the Vi audience.

The more than 400 resources that can currently be accessed through the Vi site are being used to support teaching by the members of the Virtual Institute, as testified to, for instance, by the two examples below:

"Most of the materials on the Vi website are used partially or fully in some relevant courses that we are currently teaching in the department: international economics (PhD level), international finance (PdD level), microeconomic competitiveness (PhD level, to be offered), international trade theory and policy (Master level), international economics (Bachelor level) and international finance (Bachelor level)."

(Talib Awad, University of Jordan, Vi university member)

"J'ai pu accéder à la bibliothèque virtuelle...et me suis rendu compte qu'elle est extrêmement riche et qu'elle nous sera utile pour nos programmes de formation."

(Birahim Bouna Niang, Université Cheikh Anta Diop, Dakar, Senegal, Vi university member)

3.2 Online forum

Another service available on the Virtual Institute website is the online discussion forum that is currently open to staff and students of Vi university members, as well all associate members. This new feature has so far been used twice on a trial basis. The first case in February 2006 was a discussion around the question "Can the current system of international investment rules balance the development interests of host countries and, at the same time, sufficiently protect the rights of foreign investors?" This discussion was triggered by the interest of participants in the Vi professional development workshop on International Investment Agreements. A second trial in May 2006 on "Partnership is as important as ownership in the development of Africa's commodity sector" took place as a follow-up to a course on the economics of commodity production and markets that UNCTAD organized for students of the Professional Masters in International Trade at the University of Dar-es-Salaam. These discussions were held in cooperation with colleagues from the UNCTAD International Investment Agreements Programme and the Commodities Branch, respectively.

² At the time of writing of this report, the categories were as follows: commodities, competitiveness, development strategies, ICT for development, international trade, international economic law, investment, multilateral trading system, regional trade agreements, science and technology, statistics, the financial system, trade data and trade policy analysis, trade facilitation, trade negotiations, trade-related capacity-building, and Virtual Institute meeting 2005.

3.3 Vi teaching materials

In addition to the provision of documents in their original form to a wide academic audience through the Vi online library, several materials specifically tailored for the university context (consisting essentially of a handbook, exercises, simulation activities, presentations, research questions and reference readings) have also been developed or are under development as an exclusive service for Vi university members³. Topics have been chosen in consultation with Vi university members to respond to their priority needs, and so far cover the areas described below. Evidence shows that the actual use and the impact of materials are much higher if supported by professional development workshops that allow the presentation and discussion of the material, as well as exploring how it could be delivered and in which courses.

Competitiveness and development

This material is intended for use by university teachers in augmenting existing graduate courses on competitiveness or helping to structure planned courses. The material consists of four modules covering the issue of international competitiveness, its definition and history; different theoretical models; the measurement and indicators of competitiveness; and the determinants of competitiveness. The modular character of the material allows for flexible and independent use, and the focus on policy aspects means that it is also accessible to students without a strong econometrics background. The material further includes a simulation exercise that affords students an opportunity to deepen, apply and test their knowledge of competitiveness as well as to develop their negotiating, teamwork and decision-making skills. Along with a scheme of work, which provides learning objectives and advice for teachers, the material includes an activity book containing exercises, annotated readings and references, topics for debate and questions for discussion. A recent UNCTAD study on outsourcing and development is also part of the material.

Economic and legal aspects of international investment agreements

Funded by the Government of Japan and developed in cooperation between the Vi and the UNCTAD International Investment Agreements (IIAs) Programme, the material can be used as a stand-alone resource on foreign direct investment and investment agreements or to complement existing courses at the postgraduate level. It is broken into two parts: the first consists of two modules that provide background information on the economic aspects of FDI, while the second comprises two modules focusing more specifically on its legal aspects, in particular IIAs. Throughout the material, there are comprehension and class discussion questions relating to the themes described in the "table of contents". There are also practical exercises, case studies, glossaries and lists of relevant readings. The material was piloted at a professional development workshop for Asian developing countries and has therefore been enriched by a series of interesting PowerPoint presentations used by the workshop facilitators.

The material received a great deal of positive feedback and is being used by a number of developing country and LDC universities, as documented by the examples below.

³ However, individual materials can also be made available to associate members from academia upon request and are shared with the academicians who participate in Vi professional development workshops on specific topics.

"A few weeks back, I had to help some students with investment law for a moot that was being held in India. The mooters were not following my subject so I had to give them a crash course in investment law! I used the manual, and they even took it to India with them. They found it extremely useful. My own students also used module 3 for their further study, as there are some cases that they did not know about until they read it too. So thank you once again - I feel I am a better teacher now that I can help out my students like this."

(Naazima Kamardeen, University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, associate member of the Vi and participant in a Vi professional development workshop on international investment agreements)

I will teach a new course on the economics of international investment in our undergraduate programme in economics and am preparing a handbook for students on this topic. Therefore, the material, papers and presentations will be a great support for my handbook.

(Vadsana Chanthanasinh, Head of the International Economic Unit at the National University of Lao, Lao PDR, and participant in a Vi professional development workshop on international investment agreements)

"I have incorporated some issues of economic and legal aspects of FDI in my MBA course on corporate tax planning in the case of multinational tax planning. Vi teaching materials helped me a lot."

(Swapan K. Bala, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh, associate member of the Vi and participant in a Vi professional development workshop on international investment agreements)

"I use the material quite extensively in the first module of my advanced course on TNCs, technology transfer and R&D. I use the PowerPoint for actual teaching. The printed material I have received I have put in the departmental library."

(Manoj Pant, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India, Vi university member and a resource person for the Vi professional development workshop on international investment agreements)

Economics of commodities production and trade



Used as the substantive input for the Vi workshops in the United Republic of Tanzania and Senegal, this material was developed in cooperation with UNCTAD's Commodities Branch with funding provided by the Government of Japan. A French version has also been made available thanks to financial backing from the Government of Finland and the Canadian International Development Agency. The material comprises five teaching modules covering the framework for the analysis of commodities, their impact on growth and poverty reduction, the role of national policy and international cooperation, the international trading system and negotiations, market access and market entry conditions, and finally, international finance and risk management for developing countries. All of the modules include discussion questions and issues for research, as well as case studies of country experiences and exercises for students. The material is

complemented by a comprehensive bibliography with suggested further readings and a full glossary of terms and concepts used in the modules. Additionally, a simulation on the negotiation of an ECOWAS common external tariff can also be downloaded, and includes instructions, background information and data, as well as country background information. A set of exam questions and assignment issues were recently added to this material drawn from the delivery of the material on a course for Masters students at the University of Dar-es-Salaam.

