

AFRICAN UNION
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REPORT ON THE TWELFTH UNCTAD SESSION

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Issues, Activities and Results

The Twelfth Session of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD XII) was held in Accra, Ghana, from 20 to 26 April 2008. It was attended by delegates from 146 Member States of the organization, including 44 Member States of the African Union. Represented at the Conference were other United Nations organs/ specialized agencies and major global and regional organizations, both intergovernmental and non-governmental. The Commission of the African Union participated in the Conference and provided technical support to African delegations.

The theme of UNCTAD XII was “Addressing the opportunities and challenges of globalization for development”. A major activity of the Conference was a High-level Debate on “Trade and Development for Africa’s Prosperity-Action and Direction”, which was chaired by the Secretary-General of the United Nations, moderated by the Secretary-General of UNCTAD and in which the Presidents of Ghana, Brazil, Finland, Sierra Leone, former President Mkapa of Tanzania, and the Vice-President of El Salvador served as the panelists. This was followed by Roundtables on major issues within the general theme of the Conference. The issues that were discussed and on which the Conference made recommendations include: Globalization, development and poverty reduction; Creating an institutional environment conducive to increased foreign investment and sustainable development; The changing face of commodities in the 21st Century; Emergence of a new South-South trade as a vehicle for regional and interregional integration for development; Harnessing knowledge and technology for development, Debt management solutions supporting trade and development; Developing productive capacities in Least Developed Countries; and Strengthening UNCTAD to enhance its development role, impact and institutional effectiveness. In addition to the Roundtables, there were side events organized by numerous NGOs and statements at Plenary Sessions by UNCTAD Members.

The major outcome of UNCTAD XXII was adoption of two major documents: The Accra Declaration and The Accra Accord, both of which acknowledged the continued relevance of UNCTAD, in an increasingly complex global economy, as an institution with universal membership and a mandate to serve as the focal point of the United Nations for the integrated treatment of trade and development and interrelated issues in the areas of finance, technology, investment and sustainable development. UNCTAD emerged from its 12th Session a strengthened organization with an enhanced mandate in its core areas of operations (research and analysis, consensus building, and technical cooperation. It was agreed that “While working in support of all developing countries and countries with economies in transition, UNCTAD should enhance its work on the special problems of the African continent and of the least developed countries...UNCTAD must strengthen its special focus on the needs of LDCs and Africa across all areas of its mandate and in accordance with the Bangkok Plan of Action and

Sao Paulo Consensus". The Accra Accord has set out the actions required of UNCTAD to assist developing countries to address development opportunities and challenges and reap the benefits of globalization.

Way forward and Recommendations

As a follow up to UNCTAD XII, the major challenge is for the Commission of the African Union, the Regional Economic Communities, and the Member States of the African Union to take full advantage of the strengthening of UNCTAD and the statement of strong commitment of UNCTAD to the cause of Africa's development, by utilizing effectively the services of the organization to address development opportunities and challenges for reaping the benefits of globalization. The major areas of Africa's development needs and concerns where the research and policy analysis, the consensus building, and the technical cooperation role of UNCTAD can be critical include:

- Building of capacity in multilateral trade negotiations, especially WTO negotiations and assistance to African countries in defining the correct balance between international commitments and disciplines, and national policy space;
- Assistance to interested African Union Member States in securing accession to the WTO;
- Support for the implementation of trade agreements;
- Assistance to African countries in mainstreaming trade into development policies and strategies at the national, regional and continental levels;
- Building of productive and trade capacity: infrastructure, human capital, technology, legal and regulatory frameworks and institutions for upgrading of standards, fair competition, export promotion, development of dynamic and new sectors of global trade, and the creation of new supply and export capacities in more value added sectors;
- Addressing the problems of commodity dependence, including the volatility of prices and the diversification of production structures in African economies that are dependent on a few commodities;
- Assistance in the prudent management of windfalls from the upsurge of natural resource prices;
- Support for private sector and entrepreneurship development, public-private sector partnerships;
- Achievement of an African Green Revolution, food security and increased agricultural productivity, especially in the food sector;
- Creation of an enabling environment for domestic and foreign investment, and the development of investment codes that strike a proper balance between the rights and obligations of the host countries and foreign enterprises;
- Support to the African Union in the implementation of its regional integration agenda: fast tracking the process of the establishment of the African Economic Community, the implementation of the Action Plan for Industrial Development of Africa, the Action Plan for the Development of Science and Technology, etc;

- Attainment of the Millennium Development Goals, which requires securing the enhancement of the support of the developed countries to meet their commitments and obligations with regard to ODA, Aid for Trade, Fair and Balanced Multilateral Trading System, Debt Relief, etc; and
- Development of South-South cooperation and establishment of synergies between Africa's economy and those of the emerging powers of the South for the mutual benefits of both sides.

At the Joint Conference of AU Ministers of Trade and Finance that was held in Addis Ababa just before UNCTAD XII, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the AUC and UNCTAD was signed. The MOU provides a framework for cooperation between the two organizations and for securing the support of UNCTAD in the three pillars of its mandate for the implementation of the programmes and projects of the African Union. The Commission of the African Union should organize, as soon as possible, an AUC-UNCTAD meeting to develop and prioritize a programme of cooperation that will assist Africa to address development opportunities and challenges and effectively harness the positive forces of globalization in accordance with the Accra Declaration and the Accra Accord.

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