UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON TRADE AN DEVELOPMENT

Human Resources Development Section
SITE Division

Advisory Group on the Strengthening of UNCTAD Training Capacities and Human Resources Development

Report and Recommendations of the Third Advisory Group Meeting
on Human Resources Development

Geneva, Palais des Nations, 1 & 2 February 2005

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Advisory Group on the Strengthening of Training Capacities and Human Resources Development was established in 2002 in response to the conclusions of the official evaluation of the TrainMar programme[1]. In recommendation seven, the evaluators of the programme proposed that "a small advisory group of qualified persons with relevant experience and without direct involvement in the programme should be established for strategic guidance on the HRD group".

2. The third meeting of the Advisory Group was opened by Mr. Peter Fröhler, OIC of SITE Division, who welcomed the advisory group members and paid tribute to the diversity of their origins and backgrounds. He highlighted the work undertaken recently by the Information and Training Branch (ITB) to enhance synergies between the three training and capacity-building programmes of the Branch. He further asked the Group Members to take into consideration this new development when discussing issues related to the cooperation between ITB and other UNCTAD divisions and programmes.

3. Ms Manuela Tortora, Chief of the Technical Assistance Service, described the framework for UNCTAD capacity development activities. She explained that UNCTAD was active in three main areas: (i) consensus building; (ii) research; and (iii) technical cooperation activities, and UNCTAD develops a relationship between these three fields.

4. Mr. Xavier Alphaize, OIC of ITB, introduced the discussion theme of the meeting centered on the assessment of distance learning activities from the beneficiaries' perspective. He stressed that the objective of TrainForTrade was not only to deliver training, but to develop training capacities. He also mentioned activities were to be carried out as a priority for least developed countries (LDCs). The agenda of the meeting was adopted with no modification *(annex 2)*.

---

[1] TD/B/WP/144, 17 July 2001.

II.   ACTIVITIES

A. Report on the results of the second Advisory Group meeting

5.   Ms. Vlasta Macku, Chief of the Training and Capacity-Building Section, explained the progress made in the past twelve months by the _UNCTAD Virtual Institute (annex3 and annex4)._ During the discussion the following points were raised:

- The support of the top management is required to obtain the cooperation of all UNCTAD substantive divisions and programmes;
- It is important to clearly state the criteria for the selection of universities;
- There should be easy access to the Virtual Institute website from the website of UNCTAD;
- Funding is needed to enable LDCs to join the Virtual Institute Network;
- Complementarities between the UNCTAD Virtual Institute and TrainForTrade must be put forward with a coherent approach

6.   Mr. X. Alphaize and Mr. D. Chantrel described the progress made in implementing _distance learning (annex5)._ Activities covered the design of new distance learning courses, the deliveries as well as the use of recent IT tools. Detailed information on progress achieved was made available to the Group Members via the "TrainForTrade Activity Report (August 2003-December 2004)".

B. Presentation of the new Distance Learning Platform

7.   Mr. D. Chantrel, Mr. A. Nelson and Ms. S. Olivares, made a presentation of the new distance learning platform _(annex6)._ They highlighted the improvements made through the use of new software and described the benefits of the platform for the TrainForTrade team, other UNCTAD substantive divisions and programmes as well as for training recipients. They showed samples of distance learning courses and tests developed.

8.   The criteria used for the selection of the new technologies were the following: open source software, multiplicity of languages, user-friendliness for all parties concerned, increased capacity of management of courses--including a variety of elements such as statistics, number of students and teachers, news, chat sessions, and forums--as well as continued possibility of improving the platform via an active development community. In addition, this new tool should be compatible with the technologies that are still used in LDCs.

9.   The group members welcomed the new platform and expressed their satisfaction with the work undertaken by UNCTAD in selecting the appropriate IT tools and improving the way distance learning is implemented.

C. Process used in distance learning

10. The objective of TrainForTrade is to strengthen the capacities of institutions in particular in least developed countries, where access to training and ICTs does not yet match the needs of those countries. This is done through the development of courses, training of trainers, distance learning and networking.

11. The process used for the implementation of distance learning activities includes three phases. During the *preparation phase* distance learning materials are developed and distance learning centres are identified in beneficiary countries. In the *implementation phase* the distance learning platform is set up, IT tutors are selected, and training is delivered via distance learning and face-to-face sessions. The *capacity-building phase* encompasses the identification, selection and training of new local IT tutors. Training courses remain available via the platform and plans are developed to carry out subsequent training deliveries with the participation of locally trained IT tutors.

12. This approach was examined last November during the evaluation of the "Capacity building programme on training in selected international economic issues: distance learning technique". The evaluation report confirmed the suitability of this process, in particular for LDCs. Mr. Alphaize indicated that the findings of the evaluation are now being considered by the TrainForTrade team as a basis for the implementation of distance learning activities in the future (*annex7*).

13. The Group Members stressed the importance of establishing benchmarks and indicators that can show the progress achieved at various stages. As they will reflect the efficiency and effectiveness of the programme, these indicators will be appreciated by the beneficiary countries and regional organizations as well as by the donor community.

14. Mr. A. Agbadomé, Ministry of Trade, Benin, presented the benefits of TrainForTrade distance learning activities for the beneficiary countries (*annex8*). He reiterated the crucial role of the national steering committee in the commitment of the parties concerned. During the discussion the following issues were raised:

    - The importance of IT tutors in assisting trainees at the conclusion of distance-learning sessions;
    - The need to reinforce cooperation between the ITB programmes and other divisions and programmes.
    - The necessity to develop long-term indicators in order to expand such a project to other countries in the sub-region.