Based on a first draft of January 2006, the course material was only completed in mid-2006 so it was not yet fully possible to use it in teaching. However, there has already been some experience with the draft version (see below) and there are plans to use it more extensively, including in the French-speaking African countries. At the University of Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, member of the Vi, the material already served as a manual/textbook for a course on the economics of commodity production and markets that is part of a professional Masters in International Trade programme. Another Vi member university in Dakar also plans to use it in a similar way for the course that it intends to include in its Masters in Rural Economy, and a thematic seminar on the role of commodities in the process of economic and social development within its upcoming Masters in International Trade Policies and Negotiations.

"The training material has widened and deepened the scope of the teaching of business administration courses in both degree and postgraduate programmes, and improved the short-term training courses geared to private operators, policymakers, and staff from NGOs and other trade-advocating institutions. This is especially so with modules 3, 4 and 5, which were instrumental in spicing up and increasing the attractiveness of these short courses. We have received positive comments in this regard following integration of this training material into the preparation of these short-term training programmes. The beautiful part of this material/literature is that it is relevant and practical to current trade problems facing developing countries like Uganda, and the training information can easily be adapted to training with different background levels."

(Nichodemus Rudaheranwa, Makerere University, Uganda, associate member of the Vi and participant in the Vi professional development workshop on commodities)

"Last (academic) year I taught part of module 3 and module 1 to students of macroeconomics at BSc level. It was a bit hard for them to assimilate module 3 as they were not yet prepared for this. However, I was happy with their understanding of module 1. Module 1 and module 5 will be taught in the International Business Management at BSc level and International Business and Strategy at MSc level next year."

(Sawcut Rojid, University of Mauritius, Vi university member and participant in the Vi professional development workshop on commodities)

Other teaching materials

Following a request by its university members, the Vi also recently produced a teaching resource providing an **introduction to international trade negotiations skills and strategies**. It is intended as background material to give students an overview of the field, raise questions and promote discussion. The material consists of an overview of negotiation theory in the form of descriptive information on the main strategies and tactics used in negotiations. This document links to several other resources: a brief history of negotiations; papers on WTO and recent negotiations under the Doha Round; a paper on theoretical models of negotiations; a discussion paper on regional trade agreements (RTAs) and multilateralism; and a link to a Vi simulation of an issue related to the WTO agriculture negotiations. The intention is to complement this initial material by contributions and inputs from members, particularly those that refer to negotiation issues relevant to their countries.

Regional trade agreements (RTAs) have ranked very high on the priority list of most needed teaching materials produced by Vi university members after the first meeting of the network in July 2005. Members therefore undertook to contribute to the development of teaching materials on this issue. A group of volunteers under the leadership of the University of Grenoble, France, was set up and produced an outline of the desired material. Several other members contributed comments (for instance, Mauritius), developed fact sheets on regional/bilateral trade agreements concluded by their countries (Iran, Jordan, Senegal), or shared other materials (Argentina). These documents, as well as the comments and suggestions by Vi members, will serve as inputs for more comprehensive material on regional trade agreements that is currently being developed in cooperation with UNCTAD's Trade Negotiations Branch.

Following the conclusion of the Vi professional development workshop on **trade data and trade policy analysis** in September 2006 (see below), the Vi produced preliminary training material on the topic. The material consists of a CD-ROM containing presentations, readings, research questions, exercises, analytical tools with all necessary software "add-ins", as well as short films, links and policy recommendations arising from the workshop. The material is currently being developed into a full modularized handbook, which will be available in early 2007.

3.4 Professional development and networking workshops

In order to support the use of Vi teaching materials in developing country universities, and also to encourage research of the topics covered in these materials and networking within the academic community, the Vi conceptualized and organized professional development workshops for university teachers and researchers. Four such workshops were held during the period under review.



Participants in the workshop on trade and trade policy analysis discuss research methodologies.

Workshop on teaching and research of international investment agreements (Bangkok, Thailand, 28 November-2 December 2005)

The workshop, devised and delivered in collaboration with the UNCTAD International Investment Agreements programme, was financially supported by the Government of Japan and hosted by the International Institute for Trade and Development in Bangkok. In addition to the UNCTAD staff, a resource person from the Vi member university in India, Prof. Manoj Pant, contributed to the workshop delivery. An audience of 19 participants (including nine women) from universities and research institutes from 11 Asian countries, primarily LDCs (Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam) came to enhance their knowledge, teaching and research skills on the economic and legal aspects of investment, share their research in this area and discuss ways in which they could strengthen teaching and research on investment in their institutions. Several universities decided to use the materials to enrich their courses and make them more relevant (see section 3.3 above) and several participants also envisaged new research projects on investment, such as a study on BITs and DTTs in Bangladesh at the University of Dhaka, an article on FDI in Cambodia at the Cambodian Development Resource Institute, or briefs for policymakers on FDI issues at the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka.

In the view of all participants, the workshop substantially or significantly increased their knowledge in the legal area, and 68 per cent of them (the workshop was mainly attended by economists) made the same statement with regard to the economic aspects of IIAs. The participants specifically noted the innovative nature of the workshop in that it made links between economic and legal aspects of investment/IIAs, and

brought together persons with both a legal and economic background, enabling them to learn about and understand the perspective of the other side.

Participants in the workshop appreciated its focus on the special needs of university teachers and researchers. In the words of Naazima Kamardeen of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka, “I was very pleased with the workshop as it was the first for me that addressed the issue of teaching and was structured with this in mind. As a university teacher, this made the focus very appropriate for me.” Many, such as Khondaker Moazzem, from the Centre for Policy Dialogue of Bangladesh, expressed their satisfaction with the usefulness of the workshop: “It was a great opportunity to hear the in-depth overview and critical assessment on FDI and TNCs. The suggestions to young researchers made at the workshop will be guiding principles for future mode of actions.”

Workshops on teaching and research of commodities production and trade (Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania, January 2006; Dakar, Senegal, June 2006)

The Vi organized two workshops on commodities, in cooperation with the UNCTAD Commodities Branch and the Vi university members in African LDCs. The first workshop, financially supported by the Government of Japan and held in cooperation with the University of Dar-es-Salaam, was attended by 15 participants (including two women) from universities and research institutes of eight English-speaking African countries, mostly LDCs (Eritrea, Mauritius, Mozambique, Senegal, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Due to the success of the first workshop, another Vi university member, the University of Dakar, offered to host a similar event for French-speaking African countries in June 2006. The second workshop was mainly backed by the Government of Finland, with a smaller contribution for travel of three participants from the UNCTAD Special Programme for LDCs. Among the participants were 21 university teachers and researchers (including two women) from 10 French-speaking African countries, mostly LDCs (Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d’Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Mali, Niger, Central African Republic, Senegal, Togo). In addition to assisting with the organization of the workshops, the Vi member universities also contributed resource persons - Francis Matambalya from the University of Dar-es-Salaam, and Aly Mbaye from the University of Dakar.



