

GLOBALIZATION OF R&D AND DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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The secretariat is grateful to the authors of the papers included in this volume, which were presented at the Expert Meeting on "The Impact of FDI on Development", that was held in Geneva from 24 to 26 January 2005 and dealt with the globalization of research and development and its implications for development. These issues are expected to remain for a long time at the heart of policy debate on technological development in developing countries. It is hoped that this volume will contribute to that debate in a timely manner. With the exception of the Overview, which was prepared by the UNCTAD Secretariat, the views and the opinions expressed are those of the authors and not of the United Nations.

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PREFACE

Reflecting a broader trend towards the offshoring of services, a number of developing countries are attracting foreign direct investment in research and development. Transnational corporations, including the ones headquartered in developing countries, are selecting developing countries as locations for such activities. With the offshoring of research and development, firms aim to access the skills of new locations, adapting products to local markets and reducing their costs, in response to competitive pressures, technological changes and a more liberal trade and investment environment. In particular, information and communication technologies have had a profound effect on the way economic activities, including research and development, are organized, enabling firms to allocate tasks on a global scale through intra-firm information networks. At the same time, keeping up with new developments in information and communication technologies is a major challenge for developing countries wishing to accelerate their economic development. How important is this relatively recent phenomenon? Is it set to continue?

This publication aims to elaborate key issues related to the trends towards globalization of research and development and their implications for developing countries: What is its development potential? How can the establishment of research and development abroad affect the transfer of technology – one of the main potential benefits from foreign direct investment? What types of research and development are the most desirable for development? What benefits and costs are involved and, how can policies in home and host countries influence the allocation of such activities and their economic impact?

These questions were elaborated at the Expert Meeting on FDI in R&D held in January 2005. This volume contains written submissions presented by scholars and experts at the Expert Meeting. The overview chapter is based on a note prepared by the UNCTAD secretariat for the meeting. The Chairperson's summary of the discussion at the Expert Meeting is also included, reflecting the diversified views expressed by scholars and experts from governments. The issues addressed, to mention a few, included the use of foreign direct investment versus contractual channels in acquiring innovative capacities in developing countries, the potential links of transnational corporations' research and development activities with the local innovation systems of host countries, the likelihood of research and development activities spreading to new developing locations and, the kinds of host country policies that can facilitate the diffusion of technologies from foreign affiliates' activities to the local economy.

UNCTAD's analysis of transnational corporations' research and development activities in developing countries benefited largely from the insights gained at the expert meeting. The continuation and deepening of that analysis resulted in the publication, in September 2005, of the *World Investment Report 2005: Transnational Corporations and the Internationalization of R&D* (WIR05; UNCTAD 2005). The readers of this volume may find in WIR05 a rich body of additional first-hand information on trends in research and development, its development impact and policy implications. Furthermore, readers familiar with the WIR05 will also find interesting expert opinions and additional case studies.

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