

Committee on Trade and Development

UPDATE ON PREPARATIONS FOR THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON
LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES

Note by the Secretariat

Addendum

I. INTEGRATED FRAMEWORK FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

1. Informal consultations are being conducted by the WTO and UNCTAD secretariats jointly on the draft *Integrated Framework for Technical Assistance*¹, with the aim of it being endorsed at the High-Level Meeting. The consultations will continue in September.

II. PREPARATION OF COUNTRY-SPECIFIC ROUNDTABLES

2. As of 31 July, twenty-one least-developed countries have indicated that they have accepted the invitation contained in the Director-General's letter of 7 May to prepare a comprehensive assessment of their needs for trade-related technical assistance. They are: Bangladesh, Benin, Cape Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Comoros, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea, Haiti, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique, Nepal, Sao Tome and Principe, Sudan, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Zambia. Arrangements have been made among the six intergovernmental agencies involved directly in preparing the High-Level Meeting² to provide technical assistance to those least-developed countries that request it to help prepare their needs assessments.

3. In response to requests from several delegations, the following sections provide a more detailed description of the approach being followed in preparing country-specific roundtables. Adjustments to the approach will be made, as necessary, in the light of the finalisation of the *Integrated Framework for Technical Assistance*.

Preparation of the needs assessments

4. All least-developed countries have been invited to complete a comprehensive assessment of their needs for trade-related technical assistance, to prioritize their needs, and to indicate which of their needs are already being met by multilateral or regional intergovernmental organisations or by their bilateral development partners. It is the responsibility of each least-developed country to conduct its own assessment of its needs for trade-related technical assistance, so as to ensure that the process

¹A draft of the *Integrated Framework* has been circulated in document LDC/HL/2, of 19 June 1997; copies are available from the WTO and UNCTAD secretariats.

²References here and elsewhere in this Note to the six agencies involved mean the IMF, ITC, UNCTAD, UNDP, World Bank and WTO

is properly demand-driven and that it commands the full support and commitment of the government concerned; nevertheless, a least-developed country may request assistance to complete its needs assessment from any of the six agencies involved.

Review of the needs assessments

5. Once complete, each least-developed country's needs assessment is reviewed by the six agencies involved at an inter-agency meeting. The aim of such meetings is:

- (a) to allow the six agencies to develop a collective appreciation of the comprehensive needs for trade-related technical assistance of each least-developed country, what the priority needs are, and which needs are already being addressed through existing or planned technical assistance activities of multilateral or regional intergovernmental organisations or the country's bilateral development partners.

To assist with this last task, and to supplement where necessary the information supplied by each least-developed country, the six organisations are compiling an inventory of the trade-related technical assistance activities they are currently engaged in with least-developed countries, and a number of other multilateral and regional intergovernmental organisations have been asked to provide similar information³; this information will be presented in unrestricted background documents for the High-Level Meeting. The inventory of the collective activities of the six agencies will be updated regularly; other multilateral and regional intergovernmental organisations will be invited also to keep us informed about the trade-related technical assistance they are providing to least-developed countries.

- (b) to arrive at an understanding on which of the six agencies, individually or jointly with others, is in the best position in the light of its mandate and expertise to provide trade-related technical assistance to meet the identified needs of the least-developed country concerned, and how this assistance might best be timed and sequenced. The timing of the provision of technical assistance by any particular organisation may be influenced, *inter alia*, by the financial resources it has available for this exercise.

6. The results of the inter-agency consultations are communicated to and discussed with the least-developed country concerned, to ensure that they properly reflect its particular needs and priorities. At the same time, the least-developed country is requested to confirm which ministries and/or officials will be responsible at the local level for collaborating in the technical assistance activities, coordinating their implementation and monitoring them.

Country-specific roundtables

7. A separate roundtable meeting will be convened for each least-developed country that wishes to participate in this exercise: The least-developed country concerned will take the lead in conducting the roundtable meeting. The basic documentation for the meeting will be the country's needs assessment and the response of the six agencies in the form of an initial, multi-year country-specific programme

³African Development Bank, Agence de Francophonie, Asian Development Bank, Commonwealth Secretariat, FAO, Islamic Development Bank, UNECA, UNESCAP, UNIDO, World Customs Organisation, and WIPO. The OECD Secretariat has been asked to consider to what extent it might be possible to secure on a regular basis complementary information on the bilateral trade-related technical assistance activities of OECD member countries.

of trade-related technical assistance activities. Documentation will be circulated to all interested parties at least three weeks in advance of the roundtable meeting.