A negotiations simulation exercise during the commodities workshop in Dar-es-Salaam

As with the previous workshop on investment, the objective was to enhance participants' knowledge and understanding of commodities production and trade and to provide them with opportunities to strengthen their skills to undertake research and teaching on commodities. An important element of the workshop was networking, in particular at the latter event, which was attended by a number of researchers interested in sharing knowledge and discussing possible collaborative projects.

In their feedback, 80 and 94 per cent of participants (for the Dar-es-Salaam and Dakar workshops, respectively) stated that the event had significantly increased their knowledge of commodity-related issues. They particularly appreciated the focus of the workshop on teaching and research and its tailoring to the needs of the academic audience – 66 and 94 per cent of them noted as very useful the presentations and discussion of research and research questions, as well as teaching of commodity issues. The inclusion of a simulation exercise on the negotiation of a common external tariff for ECOWAS was viewed as a particularly innovative teaching method that in many instances gave participants their first opportunity to gain an understanding of the international trade negotiation processes. A number of participants said that

after having gone through the simulation experience, they realized the need for thorough preparation for negotiations, including the prior formulation and substantiation of arguments, and the need for developing countries to train qualified negotiators capable of defending their national interests. After having been exposed to the simulation, they also noted that they now better understood the challenges facing developing country negotiators, as well as secretariats of regional groupings, in real-life negotiations. Overall, as Nichodemus Rudaheranwa from Uganda put it several months after the event, "the workshop and associated material have been instrumental in improving the ways and styles I conduct training at the Makerere University Business School in imparting knowledge to trainees."

In addition to increased interest and commitment to expand the teaching of commodity issues, many participants said that the workshops had motivated them to get more involved in commodity-related research. For instance, the participant from Zambia plans to include commodity issues in the five-year research plan that he is currently preparing for the Institute of Economic and Social Research at the University of Zambia. Another project intended by the participant from Togo is to produce a research paper on the negotiations strategy for cotton producers at WTO. Several participants at the Dakar workshop also decided to work together on a research proposal addressing the issue of commodities production and trade and its impact on poverty in their countries. In two instances, knowledge from the workshop will also be used in participants' consultancy work – advice to the association of cocoa and coffee producers in Côte d'Ivoire, and the preparation of the second generation of the national poverty reduction strategy in Mali.

Workshop on tools and methods for trade and trade policy analysis (Geneva, Switzerland, 11-15 September 2006)

As stated earlier, the Vi is by nature a collaborative project, bringing together various partners interested in working towards the same goal, which is to enhance the capacity of developing country academia to undertake research and teaching of trade issues that are relevant for their countries and link them with decision-making and policymaking regarding trade issues. The topic that was considered as essential for informed trade decision-making is the use of data and econometric and simulation techniques and tools to analyse trade and trade policy. This stemmed from the understanding that policy decisions should be based on a thorough analysis of their potential impact.

The Vi therefore also initiated a collaborative project on this issue involving other UNCTAD programmes (Trade Analysis Branch, Trade Negotiations and Commercial Diplomacy Branch, Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch, Central Statistics and Information Retrieval Branch) and two Geneva-based agencies - the World Trade Organization (Economic Research and Statistics Division) and the International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO (Market Analysis Section).

The project follows in its entirety the logic explained in the scheme on p. 3: it includes both the teaching and research components and their links to trade skills and policymaking. In the absence of funds for the development of the teaching material and research projects, the agencies decided to jointly organize a professional development workshop on tools and methods for trade and trade policy analysis. The participants of this workshop were requested to secure their own funding to cover travel and living costs in Geneva, with UNCTAD being able to support six LDC participants (two funded by the Vi and four by the Special Programme for LDCs). The announcement of the workshop triggered considerable interest and the Vi received 41 applications, out of which the selection committee endorsed 33 with profiles suitable for the workshop. Some very qualified applicants, in particular from Africa and LDCs, were however not able to attend because they did not succeed in securing the necessary support funds. In the end, there were 20 participants (including four women) from 16 countries (Bangladesh, Barbados, Burkina Faso, Cambodia, China, Costa Rica, Gambia, India, Jordan, Nigeria, Russian Federation, Senegal, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Togo and Uganda) present at the workshop.

One purpose of the workshop was to enhance participants' capacity to analyse trade and trade policy by familiarizing themselves with, and gaining access to, the sources of trade data and the tools and methods for the conduct of such analysis. However, at the same time and in line with the Vi's endeavour to make

research policy relevant and used in policymaking, these tools were presented in a framework starting from the formulation of research questions of interest to policymakers, through the identification of appropriate methodologies to address these specific questions, to the communication and cooperation with policy makers throughout the research process and the implementation of research results. A special session with the participation of policymakers organized at the end of the workshop has resulted in a set of recommendations on "Research-based policymaking: Bridging the gap between researchers and policymakers". The participants particularly appreciated this linking concept of the workshop. As Carol Lynch from the University of the West Indies put it: "The workshop was empowering on a personal level as it equipped me with the tools necessary to raise the quality of my research endeavours and my trade policy discussions."



Left to right: Sam Laird, Principal Trade Expert, UNCTAD; participants discuss research methodologies; His Excellency, Toufiq Ali, Ambassador of Bangladesh talks about the links between research and policy; and participants come to grips with STATA, an applied trade simulation model.

All participants intend to use the knowledge and materials from the workshop in their activities, be it teaching, research, cooperation with policymakers or preparation of policy-related publications. The suggested areas of use in teaching included the introduction of a new module on partial equilibrium models in a Masters course on modelling; the use of modelling for empirical assessment of trade theories; practical exercises using models for tutorials on international trade; the organization of a regional course on the topic of the workshop for researchers within CARICOM/CARIFORUM; and efforts to steer students and teachers towards UN databases and Vi resources. A number of possible uses for research were also put forward. The group from Senegal attending the workshop envisaged developing a project in the coming months using the gravity model for the analysis of intra-WAEMU trade. Other plans included analysis of regional integration, impact of MFA phase-out on the textile sector in Bangladesh, issues related to quota-free and duty-free access, impact of agricultural policies on poverty, development of a gravity model for South Africa, and the development, in cooperation with UNDP, of a CGE model for Cambodia. With regard to work with policymakers, several participants said that they now had a better understanding of what policymakers expected from researchers and that they would redouble their efforts to work more closely with them by, for example, consulting with them on the development of research proposals. One participant planned to establish systematic relations between his university and the Ministry of Trade to define research topics for his institution that would be useful and could be used in policymaking.

The professional development workshops made it clear that there is considerable interest in the long-term cooperation and support that the Vi aims to provide to developing country academics. Many participants expressed a wish for closer ties and cooperation with UNCTAD – both the Vi and the programmes providing substantive contributions to the workshops. A participant representing the Eduardo Mondlane University (Mozambique) expressed an interest in her institution becoming a university member of the Vi, which actually happened in September 2006. Twenty-two participants have become Vi associate members and thus benefit from standard Vi services and to the extent possible, also more personalized support in their work.

