

**Report from the Preparatory Committee for UNCTAD XII,
Hearing with civil society and the private sector
Monday, 3 March 2008**

I. Opening remarks

The importance of the hearing as a forum to interact, as well as the civil society's and the private sector's guiding role to the secretariat was underlined. Furthermore, the expectation that better convergence between all parties will be reached before the conference in Accra was expressed, as well as the importance of the full use of the three pillars of UNCTAD and the need to link the three pillars together. It was considered important that UNCTAD will not only constitute a "talk-shop", along with that countries must agree on what work UNCTAD can and should undertake. The importance of working with civil society in order for UNCTAD to move forward was also highlighted.

II. Sub-theme 4: Strengthening UNCTAD: enhancing its development role, impact and institutional effectiveness

Institutional aspects

Many participants called for a permanent reorganization of UNCTAD institutions, and consensus building was considered constituting the backbone of UNCTAD. It was felt that UNCTAD should deal with practical issues and seek to maintain the poorest countries' hope in development. It was stressed that disadvantaged categories must be considered in order to seek balance between stakeholders.

Many participants highlighted that studies and investigations undertaken by UNCTAD should seek for pragmatic solutions, and that there is a need to step up measures to make UNCTAD a leader in trade and economic policies. It was also stressed by many that the civil society should be considered a strategic partner and that there is a forthcoming need to extend activities between UNCTAD and civil society, for example through an increased frequency of meetings and real participation of NGOs, including those from the field, in all debates of UNCTAD. The latter would also contribute to creating direct links to countries in order to spread the work of UNCTAD, and to constitute an important part in fostering democracy. Furthermore, many participants underlined that UNCTAD has to be seen as a space where developing countries can take part in international debate.

Many participants expressed that UNCTAD's work needs to focus on how to help countries, and to defend human rights and economic, social and cultural rights. Technological cooperation as a means to increased knowledge was mentioned as one way of helping and supporting countries. Several participants highlighted the question of what impact migration has on development.

According to one participant, UNCTAD should, through the creation of a new globalization committee, assist poor countries with advises on development. The creation of Economic Processing Zones (EPZs) and enterprises was given as examples of how growth could be created.

One participant expressed UNCTAD's essential role and UNCTAD as an appropriate forum for diverse issues by having a new development based approach – a task that no other international organization was considered able to take on. Another participant highlighted UNCTAD's role concerning challenges of globalization, and stressed the question of how global growth can be spread to countries with weak institutions. The need to establish tools for empowerment of grassroots was underlined.

One participant underlined its lack of will to accept the creation of new bodies within UNCTAD since the functioning of the already existing ones was considered inefficiently. The same participant emphasized the importance of all stakeholders' contributions, even though this sometimes can involve that cultural changes are needed. The same participant also highlighted the importance of non-partial and objective research, as well as the need of prioritization in order to not overload the program of work. The question of whether to expand or to go more deep was raised. Furthermore, the need for more clearly defined objectives and what the outcomes of meetings should be was emphasized, as well as a need to streamline processes and to expand the engagement by member states.

Another participant noted the convergence of the member countries' negotiations and the NGO's interventions during the hearing. The importance of independence of analysis was also underlined, as well as the need to give UNCTAD a broad comprehensive mandate. Furthermore the same participant stressed that the current bodies of UNCTAD not are enough to face all challenges of developing countries.

Role of civil society in the activities of UNCTAD

Many participants expressed that the civil society cannot be considered only as an observer, but must be a fully fledged partner to UNCTAD and has to be seen as a valuable and indispensable player in the development endeavor. Many participants called for the inclusion of a general paragraph calling for a mainstreaming of the UNCTAD/CSO partnership in the work of the organization.

Regarding research and analysis, many participants called for UNCTAD to outreach civil society to compensate for UNCTAD's lack of a direct link with the field. Consultation with grassroots organization was by many seen as an important alternative to the main globalization paradigm driven by the Bretton Woods institutions and WTO. Furthermore, many participants called for UNCTAD to help and support the elaboration of such alternative international economic model, which could ensure fair and sustainable development for all.

On the issue of consensus building, many participants felt that expanding and deepening the relationship with civil society and the private sector will further strengthen both the institution and its intergovernmental debate. Many participants also stressed the need of more civil society experts/presenters in all UNCTAD meetings panels and expressed their wish that NGOs/CSOs should be authorized and encouraged to propose the establishment of expert meetings on one specific subject. Many participants also called for a more interactive dialogue with member states, as well as for more time for discussion and more interactive exchange at various stages of the policy shaping process, continuing on wide participation of delegates.

Regarding technical cooperation, many participants called for training and capacity building programs for NGOs/CSOs in the south, and for UNCTAD to develop its outreach program in order for people in developing countries to be able to be updated on and take part in UNCTAD's work.

One participant called for more capacities to finance NGOs participation, especially from developing countries, and also stressed that NGOs/CSOs, besides economic support, also need encouragement.

Another participant stressed the need of domestic reforms and education and training as essential for development. The participant underlined that, in order to foster development, the public-private partnership needs to be taken into account by UNCTAD, as well as the new geography of trade and investments. Furthermore, the same participant believed that UNCTAD should bridge the gaps to cope with the conditions in the digital age, but technological assistance is not enough.

III. Revitalizing UNCTAD: Priority issues

Many participants emphasized the impact of trade on employment and the need of more analysis on this issue. It was stressed by many participants that not just any jobs are needed to foster growth, and that growth can exist without creating more jobs. Many participants also stressed the issue of seeing Export Processing Zones (EPZs) as solutions for developing countries, and expressed their concern about the exploration of workers and the lack of decent income and standards in these zones. The need of solutions to these problems was underlined by many participants.

Many participants also underlined the need of sustainable agricultural systems and food systems, and that action among UN member states is needed on this issue. Many participants also considered that prioritized issues during UNCTAD XII should be: development-friendly trade rules; transnational cooperations; commodities; the effects of higher food prices; and benefits of trade distribution.

One participant stressed the need of gender based contribution and capacity building, and noted the need of research on women's benefits in trade.