8. The least-developed country concerned will be responsible for selecting who, in addition to the six agencies, to invite to participate in its roundtable meeting. The meeting can provide an opportunity, *inter alia*, to involve other multilateral and regional organisations as well as bilateral development partners who have an interest in the exercise and who may be able to contribute to meeting the identified needs for trade-related technical assistance that are not otherwise being met.

9. A number of pilot country-specific roundtables will be organised at the High-Level Meeting in October 1997. The main criteria that will be applied in scheduling these roundtables will be the satisfactory completion of the needs assessment and the agencies' country-specific programme of technical assistance, along with those described by the Chair of the WTO Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries at its meeting on 26 June⁴.

10. Following the High-Level Meeting, further country-specific roundtable meetings will be organised at the request of individual least-developed countries wishing to participate in this exercise. The meetings will be scheduled to take place as soon as the necessary preparations are complete.

The provision of trade-related technical assistance

11. On the basis of the results of each country-specific roundtable, each of the six agencies will discuss and agree with the government of the least-developed country concerned the precise modalities for undertaking those technical assistance activities out of the integrated package of activities for which it is responsible. Each of the six agencies is responsible for securing the financial resources necessary to meet its commitments under this exercise.

III. PREPARATION OF THEMATIC ROUNDTABLES

12. A draft outline for conducting the two thematic roundtables that will take place at the High-Level Meeting in parallel with the country-specific roundtables has been prepared, along with a provisional list of suggested participants (see attachment 1 to this Note). A "brainstorming" meeting will be convened by UNCTAD in September to review the draft and prepare the debates at the roundtable meetings in October.

IV. INVITATIONS TO PARTICIPATE IN THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING

13. Invitations to participate in the High-Level Meeting have been sent to the Trade Ministers of all least-developed countries (see attachment 2 to this Note).

V. NGO SYMPOSIUM

14. In addition to the list of NGOs contained in WT/COMTD/W/28/Add.1, invitations to participate in the NGO Symposium on 25-26 September have been sent to the International Chamber of Commerce (France), Global Traders (Switzerland), and WASME (India).

⁴See paragraph 5 of WT/COMTD/LLDC/M/7

ATTACHMENT 1

30 July 1997

Thematic Roundtables at the High-Level Meeting for Least-Developed Countries
Suggested topics, recommendations and participants

Theme A

Building the "'capacity to trade" in least-developed countries

- (i) "The economic environment for trade reform in least-developed countries"
- (ii) "Human and institutional capacity building in LDCs"
- (iii) "Strengthening trade support services in LDCs"
- (iv) "Trade-related infrastructural needs of LDCs"

Suggested participants:

Minister of a least-developed country
Mr. Ali Bourhane, Co-Den of the Executive Board of the World Bank
Representative of the Swiss Development Corporation
Mr. Gautam Kaji, Managing Director of Operations, World Bank
Mr. D. Bèlisle, Executive Director, ITC
Senior staff member, UNDP (Mr. G. Speth if available)
Staff member, IMF
One of the six eminent business people (see list below)

Possible recommendations:

To LDCs:

To agencies:

To other development partners:

Theme B

Encouraging investment in least-developed countries

- (i) "Elements of international best practice in attracting foreign investment to LDCs"
- (ii) "Private sector involvement in infrastructural investment in LDCs"
- (iii) "Sustainable business strategy in LDCs"

Suggested participants:

Minister of a least-developed country
Mr. Jemal-Ud-Din Kassum, Vice-President Investment Operations, IFC
Mr. John Robinson, Vice President for Policy, Canadian International Development
Agency (CIDA)
One of the six eminent business people (see list below)

Possible recommendations

To LDCs:

To agencies:

To other development partners:

List of eminent business people invited to participate in the High-Level Meeting

Mr. Reginald Mengi, Chairman, IPP Limited, Tanzania
Mr. H. Maucher, Chairman, Nestlé S.A., Switzerland
Mr. Hideya Taida, Head of Corporate Strategy, Marubeni Corporation, Japan
Mr. Abdul Awal Mintoo, President, Bangladesh Employers' Association, Bangladesh
Mr. Hans J. Smith, Executive Chairman, Iscor Limited, South Africa
Mr. Ratan Tata, Chairman, Tata Iron and Steel Co. Ltd., India

ATTACHMENT 2

**UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE
ON TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT**

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Dear Minister,

It is a pleasure for us to invite your government to participate in the High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for Least-Developed Countries' Trade Development, to be held in Geneva on 27-28 October 1997. Information about the High-Level Meeting was provided by Mr. Ruggiero in his letter to you of 7 May 1997. Since then, most of the arrangements for the High-Level Meeting have been agreed on, and preparations are advancing well. We are pleased to provide you below with details of the format of the Meeting and principal subjects that will be addressed. It is our priority to ensure that the High-Level Meeting produces substantive results that will assist least-developed countries to deepen their participation in international trade and in the multilateral trading system.