A number of participants also called for more workshops on trade-related issues for members of academia; six subsequently became repeat participants in Vi events. As one participant of the commodity workshop in Dar-es-Salaam put it, “the workshop concentrated more on practical UNCTAD issues rather than abstract textbook economic issues. This is why I believe more such workshops can help researchers and academics from LDCs have an impact on policy, unlike the case at present”. The participants of the commodity workshop in Dakar even prepared a written submission in which they thanked UNCTAD for holding the workshop and invited the Organization to seek, through the Virtual Institute and the Commodities Branch, practical ways and means of supporting the dissemination of knowledge of commodity issues and increasing its impact on teaching and research on commodities in Africa.

Professional development opportunities outside the Vi

In order to afford its members access to a wider range of professional development opportunities, the Vi also disseminated information about events of potential interest both at UNCTAD and in other (partner) organizations.

Among them was the UNCTAD course on key issues on the international economic agenda, a three-week course addressing the issue of economic development and how different external and internal factors (international financial system, trade, investment, transfer of technology, development of entrepreneurship, efficient trade support services, information and communication technologies, etc.) can contribute to the attainment of national development goals. This course was originally designed for policymakers. However, since university teachers can play an important role in potential subsequent integration of the knowledge and materials from the course into their own teaching⁴, UNCTAD has been making a special effort to include academics among the participants.

This approach, also recommended by the independent external evaluation of the Key Issues course programme, has become a rule since the start of the latest series of courses in June 2006. Consequently, Talib Awad from the Vi member university in Jordan participated in and contributed to the regional edition of the course for Arab countries-members of UNESCWA (Beirut, June-July 2006), which was also attended by Rabee Salih from Baghdad University, a Vi associate member. Another Vi associate member, Predrag Bjelić from the University of Belgrade, contributed to two modules of the regional course for transition economies (Belgrade, September 2006).

The Vi also disseminated information about professional development opportunities in other organizations, such as the WIPO–WTO colloquium for teachers of intellectual property held in June-July 2006 in Geneva, an ITC workshop on strategic market analysis for international business development held in Geneva in July 2006, or the World Bank e-learning courses on trade in services, and on trade, growth and poverty, scheduled from September to November 2006 and from 29 October to 22 December 2006, respectively.

3.5 Study tours to Geneva-based international organizations

A number of Vi university members have recently launched postgraduate programmes with a strong professional component. This means that not only is teaching made as relevant as possible for the requirements of graduates' future careers, but students often undergo a professional internship as an obligatory part of their degree/certificate and, in some instances, there is an obligatory or optional training programme at international institutions in Geneva. The travel and accommodation for students during such programmes are covered by the participating universities or the participants themselves.

In this context, following previous successful experience, the Vi organized the following two study tours during the spring 2006.

⁴ A concrete case in point is the postgraduate Certificate in Economic Diplomacy, which Mario Presser of the Vi member university in Brazil (University of Campinas) developed, with UNCTAD support, following his attendance of an earlier delivery of the course.

Study tour for the University of Dar-es-Salaam (18-27 April 2006)

This first ever tour for the students of the Professional Masters in International Trade programme at the University of Dar-es-Salaam involved 29 graduate students, who spent almost two weeks at UNCTAD, ITC and WTO on a tailored training programme that dovetailed with their studies. The students were accompanied by Francis Matambalya, who had designed the Masters programme and provided pedagogical support to the group throughout the tour, linking the training in Geneva to the overall context of students' studies back in the United Republic of Tanzania. The Vi has developed the programme of the study tour in cooperation with the UNCTAD Commodities Branch, the divisions involved with investment and trade issues, the Special Programme for LDCs and the Technical Cooperation Service, as well as partners in the WTO (WTO Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation) and ITC (Market Analysis Section).

The students' time was divided between a course on issues related to the production and trade of commodities (see section 3.7 below for details) and another one on other trade and development issues relevant to LDCs. The tour included over 33 workshops and presentations on international commodities production and trade, and various trade and development issues, with a particular focus on LDCs. A workshop at ITC concentrated on practical tools for trade and market analysis that were of direct interest to the students' current academic programme and their future work. Subsequently, an interactive session at WTO complementing an earlier presentation by UNCTAD brought the students up to date with the current status of the Doha Development Round negotiations.

The first study tour for the University of Dar-es-Salaam was considered by the students as an invaluable learning experience, providing both breadth and depth of the main issues concerning commodities and development in LDCs. Additionally, the students reported that the materials they had received were relevant, well presented and informative. The tour also contributed to the University's capacity to deliver in-depth and wide-ranging expertise in commodities and economic development and in conjunction with the subsequent fellowship programme (see below) to prepare the ground for the long-term sustainability of the course. It is therefore hoped that a similar tour can be organized again next year.

Study tour for the University of the West Indies (8-26 May 2006)

Soon after the Tanzanian students left Geneva, the Vi welcomed 23 students from the Masters Programme in International Trade Policy at the University of the West Indies (UWI). Over the three weeks of the tour, the students followed a tailor-made training programme at UNCTAD, the International Trade Centre, the World Trade Organization and the World Intellectual Property Organization. They participated in 42 workshops and presentations, involving over 45 presenters/facilitators from the four organizations, as well as outside speakers from the International Labour Organization and the World Health Organization. In addition, the group met and discussed with ambassadors from the permanent missions of Barbados, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States.



West Indies Study Tour, May 2006

The tour was designed to present to students the work of UNCTAD, ITC, WIPO and WTO, and to discuss some of the most pressing issues in international trade policy, especially in relation to the Caribbean

region. Students also met with and discussed the work, challenges and hopes of the Caribbean region missions with the persons actually involved in trade negotiations.

Vi university member coordinator, Pamela Coke-Hamilton, who set up the Masters programme at UWI, believed that the study tour had given students valuable insight into the workings of the Geneva institutions and built on their academic studies in the classroom. For the potential future makers and shapers of Caribbean trade policy, the study tour provided an opportunity to make contact with experts in the trade-related international organizations and to become more familiar with how the major institutions supporting international trade impact the Caribbean region.

Following the conclusion of their stay in Geneva, the students moved to Brussels for one week at the European Commission before undertaking individual work placements in government ministries in the Caribbean and in one case at the Guyanese mission in Brussels. It is hoped that UWI will be able to return next year to repeat the tour and that the Virtual Institute will be able to broaden the scope of the tour to include other Geneva institutions.

