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Trade Point Review 2000-2001

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Abbreviations

ATPI	African Trade Point Initiative
BOAD	West African Development Bank
CA	Certification Authority
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
CPLP	Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa)
EATB	Euro-Asia Trade Bridge
ETN	Eurasian Trade Network
ETO	Electronic Trading Opportunity
EU	European Union
GTPNet	Global Trade Point Network
IATPF	Inter-American Trade Point Forum
ISO	International Organization for Standardization
IT	information technologies
ITC	International Trade Centre UNCTAD/WTO
LDCs	least developed countries
JITAP	Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme to Selected Least Developed and Other African Countries
METCO	Malta External Trade Corporation
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Area
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PKI	Public Key Infrastructure
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SAARC	South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
SMEs	small and medium-sized enterprises
SMMEs	small, medium-sized and micro-enterprises
TACIS	Technical Assistance to the CIS Countries
TRAINS	TRade Analysis and INformation System
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNOPS	United Nations Office for Project Services
UNTPDC	United Nations Trade Point Development Centre
WTO	World Trade Organization

Foreword

The Trade Point Programme was launched by UNCTAD in 1992 with the aim of opening international markets to new participants, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), and making them more competitive by giving them access to the most advanced information and telecommunication technologies and networks. Trade Points, acting as points of entry for SMEs to international trade and electronic commerce, have since been set up in 83 countries around the world. They have provided invaluable assistance to those who might otherwise have been left behind the new technological trends, especially the SMEs in the developing and least developed countries.

The speed of technological developments and the competitive nature of the e-commerce market present both a formidable challenge and an opportunity for the Programme. Cooperation with external partners, including the private sector, would be productive in this regard. However, such cooperation cannot achieve its fullest potential within the United Nations framework because of the nature of the organization. The Trade Points worldwide therefore decided to create the World Trade Point Federation, a non-profit international organization that is meant gradually to take over the Programme from UNCTAD and manage it on behalf of its members – Trade Points. The first steps have already been taken, with the transfer of the Programme's trade leads service, the Electronic Trading Opportunity (ETO) system, to the Federation.

In accordance with its statutes, the Federation is committed to continuing the Programme's developmental goals and its assistance to weaker players, and intends to cooperate with the United Nations. The linkage with the developmental work of the United Nations will be ensured through UNCTAD's advisory seat on the Federation's Steering Committee.

The **Trade Point Review 2000-2001** assesses past progress and future challenges in the implementation of the Programme's strategy, which was adopted by UNCTAD member States in October 1999 with a view to transferring the Programme from UNCTAD. The World Trade Point Federation was formally established in November 2000; its Steering Committee is now working with UNCTAD to make it fully operational and able to take over the Programme in October 2002, when implementation of the strategy should be completed. Much work remains to be done and a number of obstacles have to be surmounted. The Federation is now preparing for negotiations with strategic partners on transaction support services for Trade Points and their clients, which should enhance their income-generating ability and strengthen the network as a whole. During this crucial transitional period UNCTAD has been working closely with the Federation, whose enthusiasm and commitment augur well for the future.

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Chapter 1: Highlights of the year

The period starting in October 2000 was the second year of implementation of the three-year Trade Point Programme strategy adopted in 1999. Consequently, the activities conducted during this period were geared towards progress in this regard. The main focus of the concerted efforts over the last year was on the preparations for the transfer of the Programme to the World Trade Point Federation, which is planned to take place on the completion of the strategy in October 2002.

The milestones in the Programme during 2000-2001 are set out below.

- *UNCTAD member States' review of the implementation of the Trade Point Programme strategy (Geneva, September 2000)*

UNCTAD member States meet yearly to review issues related to UNCTAD's technical cooperation activities and to decide on the action that should be taken during the coming year as a matter of priority. The meeting of UNCTAD's Working Party on the Medium-term Plan and the Programme Budget that was held in September 2000 invited the secretariat to proceed with the implementation of the Trade Point Programme strategy¹ within the agreed time-frame. UNCTAD member States felt that particular efforts should be made to transfer the ETO system to a suitable non-profit entity outside UNCTAD and to set up an international Trade Point federation. They invited donor countries to make available extrabudgetary resources for capacity-building projects envisaged in the strategy.²

- *Sixth World Trade Point Meeting (Geneva, 6-10 November 2000)*

This meeting brought together 160 participants from 66 countries, including managers from 58 Trade Points. Its agenda was largely shaped around the main tasks outlined in the Programme's strategy. Since the first task related to technical development, two sessions of the meeting were dedicated to the presentation of the renovated GTPNet, discussion of services and tools that could further enrich it, and debates on the ETO system. The second major issue was the strengthening of Trade Points, both individually and collectively. Time was therefore allocated to presentations of replicable web-based Trade Point services that could attract clients and generate income, and discussion of capacity building and of assistance that the Trade Points could obtain from international organizations. At the collective level, participants discussed cooperation among Trade Points, and took a historic decision to create the World Trade Point Federation, which should gradually take over the Programme from UNCTAD. The newly created Federation expressed its preparedness to take over the ETO system.³

¹ "Follow-up to the evaluation of the Trade Point Programme: Trade Point Programme strategy", TD/B/WP/120, 9 August 1999.

² For a full account of the Working Party decisions see the UNCTAD report "Evaluation of technical cooperation programmes", TD/B/47/L.4, 19 September 2000.

³ The report of the Sixth World Trade Point Meeting, presentations and decisions made at the meeting, can be found at www.gtpnet-e.com.

- *Externalization of the ETO system (May 2001)*

UNCTAD explored the two possible arrangements for the future of the ETO system, namely identification of a suitable non-profit entity that would operate the system under a contract with UNCTAD, and transfer of the ownership and management of the system to the World Trade Point Federation. It was finally decided to transfer the system to the Federation since this better corresponded to the member States' wish to release the United Nations from any liability with regard to the system. The Federation currently operates the system on a temporary basis in Trade Points Madrid and Castilla La Mancha in Spain. In the longer term, it is expected that a strategic partner will be identified for the operation and further development of the system.

Chapter 2: Progress in the implementation of the new strategy

Last year there has been further progress in the implementation of the new Trade Point Programme strategy. The main objective was to advance the externalization of the Programme, in particular its transfer to the World Trade Point Federation.

To be successful, this endeavour requires a number of actions, including the following:

- The formal establishment of the World Trade Point Federation;
- The building of capacity in the Federation to gradually take over UNCTAD's current support functions and to perform additional tasks that are vital for the future of the Programme and that cannot be fulfilled by a United Nations agency;
- The putting in place of a model that will allow the Federation to be financially sustainable;
(The progress achieved in these tasks is described in chapter 2.1.)
- The consolidation of the membership of the Trade Point Programme before it is transferred to the Federation (for details see chapters 2.3 and 3);
- The strengthening of cooperation among Trade Points and their capacity to act as a network globally, regionally and nationally (for details see chapter 4).

In the two-year transition period, it was decided to start with the externalization of technical components of the Programme. In line with the decision taken by UNCTAD member States, the ETO system was externalized first. In accordance with the strategy, the remaining web-based services of the Programme, in particular the Global Trade Point Network website and its Trade Point client database, will follow shortly. Chapter 2.2 deals with the transfer of the ETO system and its current status.

2.1 World Trade Point Federation

The Trade Points worldwide realized that the Programme only had a future under the new strategy if they worked together and made efforts to take it over from UNCTAD. Consequently, the creation of the Federation was scheduled as one of the two crucial

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