A copy of the provisional agenda and format of the High-Level Meeting is enclosed with this letter⁵. There will be three principal components of the Meeting.

One of the main subjects to be addressed will be improvements in market access for products of particular export interest to least-developed countries. This reflects the importance attached to the issue of market access in the Comprehensive and Integrated WTO Plan of Action for the Least-Developed Countries, which WTO Ministers adopted in Singapore in December 1996, as well as the conclusions and recommendations of the Mid-Term Global Review of the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the LDCs and the outcome of UNCTAD IX. Recently, Mr. Ruggiero has written to a large number of WTO Trade Ministers encouraging them to improve their market access for imports from least-developed countries in the context of the High-Level Meeting. It is our hope that many of them will be in a position to make a significant contribution in October in this respect.

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Minister of Commerce
Ministry of Commerce

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⁵A copy of the provisional agenda has been circulated in Attachment 1 in document WT/COMTD/W/28/Add.1, of 24 July 1997.

Trade-related technical assistance, including for human and institutional capacity building, is the second main subject on the agenda of the High-Level Meeting. This will involve the combined efforts of six intergovernmental organisations active in the area of trade of the least-developed countries (the IMF, UNDP and the World Bank, as well as ITC, UNCTAD and WTO) and the least-developed countries. Our intention is to design an Integrated Framework for Technical Assistance among the organisations involved to support least-developed countries in their trade and trade-related activities, and to apply that Framework to meet the needs identified by individual least-developed countries. Following Mr. Ruggiero's invitation of 7 May to the Trade Ministers of all least-developed countries, the staff of the organisations involved are working closely with a number of least-developed countries, at their request, to help them complete a comprehensive assessment of their needs for trade-related technical assistance and to prepare to respond to those needs in an integrated manner. Where it has been possible to complete this exercise before October, the results will be featured in a series of selected country-specific roundtables at the High-Level Meeting. It is expected that these roundtables will prove to be of interest not only to the particular least-developed country directly involved in each of them and its development partners, but also to other least-developed countries which expect eventually to take advantage of this new integrated approach to trade-related technical assistance. We would like to emphasize the commitment of all of the organisations involved to continuing this exercise after the High-Level Meeting, both to respond to outstanding and new requests from least-developed countries for their trade-related technical assistance needs to be addressed in an integrated way and to follow-up on cases where the Integrated Framework is already being applied.

The third component of the High-Level Meeting will be devoted to two subjects which are viewed as crucial to enhancing the participation of least-developed countries in world trade: "Building the capacity to trade in least-developed countries" and "Encouraging investment in least-developed countries". These will be addressed through two thematic roundtables that will be held in parallel with the country-specific roundtables described above. Importance is being attached to ensuring that, through these thematic roundtables, ample opportunity is provided to representatives of the least-developed countries to air their concerns, and to ensuring that eminent business leaders familiar with the situation of least-developed countries are involved so as to be able to contribute their practical experience, insights and ideas. It is intended that the thematic roundtables will lead to concrete recommendations at the High-Level Meeting on how the participation of least-developed countries in world trade and investment can be enhanced.

We believe that the High-Level Meeting will present a unique opportunity for the international inter-governmental and business communities to lend their support to the efforts of least-developed countries to enhance their participation in international trade and to tackle substantively the main obstacles that stand in the way of them becoming viable trading nations. We hope that it will be possible for your government to be represented at the Meeting at a senior level, and it would give us great pleasure if you were able to participate yourself. Please inform us as soon as possible of the composition of your delegation. A certain amount of financing is available to assist least-developed country governments to cover the costs of the participation of their delegations at the High-Level Meeting. We shall be pleased to supply you with further information on this, or on any other aspect of the High-Level Meeting should you request it.

We remain, dear Minister,

Yours sincerely,

Renato Ruggiero
Director-General

Rubens Ricupero
Secretary-General

J. Denis Bélisle
Executive Director