D. Regional approach

15 To ensure continuity and sustainability of its activities the TrainForTrade programme intends to implement training and capacity-building activities through a regional approach. This process was initiated in Las Palmas in March 2004 with the organization of an interregional meeting that gathered together regional organizations and countries from Africa, Asia, and Latin America & the Caribbean

16. The Las Palmas "Concluding Statement"(*annex9),* emphasizes *inter alia* the importance of a regional approach as a tool to encourage South-South cooperation in the field of training and capacity development, thus expanding capacities, creating synergies and avoiding duplication. It also welcomed UNCTAD's collaboration with regional organizations to support, in cooperation with other relevant partners, both existing and new human resources development activities in the area of trade and investment,

17. Since this meeting TrainForTrade has developed a cooperation strategy with regional organizations. In Africa requests have been received from COMESA, CEMAC, UMA and ECOWAS. TrainForTrade, in cooperation with in-house partner programmes, is undertaking preliminary missions to identify the training needs of requesting regional organizations. To address those needs support is being sought within the donor community

E. Cooperation with other divisions and programmes

18. In presenting their experience with the TrainForTrade programme, the trade negotiations and commercial diplomacy programme, DITC Division, and the E-commerce programme, SITE Division, stressed the following benefits for their respective programmes:

   –   Value added for the commercial diplomacy programme: (cost reduction, time saving and human resources, more efficient response to countries' demands, increased level of training, increased number of people trained, synergies in terms of pedagogical materials and experts
   –   Value added for E- commerce programme: to familiarize trainees with the use of the ICT tool, increase their autonomy, motivate participants

The meeting concluded with the presentation to the donor community of the outcome of the Third Advisory Group meeting.

III.   OUTCOME OF THE THIRD ADVISORY GROUP MEETING

At its third meeting, the UNCTAD Advisory Group on Human Resources Development, while

Welcoming
- the efforts made by the Information and Training Branch in ensuring the complementarities between the Virtual Institute, TrainForTrade and other training and capacity-building programmes of the Branch,
- the enhancement of new ICT tools used and *acknowledging* that these match the needs of target populations,
- the launching of the UNCTAD Virtual Institute and *noting with satisfaction* the progress made towards the strengthening of beneficiary higher education institutions in developing countries,

Valuing the efforts made by these programmes in developing the capacities of the beneficiary countries and institutions,

Makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Group *underlines* the value added that distance learning activities bring to other collaborating training and capacity building programmes, in terms of optimizing in-house resources, increased capacity to address the needs of countries, enhanced level of training and related discussions.

Recommendation 2: The Group *supports* the continuous improvements made in the TrainForTrade distance learning platform, and welcomes the new functionalities made available to other UNCTAD divisions and programmes, as value added tools for improving the in-house cooperation.

Recommendation 3: The Group *recommends again* that other UNCTAD divisions and programmes increase their cooperation with the Information and Training Branch (ITB) while implementing training and capacity-building technical assistance projects in a long term perspective.

Recommendation 4: The Group *requests* UNCTAD to disseminate to the donor community and potential beneficiary countries and regional organizations, through appropriate channels, the coherent approach taken by the training and capacity-building programmes of ITB.

Recommendation 5: The Group *stresses* the importance of building indicators that reflect medium term achievements and recommends the implementation of surveys for this purpose.

Recommendation 6: The Group *values* the importance of the regional approach for the sustainability of efforts as agreed during the interregional conference of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria on "International Trade, Investment and Human Resources Development: the Role of Regional Integration Groupings"**;** this approach can be complemented by support at national level.

Recommendation 7: The Group *takes note* of the evaluation report of the "Capacity building programme on training in selected international economic issues: distance learning techniques**"** project**;** commends the high quality and professionalism of the work undertaken by the evaluation team in preparing the report, and *concurs* with the recommendations contained therein;

Recommendation 8: The Group stresses the importance of the long-term approach in the development of capacities of the beneficiary institutions through training of trainers, distance learning, training of IT tutors and systematic support to the strengthening of teaching and research in academic institutions;

Recommendation 9: The Group *emphasizes* the importance of predictability of funding in sustaining UNCTAD's efforts towards the development of training and capacity-building activities, in particular in least developed countries, and support to networks of exchange and best practice among the beneficiaries.

IV.   List of Annexes

Annex 1:   List of participants and documentation provided to the members

Annex 2:   Agenda of the third Advisory Group meeting, Geneva, 1-2 February 2005

Annex 3:   UNCTAD Virtual Institute: Progress report on the Recommendations of the Second Advisory Group Meeting on HRD, Geneva, 13-14 January 2004

Annex 4:   UNCTAD Virtual Institute: PowerPoint presentation on Building the capacity of academic institutions

Annex 5:   TrainForTrade Programme: PowerPoint presentation on TrainForTrade Distance Learning activities implemented in 2004

Annex 6:   TrainForTrade Programme: PowerPoint presentation on the New Distance Learning Platform

Annex 7:   TrainForTrade Programme: PowerPoint presentation on the evaluation report of "The Capacity- building programme on training in selected international economic issues: distance learning techniques

Annex 8:   TrainForTrade Programme: Powerpoint présentation on "Développement de capacités de formation en commerce international: BENIN - GUINEE – MALI - TOGO"

Annex 9:   TrainForTrade Programme: Concluding Statement of the Interregional meeting on International Trade, Investment and Human Resources Development: the Role of Regional Integration Groupings, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain, 15-19 March 2004