3.6 Vi fellowships

In order to support the building of trade-related teaching and research capacities at Vi university members, the Vi conceptualized and offered, for the first time in 2006, the possibility of short-term (one-month) fellowships to its LDC members, the University of Dar-es-Salaam and the University Cheikh Anta Diop of Dakar. This has been possible thanks to a financial contribution from the Government of Finland and the cooperation of UNCTAD's divisions dealing with globalization, investment, trade and LDC issues.

Both universities are in the process of building their teams for trade-related teaching and research and have therefore expressed an interest in fellowships for selected staff identified to work on trade programmes. Five junior lecturers from the University of Dar-es-Salaam and two researchers from the University of Dakar have participated in the fellowship scheme. Each was assigned an area of work that was deemed important for the implementation of trade-related programmes at their respective universities and conducted specific projects during the fellowships, in cooperation with and with the support of an UNCTAD substantive programme. Each fellow was assigned an UNCTAD staff member as a mentor, to help guide and structure his/her teaching and research projects during the fellowship.

For the University of Dar-es-Salaam, the priority was to gradually build a team of assistant lecturers that could support the organization and delivery of the Masters Programme and become involved in the teaching of individual courses. For this reason, each of the five staff accepted to the scheme conducted an assignment on a specific topic that is relevant to his/her future work, consisting of developing teaching materials suitable for lectures at technical workshops, namely a paper, a presentation and an assignment for students. An overview of the tasks may be found in the table below.

Fellow	Courses to be taught	Issue for fellowship assignment	Mentor
Mr. George GANDYE	Trade policy analysis and review: quantitative and qualitative methods	Policy implication on export performance: insight from theory and case studies	Marco Fugazza, Trade Analysis Branch
Mr. Charles DOMICIAN	Trade, economic growth, competitiveness and welfare	Effectiveness of official development assistance in tackling supply-side problems: case of Tanzania	Samuel Gayi, Office of the Special Coordinator for Africa
Mr. Petro SAUTI	Economics of commodity products and markets	Sustainability of the fishing industry, market opportunities and barriers: case of Mwanza-Tanzania	Olivier Combe, Commodities Branch
Ms. Ashura HAJI	Economics of commodity products and markets	Market access and market entry for clove industry: case study of Tanzania	Olivier Matringe, Commodities Branch
Mr. Ali VUAI	Trade, economic growth, competitiveness and welfare	Mainstreaming gender issues into national development, particularly trade: case study of Tanzania	Shigehisa Kasahara, Macroeconomic and Development Policies Branch

At the end of the fellowships, the Vi organized an informal meeting with the mentors, other interested UNCTAD staff, a representative from the Tanzanian mission and Francis Matambalya, in which the fellows were given an opportunity to present their papers and take questions from the audience, as well as receive feedback to facilitate successful finalization of their assignments. The meeting also provided an opportunity for a general assessment of the fellowship. In the view of Francis Matambalya, Vi fellowships represented a valuable training opportunity for building the teaching capacity of the university and directly enhancing the sustainability of its Masters programme. The fellows said that they were leaving very motivated and committed to working even harder on strengthening their knowledge of trade and development so that they could assist in teaching courses in the Masters programme, undertake PhD studies, if feasible, and become experts in the field of trade.



Petro Sauti, University of Dar-es-Salaam, Fellow, May 2006

For the University of Dakar, the priority was to build a research team specialized in trade. For this reason, the main focus of the assignments undertaken by the two fellows who participated in the autumn 2006 portion of the fellowships (4-29 September 2006) was to work on research projects. Both fellows already had research experience and held senior positions at the University. Ibrahima Thione Diop, Head of the Department of Economics at the University, in cooperation with colleagues from the trade division, worked on a research project on "Ouverture commerciale et développement de l'aviculture au Sénégal - stratégie de développement de la filière face à la concurrence des importations de poulet" whereas Malick Sané, lecturer/researcher at the Faculty of Economics and Management, with support from Masataka Fujita and Hilary Nwokeabia from the Investment Issues Analysis Branch and other colleagues, pursued a project on "Les déterminants des investissements directs étrangers dans les pays de l'UEMOA : modélisation et estimation sur données de panels".

Since both fellows are also in charge of Masters programmes at the University, the results of their research will feed as case studies into the commodities course which will be part of the Masters in Rural Economy (responsibility of Ibrahima Diop) and the course on foreign direct investment and TNCs in the professional Masters in International Trade Policies and Negotiations (responsibility of Malick Sané).

Given the positive feedback with regard to the usefulness of the scheme, it is hoped that, subject to the availability of funds, the fellowship programme can be repeated next year and extended to allow the fellows more time for research, collection of data and interaction with staff of UNCTAD and other international organizations in Geneva, which was also a recommendation made by the beneficiaries at the end of their stays at UNCTAD.

3.7 Curricula advice and support for course delivery

One of the Vi objectives is to promote and support academic programmes related to trade and development at its member universities. In addition to providing specific curricula advice upon request, the Vi has thus systematically worked with two universities that were either in the initial phase of delivery or in the process of conceptualizing such programmes at the postgraduate level.

Professional Masters Programme in International Trade at the University of Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania⁵

After earlier advice on the design of this programme and a contribution, in cooperation with the UNCTAD Special Programme for LDCs, to a pre-launch training-of-trainers workshop for the lecturers involved, the Vi supported the delivery of one specific course of that programme - on the economics of commodity production and markets. In this context, the Vi cooperated very closely with the UNCTAD Commodities Branch whose staff, together with other colleagues from the Division on International Trade in Goods, Services and Commodities, delivered the course as a part of the study tour to Geneva for the University of Dar-es-Salaam (see section 3.5 for details). This course further expanded teaching materials on this topic jointly developed by the Vi and the Commodities Branch, which served as a course manual for the students.

The four-day (18-21 April 2006) intensive course delivery was structured into four blocks: commodities data and market analysis; role of commodities in development; market access and market entry; and financial issues related to the commodity sector. These were then rounded out by a session on trade reforms and food security. In addition to lectures and discussions, the students were exposed to group exercises on commodity-based development policy and on sugar (market access, market entry, new uses and factors influencing prices). While in Geneva, the students completed one group work assignment and an exam, set and moderated by staff from the UNCTAD Commodities Branch. Upon their return to their home country they completed a second assignment, based on their programme in Geneva. Both contributed to their final mark.

"This has been a memorable and invaluable experience," said Charles Domician, graduate student at the University of Dar-es-Salaam and a prospective assistant lecturer for the programme. "The students who attended the course are now in a position to better advise the Tanzanian government on commodity policies and WTO issues".

Professional Masters Programme in International Trade Policies and Negotiations at the University of Dakar, Senegal

This particular Masters programme is currently under development at the University of Dakar where it is undergoing an approval process at the level of the faculty and the university. In this initial phase, the Vi provided advice with regard to the concept of the programme, definition of the groups of subjects (*unités d'enseignement*) of which it will consist, and the identification of subjects that could fall into these different groups. There has also been a discussion about the teaching materials available at the moment, or in the near future, at the Vi and in UNCTAD that could be used for the programme. The fellowship of the programme's coordinator at UNCTAD also provided an opportunity to establish contacts with UNCTAD experts in areas relevant to these programmes.

