

United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

A Survey of Support by Investment Promotion Agencies to Linkages



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ABBREVIATIONS

ASIT	Advisory Services on Investment and Training
BDS	business development services
FDI	foreign direct investment
FIAS	Foreign Investment Advisory Service
IPA	investment promotion agency
ISA	Invest in Sweden Agency
IT	information technology
MIGA	Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
SMEs	small- and medium-sized enterprises
TNC	transnational corporation
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNIDO	United Nations Industrial Development Organization
WAIPA	World Association of Investment Promotion Agencies

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Based on a survey of 123 investment promotion agencies (IPAs) from 109 countries undertaken by UNCTAD in 2004, this study explores the extent to which IPAs carry out activities to promote the formation of business linkages between foreign investors and local SMEs, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of IPA business linkages programmes. A summary of the responses is contained in Annex A. The list of surveyed IPAs can be found in Annex C.

Overall, 51 out of the 123 IPAs reported having a linkages programme. By region, the breakdown was nine out of 26 Latin American IPAs, 16 out of 35 African IPAs, 16 out of 29 IPAs from Asia and the Pacific and 10 out of 33 European IPAs. Seventy-two IPAs reported not having any business linkages programme.

The survey found that the establishment of linkages is a relatively new activity for IPAs and is an area with growth potential. Of the IPAs that have a linkages programme, 61 per cent are considered the lead agency for encouraging business linkages. The remaining 39 per cent share that responsibility with other institutions, such as the ministries of industry, commerce and technology, as well as business development services (BDS) providers for SMEs and universities.

IPA linkages programmes share certain common features. The majority tends to encourage the creation of new backward linkages with local suppliers, as well as the deepening and upgrading of existing backward linkages with those suppliers. To facilitate this, IPAs engage in matchmaking and networking activities. A number also support programmes to disseminate information, to forge linkages that emphasize technology partnerships and to support the upgrading of local SME capacity.

IPA linkages programmes focus on certain industries, depending upon the region. The survey found, for example, that IPAs from Latin America and the Caribbean and Africa focus on agro-industries and other manufactured goods, while IPAs from Asia and the Pacific focus on information technology and IPAs from Europe emphasize electronics.

Despite the growing number of IPAs with formal or informal linkages programmes, the vast majority of local SMEs in developing countries remain de-linked from TNCs. The study shows that most of the 72 surveyed IPAs that are not engaged in linkages programmes are inactive in this area because: 1) they do not have sufficient budgets to support business linkages programmes; 2) linkages promotion is not emphasized in their mandates; 3) specialized agencies other than IPAs deal with linkages promotion; 4) they do not have enough human resources, either in number or expertise; and 5) they do not have the in-house know-how to implement such programmes.

Many IPAs cited several reasons why many SMEs in their country do not make attractive business partners for TNCs. These include insufficient capacity of SMEs to provide quality goods or services due to an inadequate regulatory framework to support partnerships with SMEs, the lack of managerial, technological and financial

resources, and the lack of tax incentives to encourage partnerships between TNCs and local SMEs. Those IPAs who considered themselves to have strong business linkages programmes cited the SMEs level of technology and good quality control as key success factors.

With respect to environmental factors, political instability, lack of participation in existing linkages programmes and the lack of basic infrastructure appear to be major impediments.

One consistent pattern arising from the survey responses was the tendency of IPAs from Asia and the Pacific and Europe to evaluate their programmes as being effective, while those from Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean tended to evaluate their programmes as weak.

The study has three main conclusions. First, those IPAs that wish to be active in supporting the creation and nurturing of business linkages should have a clear mandate to provide prospective investors with accurate and timely information and contacts on potential SME partners. Second, IPAs should make full use of their position to help mobilize TNCs and other stakeholders to nurture their partners in the host economy. Finally, effective IPA business linkages programmes value not only job creation but also the transfer of skills and technology.

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