



United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

Distr.: General
15 September 2016

English only

Fourteenth session

Nairobi

17–22 July 2016

Civil Society Forum

Summary prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat

1. The Civil Society Forum, hosted by Tax Justice Network – Africa during the fourteenth session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XIV), featured 7 plenary sessions and 30 side events revolving around six themes: challenges and opportunities in multilateralism for trade and development, finance and debt, women in trade and development, structural transformation, inclusive growth and development, and the contribution of civil society to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Some 275 participants, representing 163 civil society organizations, attended.
2. The Secretary-General of UNCTAD, at the opening ceremony of the Forum, invited civil society organizations to help UNCTAD and its member States prioritize tasks consistent with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and commit to tangible actions.
3. The Declaration of Civil Society to UNCTAD XIV (TD/506), presented to the Committee of the Whole on 18 July 2016, was endorsed by more than 400 civil society organizations and included summary reports on two hearings held by the Preparatory Committee for UNCTAD XIV with accredited civil society organizations in Geneva, Switzerland, on 6 April and 26 May 2016. The Committee of the Whole took note of the Declaration and the summary reports (TD/INF.47 and TD/INF.48) as official inputs to the UNCTAD XIV intergovernmental process.
4. After the adoption of the Declaration, the Forum carried out several activities in parallel to the Conference. In addition to the side events, civil society organizations held private meetings on the mandate of UNCTAD with government delegations and took part in high-level events and round tables of the Conference as panellists or lead discussants.
5. Outreach activities to inform the general public on the issues at stake in the negotiations included two press conferences; a number of press releases, news articles and radio and television interviews; and a social media campaign based on the slogan of the Forum, “Walk the talk”. Forum participants posted more than 700 original messages on Twitter with the hashtag walkthetalk. These messages reached more than two million people.

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6. Two debriefing sessions were held to help civil society representative follow the negotiation process. On 15 July 2016, the special adviser to the Secretary-General of UNCTAD briefed participants on the evolution of the UNCTAD mandate and the main issues under negotiation. South Centre, an intergovernmental organization with observer status with UNCTAD, had on 18 January updated participants on progress in the negotiations and outlined the most contentious issues. The Chair of the Group of 77 and China had attended the session.
7. Four main themes ran throughout the Forum discussions: the role of UNCTAD in the United Nations system, the global financial architecture, structural economic transformation and the inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.
8. Many civil society representatives agreed that UNCTAD had a unique role to play in analysing the compatibility of a range of investment, trade, debt, macroeconomic and financial policies that, unless checked, could undermine efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.
9. Discussions on the global financial architecture centred on illicit financial flows. Many civil society representatives pointed out weaknesses in the architecture that allowed companies to avoid paying taxes, and they agreed that funding the Sustainable Development Goals would be possible only if companies paid their fair share of taxes. Further, they called for a strengthened mandate for UNCTAD to work on these issues.
10. Likewise, many civil society representatives agreed that countries would not reach the Sustainable Development Goals if they were overburdened by debt. UNCTAD work on debt provided a much-needed alternative to work done by institutions such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Monetary Fund. The civil society representatives called upon UNCTAD to continue its work on debt workout mechanisms and responsible lending and borrowing, and to develop an alternative methodology for debt sustainability analysis.
11. Many civil society representatives said that the focus of structural economic transformation should be on transforming the global economic structure because the structure of developing economies depended on how global supply chains and production systems were set up. Moreover, trade and investment agreements should support developing country industries to help them integrate and move up global value chains. They agreed that technology transfer was essential to this process and called on UNCTAD to take a lead role therein.
12. Many civil society representatives noted that the inclusive nature of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development required that UNCTAD receive a mandate to conduct policy analysis and formulate recommendations “through a gender lens”. Trade affected men and women differently, and UNCTAD stood out as an organization that examined the impact of trade agreements on women.
13. The Deputy Secretary-General of UNCTAD said that some of the Conference successes would not have been possible without the active participation of civil society. As the new mandate stemming from the Conference would be translated into a new work programme, civil society would have an important role to play in helping UNCTAD improve and deliver its products in the countries that made up its core constituency.
14. At the closing ceremony on 22 July 2016, the Civil Society Forum delivered a statement on the outcome document of the Conference, available at http://unctad14.org/Documents/U14_CSF_statement_en.pdf.