

International Conference on Linkages between Trade, Development & Poverty
Civil Society Organisations and Aid for Trade – Roles and Realities
Nairobi, Kenya, 15-16 March 2007

Objectives

To provide a discussion forum to deliberate on various aspects of the involvement of civil society organisations (CSOs) in implementing aid for trade programmes in order to:

- provide CSOs with an opportunity to share their experiences in working on trade (for example, sustainability, social and fair trade issues) and to showcase best practices and effective tools to help target groups;
- identify in more detail the obstacles facing CSOs in working on trade;
- identify in more detail methods and/or support measures that will help CSOs to work on trade more effectively and to highlight these to policy-makers; and
- update CSOs on the substance and progress of existing and future AfT and to strategise for their engagement in the ongoing process.

Background

An important aspect of the aid programmes of developing countries is support for building capacity to trade more effectively and to take advantage of the opportunities provided by expanding global markets. This type of aid currently referred to as Aid for Trade (AfT), includes support for activities such as infrastructure development, skills development, technology enhancement and a range of other measures aiming to improve competitiveness.

There is a growing consensus amongst policy-makers that for poor and vulnerable countries AfT is an important complement to market access to be gained from WTO and other negotiations, as trade capacity constraints pose the biggest obstacle to their trade interests. In recognition of this developing countries pushed for commitments to be made relating to AfT in the current Doha Round of negotiations. In response the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration instructed the WTO members to form a Task Force to explore how the AfT agenda could be incorporated into the negotiations.

The AfT Task Force was formed in February 2006 and following a lengthy consultative process reported to WTO members in July 2006. Amongst other things its recommendations included a host of measures aiming to improve country-ownership of AfT programmes and the ability of domestic stakeholders to agree on AfT priorities, especially those most significant for poverty reduction. The Task Force report states that responding to these challenges is vital if AfT is to help create a new trade dynamic for developing countries.

Context

One group of stakeholders that need to be engaged more effectively in AfT discussions if country ownership is to be deepened and priorities effectively identified and agreed upon are Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) such as business and employer organisations, producer groups, consumer groups, Community Based Organisations, NGOs, academic institutions, parliamentarians and trade unions. These groups play an important role in communicating to policy-making processes the economic and social realities faced by the poor and marginalised and these perspectives need to be heard if AfT is to promote development for all.

However, CSOs face a whole host of obstacles to playing a more active role in AfT discussions including resource constraints, low levels of expertise, ineffective coordination of activities and inability to influence political processes. These obstacles need to be better understood and capacities need to be developed to tackle them effectively. Such capacities could involve: more effective formulation of policy messages, information sharing, strategising and coordination amongst CSOs and more effective alliance building in order to convince policy-makers.

Format

The discussions will be facilitated by presentations from TDP project partners on their experiences in working on trade policy and in engaging policy-makers in debate on AfT interventions. These will include country case studies about specific AfT requirements, building on business climate assessments such as the Integrated Framework, World Bank Doing Business, FIAS Barriers to Investment Studies and the UNCTAD Investment Policy Review. Possible solutions should be formulated also in the context of PRSPs. The topics to be discussed will include:

- Better understanding of the role of CSOs in sustainable trade policy and AfT
- Effective handling of capacity constraints facing CSOs in working on trade
- Improve ability of CSOs to formulate policy messages on trade and poverty
- Information sharing, strategising and coordination amongst CSOs and more effective alliance building in order to convince policy-makers.
- How to achieve progress on AfT at national and international level
- Strategies for engaging coalitions of CSOs in the AfT initiative

Outputs

The discussions will be utilised to formulate a CSO response to communicate to policy-makers involved in the AfT initiative, which will highlight the role of CSOs, the challenges they face in working on trade and recommended policy measures, In particular, the outputs will be as follows.

Documents

- Case studies documenting the experiences of CSOs in working on trade and poverty while showcasing best practices and effective tools
- An advocacy document, which will be used to promote CSO engagement in the ongoing AfT initiative. This advocacy document will highlight the role of the various CSOs, the challenges they face in working on trade and poverty and recommended support measures, which will enhance their effectivity of engagement in trade policy-making processes

Processes

- Improved capacity, expertise and strategic-thinking amongst CSOs to carry out advocacy on trade and poverty related policy issues
- Improved information sharing, cooperation and alliance building amongst CSOs working on trade and poverty related policy issues
- Increased support amongst policy-makers and donors to engage CSOs in trade and poverty policy-making and provide them with effective capacity building support

Participants

These will include the TDP project partners and other CSOs from the project countries working on trade, poverty and sustainable development. Some major civil society organisations and think tanks from Europe and USA will be invited to the forum. Policy-makers from developed and developing countries, representatives from inter-governmental and multilateral organisations, donors and academics will also be invited so that they can share their perspectives and engage in debate with CSOs on trade, poverty and AfT.

Venue

To be decided and informed

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