It should also be noted that with regard to support for course delivery, the Vi has established fruitful cooperation ties with the WTO Institute on Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC). As a result, both the Vi and ITTC work together to support the University of Dar-es-Salaam in the delivery of the programme, with WTO covering the courses in which it has specific expertise. Discussions are under way to replicate the same approach for the future Masters programme at the University of Dakar, and potentially the Masters in International Economic and Commercial Law at the University of Maputo.

The approach that the Vi is taking with regard to support for course delivery aims at gradually building local capacity at the universities. Vi member universities therefore assign lecturers who will in future be in charge of the courses for which they seek contributions from the Vi and UNCTAD. The intention is for the Vi, with support from the UNCTAD experts on the matter, to work with them so that they can build their

⁵ The Professional Masters Programme in International Trade (PMIT) was launched at the University of Dar-es-Salaam on 25 July 2005. It is intended to prepare highly skilled trade and business analysts and managers to serve the needs of Government, enterprise and business stakeholders. The programme puts particular emphasis on the knowledge and skills needs of developing economies.

capacity over time to teach the specific courses and reduce their dependency on visiting lecturers. The Vi fellowships represent a concrete step in this direction.

3.8 Research

Implementation of research cooperation requires a large amount of both human and financial resources. Following an expression of interest by Vi members in research and research cooperation, but faced with lack of resources, the Vi undertook some initial work on mapping and identifying potential sources of grants for research and other projects of interest to Vi members, in particular the Geneva International Academic Network (GIAN), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the International Development Research Center (IDRC) and the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF). Initial contacts have also been established with GIAN and the ACU. The Vi has further compiled information about areas of research interest at UNCTAD and in Vi member universities and about publication opportunities for outside researchers at UNCTAD.

Simultaneously, often in cooperation with members, the Vi has circulated information about calls for research papers falling within its members' interests, such as the call for papers on the role of research in trade policy changes in developing countries issued by the Latin American Trade Network, a research network coordinated by FLACSO, the Vi university member in Argentina; the annual call for papers of the Economic Research Forum, an NGO involved in research relevant to Arab countries, Iran and Turkey; or a call for proposals for research grants on competition issues in the distribution sector by the International Development Research Center (IDRC) of Canada.

As a first trial of (voluntary and non-remunerated) cooperation in research and in response to the 2005 WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong, several Vi university members have written articles assessing prospects for the negotiations and their consequences for development. The articles have been merged into a single document entitled "The Hong Kong Ministerial and Beyond" and published on the Vi website. As each member addressed an issue of interest to it in the WTO negotiations, the resulting document reflects different geographical perspectives - from developed, middle-income developing and least developed countries - and different academic viewpoints.

The articles cover issues of policy coherence and development objectives in the negotiations (Sarah Geddes from the Centre for Trade Policy and Law at Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada), special safeguard mechanisms for developing countries (Francis Matambalya from the University of Dar-es-Salaam, United Republic of Tanzania), the need to restore trust between developing and developed countries (Manoj Pant from Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India), and the influence and interrelationship between regional and multilateral negotiations (Mario Presser from the University of Campinas, Brazil). Donald Mackay and Laura Ritchie Dawson, also from the Centre for Trade Policy and Law, look at the prospects of the Hong Kong Ministerial from a Canadian standpoint and use this perspective as an opportunity to reflect upon recent Canadian trade policy and the country's role in multilateral trade negotiations.

3.9 Exchanges among members

The Vi meeting in July 2005 gave representatives of Vi member universities the first opportunity to get to know each other personally and learn more about their and their institutions' areas of interest. The members then unanimously wished to have exchanges of experience and knowledge, but also staff and students, and in broader terms, enhanced cooperation within the network.

Several members (in particular from Brazil, France, Jordan, Mauritius, the United Republic of Tanzania and the West Indies) made available curricula of their trade-related post-graduate courses on the website of the Virtual Institute or offline for sharing with other members. The Vi also undertook to map exchange opportunities at Vi member universities and their legal and financial aspects, and to circulate this information to the members. Based on sample MoUs and cooperation agreements and other information provided by the member universities (Canada, China, India, Islamic Republic of Iran, Jordan, Mauritius,

Senegal), a model MoU for cooperation among Vi members has also been developed and circulated. The rather limited possibilities for funding staff (not student) exchanges that exist at some universities have not been sufficient to organize cooperation and physical exchanges within the Vi network, for which additional resources would be required.

In order to provide an opportunity for staff exchange within the network, the Centre for Trade Policy and Law, the Vi member in Canada, offered qualified candidates from member universities free attendance at its certificate programmes in trade policy and commercial diplomacy scheduled for summer 2006. The participants were requested to secure their own funds for travel and living costs in Canada. Attendance would also have afforded opportunities for discussing areas and projects for subsequent deeper cooperation. Two Vi member staff (from Mauritius and the Islamic Republic of Iran) have been selected to attend the foundational and advanced course, respectively. However, due to the lack of funding in the former case and administrative delays in the latter case, the exchanges did not materialize.

3.10 Vi newsletter



Both an informational and a promotional tool, the Vi newsletter continued to appear on a quarterly basis during the period under review. Five new issues have been produced and circulated to members and to partners inside and outside UNCTAD. The aim of the newsletter is to provide information about current activities, particularly those of Virtual Institute members, thereby helping to keep members informed of each others' projects and to sustain the network. The newsletter, which is published in electronic and paper form, is linked to ongoing news items on the Vi website, informing members and the wider Vi audience about upcoming and future events of importance and relevance to them. It also highlights recent UNCTAD publications, such as flagship reports like the *Trade and Development Report*, the *World Investment Report*, the *Least Developed Countries Report* or the *Information Economy Report*, and other relevant publications. Although the Vi website

automatically alerts subscribers of new material that has been posted, the newsletter provides a valuable summary and collation of the previous three months' postings. In addition to the above resources for members, the newsletter reports on relevant meetings held at UNCTAD, and reviews and showpieces essential websites providing information and services in the trade development fields. For example, last year's four quarterly newsletters included reviews of eight teaching resources, seven major publications, three UNCTAD expert meetings and ten websites, as well as dozens of news items about Vi member activities and information on Vi events and services.

