

UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development (CBTF)

Report of the CBTF Side Event on Trade Liberalization, Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges for small island developing States (SIDS), Mauritius, 11 January 2005

The UNCTAD and UNEP secretariats, as part of the UNEP-UNCTAD Capacity Building Task Force on Trade, Environment and Development (CBTF), jointly convened a side event on "Trade Liberalization, Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development: Opportunities and Challenges for small island developing States (SIDS)", during the 'International Meeting to Review the Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS)'. The side event took place in the Convention Centre, Port Louis, on 11 January 2005 (13h15 – 14h45).

Recognizing that trade and environment is an important relationship for SIDS, the CBTF had already organized regional capacity building workshops, back-to-back with WTO regional Trade and Environment Seminars, for Pacific Island Countries (Suva, Fiji, on 28 November 2002) and Caribbean countries (Kingston, Jamaica, on 29 November 2003). Both workshops revealed a strong interest, in SIDS, in capacity building activities aimed at enhancing national coordination on trade and environment issues and resulted in the identification of priority issues for possible future CBTF activities. The meeting was intended to assist the CBTF in planning future activities for SIDS.

Some 75 participants, including government delegations and representatives of intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations attending the Mauritius International Meeting, participated in the side event.

The event was chaired by H.E. Ambassador Nassir Abdulaziz Al-Nasser Permanent Representative of the State of Qatar to the United Nations and the Chairman of the Group of 77. Dr. Klaus Töpfer, Executive Director, United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) delivered a keynote statement. It was followed by presentations on the following issues:

- (a) Sustainable tourism development, introduced by H.E. Ms. Magdalena Brito Neves, Minister of Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries, Republic of Cape Verde.
- (b) Sustainable Fisheries Management in SIDS, introduced by H.E. Mr. Dean Peart, Minister of Land and Environment, Jamaica; and
- (c) Organic Products: Opportunities and Challenges for SIDS, introduced by H.E. Mr. Rajesh Anand Bhagwan, Minister of Environment and National Development, Republic of Mauritius.

The presentations and discussions that followed highlighted the importance of capacity building concerning the relationship between trade, environment and development for SIDS.

In particular it was emphasized that niche markets for organic agricultural and other environmentally preferable products could assist SIDS in diversifying exports and alleviating the effects of the erosion of trade preferences. CBTF-supported activities, such as policy

dialogues and studies, could help SIDS in their analysis of opportunities and constraints in this regard and take informed policy decisions.

With regard to tourism, The Barbados Plan of Action had identified tourism as one of only a few development options for SIDS, but had recognized that tourism could also significantly degrade the environment. Participants in a Pre-UNCTAD XI high-level international meeting of experts on sustainable tourism for development (Lisbon, March 2004) had recommended that CBTF should be used as an important framework for promoting the development of sustainable tourism strategies, in cooperation with the World Tourism Organization. In this regard, particular emphasis should be placed on the rational use of natural resources, the diversification and enhancement of tourism products, responding to changes in international demand, and strengthening linkages between tourism and local products such as organic products and handicrafts. The Director General of the Ministry of Environment, Agriculture and Fisheries of the Republic of Cape Verde explained the country's opportunities for highly diversified tourism activities as a means to promote sustainable development.

Discussions on fisheries highlighted the importance for the sustainable development of this sector for SIDS. Fisheries and other marine resources provided a large share of the food, employment and economic activity for SIDS. There was a need to explore the use of sustainable fishing techniques.

It is to be noted that the Mauritius Strategy for the Further Implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (A/CONF.207/CRP.7, 13 January 2005) listed the relationship between trade, environment and development among a number of issues of special concern to SIDS in seeking to integrate into the global economy (paragraph 67(h)). Similarly, in the section on capacity development, it called for the delivery of coordinated, effective and targeted trade-related technical assistance and capacity building programmes for SIDS including taking advantage of existing and future market access opportunities and examining the relationship between trade, environment and development.

The UNEP and UNCTAD secretariats have agreed to allocate some existing CBTF resources for a limited number of follow up activities for SIDS and to carry out fund-raising activities for a more comprehensive programme for SIDS as a follow-up to the above-mentioned workshops as well as the Mauritius side event.

In preparation of the side event, the UNCTAD and UNEP secretariats prepared a special CBTF newsletter (<http://www.unep-unctad.org/cbtf/cbtf2/meetings/sids/SIDSnewsletter.pdf>) describing the CBTF programme and trade and environment issues of interest to SIDS.

An UNCTAD publication prepared on the occasion of the Mauritius meeting entitled "Is a special treatment of small island developing countries possible? Includes a chapter on "Trade and Environment: an important relationship for SIDS", building considerably on work carried out for and the outcomes of CBTF workshop for SIDS.