

Event Announcement

UNCTAD XII Civil Society Forum

Going Beyond Rhetoric: Ensuring that EPAs Deliver Real Development

Organisers: CUTS International, Kenya

Date & Time: Friday April 18, 2008 /1630-1900hrs

Venue & Place: National Theatre South Liberia Road Room Lv1.1– Ghana National Theatre, South Liberia Road, Accra, Ghana

Objective

At the quadrennial meeting of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XII) in Accra, Ghana, this event will discuss the development perspective of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), so far, initialled between the European Union (EU) and African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries with a view of providing options for way forward in a manner that reflects both ACP's national and regional interests so as to ensure that the EPAs go beyond the rhetoric of sustainable development to becoming real tools for development. Messages and recommendations from this meeting will feed into the UNCTAD XII Civil Society Forum.

Background

The 31st December 2007 was the official D-day for signing EPAs between the EU (27 countries) and its former colonies in ACP (seventy-five countries). This was the day when the World Trade Organisation (WTO) waiver, an agreement from WTO member states allowing the EU to continue applying discriminatory non-reciprocal tariff preferences to ACP exports, ran out. Upon expiry of the WTO-waiver, the ACP and EU were to usher in a new WTO-compatible trading regime, which would require ACP countries to agreeing to either two things: a reciprocal market opening that would see them sign a Free Trade Agreement (called Economic Partnership Agreement) with the EU, or face less preferential market access in the EU by moving away from the discriminatory Cotonou preferences to the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP). At the onset of negotiations, five years back, the European Community (EC), negotiating on behalf of the EU, had, together with ACP countries, agreed that the EPAs they were beginning to negotiate would serve one broad objective, similar to that in their Cotonou Partnership Agreement (CPA), of sustainable development.

Being "an instrument for development", the EPAs were to be "centred on reducing and eventually eradicating poverty, and the gradual integration of ACP countries into the world economy." In October 2003, an ACP-EU Joint Ministerial Meeting on the EPAs made a declaration that the overall principles and objectives of the CPA would be augmented by the specific objectives of EPAs so as to promote sustained growth; increase the production and supply capacity of the ACP countries, foster their structural transformation and diversification; and support regional integration.

However, as of 1st January 2008 only 35 ACP countries had initialled the agreements. Out of this, 14 countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Dominican Republic (forming

CARIFORUM EPA Group) had initialled full agreements, with 18 African plus 2 Pacific countries initialling only interim accords, otherwise known as 'light versions' of EPAs.

Context

Throughout five years, the negotiation process has neither been easy, nor friendly and the agreements were initialled in haste. It is largely felt across the ACP that the EPAs were initialled, not for their good in delivering development, but out of fear that without preserving access to EU market a lot of trade would be disrupted.

Because of these reasons, among others, the initialled agreements have not only met with several criticisms, but an assertive call to reopen them for renegotiation of the contentious issues before moving on into signing (in the case of the initialled full agreements) or negotiating a full agreement (in the case of the interim agreements) so as to give EPAs a true perspective of sustainable development. For the ACP, major concerns remain in the areas of development support to address the ensuing adjustment costs and the economic and social impacts, market access into the EU for goods and services, consistency of the agreements with ACP regional integration, and the legal implications around the EPAs when they are finally signed.

It is an opportune time to highlight some of the important issues in the development perspective of the EPAs as UNCTAD's mandate is to promote the development-friendly integration of poor developing countries into the world economy. The UNCTAD recognises that civil society plays an important role in efforts to achieve sustainable human development and to alleviate poverty. For this reason, dialogue and interaction with civil society organisations (CSOs) promote UNCTAD's development role, impact and effectiveness.

Expected Outcome

Consistent with the theme of UNCTAD-XII, this event will discuss the development perspective of initialled economic partnership agreements to ensure that they go beyond the rhetoric for sustainable development. Messages and recommendations from this meeting will feed into the UNCTAD XII Civil Society Forum.

Speakers

Atul Kaushik, Adviser (Project), CUTS International (*Moderator/speaker*)

Kathrin Meissner, Resident Director, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, Ghana*

Angela Mulenga, Center Coordinator, CUTS International, Zambia

*[TBC]

Participants

All delegates of UNCTAD XII are invited.

For more information, please contact

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