4. LESSONS LEARNT

Constant **analysis of member needs** and subsequent **adjustment of Vi services and activities** continued to be an inherent feature of the programme during the past year. The Vi has accumulated a better (even if never final and complete!) understanding of the (evolving) needs of its members. These range from the simple provision of documentation to the strengthening of knowledge and skills on specific subjects or implementation of specific projects. The challenges faced in the implementation of activities aiming to address these needs have also become clearer. The diversity of its members, their specific needs and expectations have led to the development of a menu of services from which individual members are free to choose those that best match their needs. While a number of activities were conditional on the availability of funding at the Vi team in Geneva, Vi members have also participated within their resources in many of them through in kind contributions, such as sharing of materials, posting of research papers, participation in the pilot Vi research project, provision of comments on teaching materials, input as resource persons at Vi events, etc. The Vi has been making every effort to make its activities evolve permanently so as to stay or become more meaningful and useful for its members.

The experience gathered clearly shows that academics are interested in **long-term** sustained relationships going beyond one-off events. They wish to be informed of new developments, update their existing skills and materials or acquire new ones and have a counterpart to turn to with a question or a request for support in their teaching and research. For instance, a number of participants in Vi professional development workshops wishing to pursue collaboration with Vi and UNCTAD in general have become Vi associate members and have, in some instances, expressed an interest in their university becoming a Vi member institution. Some of them have also become repeat participants in Vi events. This seems to bear out the understanding that the building of capacities, whether individual or institutional, is a longer-term undertaking and requires longer-term attention and support, including predictable funding over time.

Information technologies (e-mail, Internet, as well as hybrid ICTs such as CD-ROMs) ensure unprecedented ease of access to an extremely large and wide range of information. This phenomenon, while in essence positive, also results in a sort of "information overflow", whereby recipients simply cannot absorb and actively use everything that reaches them. This is further exacerbated by the lack of time facing Vi counterparts at universities - they are usually those who actively seek ways of improving current practice and introducing new approaches, which is almost always a time-consuming endeavour. In most instances, therefore, Vi activities were received much more attentively and made a more profound impact when they were accompanied with **face-to-face contacts**. For instance, a hands-on session was more effective in making members understand how to use the Vi website than circulating a manual or e-mail instructions to them. The level of use of Vi teaching materials was higher when they were accompanied by a workshop presenting the materials and discussing in what courses and how they could be used, as compared with posting them on the website or sending the members an electronic version on a CD-ROM.

The use of Vi products was also facilitated when members were provided with ongoing **personalized support and follow-up** as an extension of initial physical meetings - in the form of information about additional resources for teaching or research, support in answering questions, or simple encouragement. It has proved important to design activities that allow for such support; for instance, by creating a category in the Vi online library periodically featuring new documents in the area previously covered by a professional development workshop. Some more substantial ways of ensuring follow-up and longer-term networking with once acquired "clients" (such as research projects in the area of the workshop) depend to a greater extent on the availability of external funding.

As the Vi builds the capacities of university teachers and researchers as individuals, it also aims to help **strengthen the institutions** in which they work (in the case of Vi university members). It has also proved very useful to extend the cooperation with the Vi to a larger number of individuals (staff and students) who can both benefit from Vi activities and contribute to their implementation at their universities. This approach has been the most successful in Vi universities in Africa where the Vi has had more opportunities to develop personal contacts - several teachers/researchers are now being involved in Vi projects at the University of Dakar, the University of Dar-es-Salaam and the University of Mauritius. Staff and students from Vi university members have also registered on the Vi website and are receiving e-mail notifications about new documents in the areas of their interest.

In addition to being a long-term effort, the strengthening of trade-related teaching and research requires a combination of various types of trade expertise and an associated commitment of resources, which, given the sheer size of the needs, invariably fall short of demands. The Vi is therefore systematically trying to build partnerships and associate as many partners with relevant expertise as possible to joint projects and support to the same universities whenever there is mutual interest. This creates opportunities for synergies and maximum impact, avoiding situations in which potential partners disperse their organization's efforts among competing projects and support to different stakeholders. Such **partnerships** have been very productive in relation to the World Trade Organization and the International Trade Centre, as well as with regard to a number of programmes at UNCTAD (details specified throughout the report) to which the Vi provides access for an audience with which some of them may not yet be working in a systematic manner.

In its activities, the Vi attempts to pursue a **comprehensive and systemic approach** (see the scheme on p.3) following: (a) development of teaching materials; and (b) subsequent strengthening of knowledge and skills on its topic; with a view, on the one hand, to (c.i) localization of teaching materials to make them relevant for the country in which they will be used and, on the other hand, to (c.ii) formulation and conduct of research proposals and their dissemination to policymakers (with policymakers participating from the initial stage of research by being consulted on the topic of relevance for the country). Over the past year, the Vi has mostly worked in the first two areas. Localization of generic teaching materials is planned for next year when it will be to some extent supported by funds from the United Nations Development Account.

The fullest trial of the Vi approach so far has been made in cooperation with the UNCTAD Commodities Branch with the development of teaching materials, organization of professional development workshops, and a partial localization and delivery of materials in a regular Masters course for the University of Dar-es-Salaam. A group of Vi associate members who participated in the Dakar commodity workshop have been working on a research proposal linking commodities, trade and poverty, and the Commodities Branch is exploring ways to fund such research. An introductory discussion about policy-relevant research questions and how to communicate research to policymakers also took place at the UNCTAD–WTO–ITC workshop on tools and methods for trade and trade policy analysis in September 2006, and resulted in the formulation of recommendations as to how to bridge the gap between researchers and policymakers. Overall, in addition to the need to first complete initial stages of the process (development of materials, building the skills), implementation of the entire chain of action has so far been constrained by the lack of resources, in particular for the research phase.

The **availability of resources** (both internal UNCTAD resources and extrabudgetary funds) has so far been a limiting factor in expanding Vi activities, be it in the direction of accepting more member universities, expanding the range of services or replicating successful activities so that they can reach a larger number of academics. In this situation and within the resources available, the Vi general strategy has been to favour the provision of higher-quality (personalized) services to a more limited number of beneficiaries over lower-quality service for larger numbers of them. The lack of funding has also hampered the implementation of projects among Vi member universities. To counter this problem, to the extent possible, the Vi has developed several (mostly automated) services of interest to a larger audience that are provided to the new category of Vi associate members.

If developing countries are to derive more efficient and fairer gains from the international economic system it is important for them to focus on the ability of their knowledge institutions to produce well-informed and high-skilled professionals in the area of trade and development. Governments and policymakers need to be provided with relevant, knowledge-based research in order to shape and design successful national policies and negotiating positions in regional and international fora. The financial and human investment in the development of this capacity should be embedded in local institutions so that they can continue to deliver research and train professionals in the long term, with locally relevant knowledge and experience. The UNCTAD Virtual Institute, in cooperation with other partners within and outside UNCTAD, has been working to help build such knowledge and capacity.

**ANNEX 1: SERVICES AND ACTIVITIES IMPLEMENTED WITH VI
UNIVERSITY MEMBERS IN 2005-2006**

Vi university member	Activities conducted within the Virtual Institute
Latin American School of Social Sciences (FLACSO), Buenos Aires, Argentina	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Presentation on RTAs as contribution to Vi training materials ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities
University of Campinas, Brazil	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Posted several papers, course outlines and presentation on the Vi website (online library) ▪ Contribution of a presentation on technical barriers to trade (TBT) and sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS) to the Vi training materials ▪ Co-authorship of the document "The Hong Kong Ministerial and Beyond" published on the Vi website ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities
Carleton University - Centre for Trade Policy and Law (CTPL), Ottawa, Canada	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution of a paper to Vi resources (online library) ▪ Co-authorship of the document "The Hong Kong Ministerial and Beyond" published on the Vi website (two contributions) ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Initiation of an exchange between Vi members by offering tuition-free attendance of CTPL certificate courses ▪ Contribution to the draft memorandum of understanding (MoU) for joint projects of Vi members
University of International Business and Economics (UIBE), Beijing, China	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Participation in workshop on international investment agreements in 2005 ▪ Participation in workshop on trade and trade policy analysis in 2006 ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members
Pierre-Mendès-France University, Grenoble, France	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of course outlines as resource on the Vi website ▪ Coordination of the joint work of members on an outline for teaching materials on RTAs ▪ A PhD student participated in the workshop on trade and trade policy analysis in 2006 ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Three students worked at UNCTAD as interns in spring 2006
Jawaharlal Nehru University, India	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution of several papers to the Vi online library ▪ Use of Vi training materials on international investment agreements (IIAs) in advanced course on TNCs, transfer of technology, and R&D ▪ Contribution to Vi training material with a presentation on trade theory ▪ Active user of the Vi online forum (discussion on trade liberalization, growth and poverty) ▪ Resource person contributed to the workshop on international investment agreements in 2005 ▪ Co-authorship of the document "The Hong Kong Ministerial and Beyond" published on the Vi website ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members
School of International Relations, Tehran, Iran	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution to the Vi training materials with a presentation on trade in services and a fact sheet on RTAs ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members
University of Jordan, Amman	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of course outlines as resource on the Vi website ▪ Use of teaching materials as well as resources available in the Vi online library in PhD programmes on international economics and international finance, Master-level courses on international trade theory and policy and undergraduate courses on international economics and international finance ▪ Contribution to Vi teaching materials with a fact sheet on RTAs ▪ Participation in workshop on trade and trade policy analysis in 2006 ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities

Vi university member	Activities conducted within the Virtual Institute
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members ▪ Participation in the UNCTAD course on key issues on the international economic agenda in Beirut (2006)
University of Mauritius	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provision of course outlines as resource on the Vi website ▪ Use of Vi teaching materials on IIAs in course on international business, and the material on commodities in several Masters and Bachelor programmes ▪ Provision of comments on the joint outline for teaching materials on RTAs ▪ Two participants at the Vi commodities workshop in Tanzania in 2006 ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members ▪ Provision of expert advice on UNCTAD capacity-building (advisory group on human resource development)
Cheikh Anta Diop University, Dakar, Senegal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution of papers to Vi online library and to Vi training materials with a fact sheet on RTAs ▪ Participation in workshop on commodities with one participant at the workshop in Tanzania (2006) and five participants and a resource person at the workshop in Senegal (2006), which was also co-hosted by university staff. Four university staff attended the workshop on trade and trade policy analysis in 2006 ▪ Two research fellowships in September 2006 ▪ The Vi provided curricular advice on the Masters in International Trade and Trade Negotiations ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Contribution to the draft MoU for joint projects of Vi members ▪ Vi facilitated contacts with WTO and ITC
University of Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Use of teaching materials on commodities in the Masters in International Trade programme ▪ Active user of the Vi online forum (discussion on Africa's commodity sector) ▪ Three staff participated in the workshop on commodities in Tanzania in 2006 and the university co-hosted the workshop ▪ Study tour to UNCTAD and other international organizations in Geneva in April 2006 with 29 students ▪ Five university staff came to work with UNCTAD as fellows in May 2006 ▪ UNCTAD staff taught course on commodities as part of the study tour ▪ Co-authorship of the document "The Hong Kong Ministerial and Beyond" published on the Vi website ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities ▪ Provision of expert advice on UNCTAD capacity-building (advisory group on human resource development)
Foreign Trade University, Hanoi, Vietnam	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Contribution of papers to Vi online library ▪ Three staff participated in the workshop on IIAs ▪ UNCTAD organized peer review of research papers ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities
University of West Indies, Barbados	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Study tour to UNCTAD and other international organizations in Geneva in May 2006 with 23 students ▪ One staff participated in the workshop on trade and trade policy analysis in 2006 ▪ Dissemination and sharing of information on research opportunities

ANNEX 2: VI TARGET AUDIENCE IN 2005-2006

Country	Number of Vi university members	Number of Vi associate members	Number of participants in Vi professional development workshops
Argentina	1		
Australia		2	
Azerbaijan		1	
Bahrain		1	
Bangladesh		3	2
Barbados	1	1	1
Belarus		1	
Benin			3
Bhutan			1
Bosnia and Herzegovina		1	
Burkina Faso			3
Brazil	1	16	
Cambodia		1	5
Canada	1	2	
Central African Republic		1	1
China	1	2	2
Colombia	1	5	
Costa Rica			1
Côte d'Ivoire		2	3
El Salvador		1	
Eritrea		1	1
France	1	1	
Gabon			1
Gambia			1
Germany		2	
Greece		1	
Guinea		1	1
Honduras		1	
India	1	9	2
Indonesia		2	1
Iran (Islamic Rep. of)	1	1	
Iraq		1	
Jordan	1		1
Kenya		3	
Lao PDR		1	1
Lebanon		1	
Malaysia		1	1
Mali			1
Mauritius	1	1	2
Mexico		2	
Morocco		1	
Mozambique		1	1
Nepal		1	1
Nigeria		1	1
Oman		5	
Pakistan		2	
Philippines		2	

Country	Number of Vi university members	Number of Vi associate members	Number of participants in Vi professional development workshops
Poland		1	
Russian Federation			1
Rwanda		1	
Senegal	1		11
Serbia and Montenegro		7	
Singapore		1	
South Africa		4	2
Spain		1	
Sri Lanka		1	2
St. Vincent and the Grenadines		1	
Sudan		1	
Switzerland		14	
Unit. Rep. of Tanzania	1	2	7
Thailand		8	2
Togo		1	4
Trinidad and Tobago		4	
Tunisia		1	
Turkey		1	
Uganda		1	3
Ukraine		1	
United Arab Emirates		1	
United Kingdom		2	
USA		6	
Uzbekistan		1	
Venezuela		3	
Viet Nam	1	3	3
Zambia			1
Zimbabwe		3	1
Total	14	152	75