



ESCWA



LAS



UNEP

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMISSION FOR WESTERN ASIA

Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment Capacity Building
Muscat, Oman, 25-27 March 2006

INFORMATION NOTE**I. BACKGROUND**

1. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), in cooperation with the League of Arab States (LAS) and the United Nations Environment Program / Regional Office for Western Asia (UNEP/ROWA), are organizing a Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment Capacity Building from 25 to 27 March 2006 in Muscat, Oman. The workshop is being conducted under the auspices of H.E. Sheik Abdullah Bin Salem Bin Amer Al-Rawas, Minister of the Ministry of Rural Municipalities, Environment and Water Resources of Oman.

2. The workshop is among the activities being conducted within the framework of the Regional Program on Trade and Environment Capacity Building, which was adopted by resolution of the Council of Arab Ministers Responsible for the Environment (CAMRE) of the League of Arab States in 2003. ESCWA, UNEP /ROWA and the CAMRE Technical Secretariat are responsible for coordinating the regional program. The workshop is also among the activities being organized by ESCWA as part of the implementation of the United Nations Development Account project on Capacity Building in Trade and the Environment.

3. The United Nations Development Account project on Capacity Building in Trade and the Environment is an inter-regional activity that is being implemented by four Regional Commissions of the United Nations. The project seeks to assist developing Member States to formulate coherent trade and environment policies in view of increasing market access for their products through better understanding of environmental standards, while ensuring environmental sustainability. Project activities in the ESCWA region include the preparation of:

- A regional workshop on trade and environment capacity building (Oman, 25-27 March 2006)
- Two sub-regional studies focusing on a key trade and environment priority issue being faced by countries in the Mashreq and the Gulf sub-regions (March-October 2006).
- Six national roundtables to discuss trade and environment priority issues with local stakeholders in the public and private sectors (April-July 2006)
- A High Level Meeting on Trade and Environment to foster consensus on regional priorities and positions (October 2006)

The project is coordinated among four United Nations Regional Commission (ESCAP, ESCWA, ECA and ESCAP), in collaboration with other United Nations agencies (UNCTAD and UNEP) as well as the WTO.

4. Ministries responsible for trade and environment issues in ESCWA Member States that are interested in participating in these capacity building activities are invited to designate or to establish an inter-ministerial national committee responsible for trade and environment issues, which would be responsible for coordinating project-related activities with public and private stakeholders at the national level. It is recommended that the senior coordinators of this committee or the national representatives responsible for inter-ministerial trade and environment policy coordination participate in the Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment Capacity Building in March 2006.

II. JUSTIFICATION

5. The rapidly changing arena of international trade has introduced new challenges and opportunities for developing countries in their efforts to achieve sustainable development. This has increased the importance of examining the relationship between trade and environment policies in an integrated manner.

6. The need for developing mutually supportive trade and environmental policies was expressed at the World Summit for Sustainable Development (WSSD), where Member States called on United Nations organizations, including regional organizations, to enhance the delivery of coordinated and targeted technical assistance and capacity building programs on trade and environment, and particularly to promote cooperation on trade, environment and development and provide technical assistance to developing countries to this end. Specifically, the WSSD Plan of Implementation (paragraphs 92-98) calls on Member States to improve market access and reduce non-tariff barriers on products of export interest to developing countries, while taking into account the special needs of developing and least developed countries; to encourage reform of subsidies that have considerable negative effect on the environment; to encourage the voluntary use of environmental impact assessments as an important tool for identifying trade, environment and development inter-linkages; and to promote the mutual supportiveness between the multilateral trading system and multilateral environmental agreements in view of promoting sustainable development.

7. The Sustainable Development Initiative in the Arab Region adopted in preparation for the WSSD specifically calls upon the international community to support the efforts of Arab countries to avoid the negative effects resulting from globalization on the economic, technical, environmental and social levels; to strengthen the competitiveness of Arab commodities; and to endeavor to abolish all forms of subsidies, assistance and barriers imposed by the industrial countries that impede the access of Arab commodities in international markets. These concerns were subsequently raised during multilateral trade negotiations.

8. The Doha Ministerial Declaration of the Member States of the World Trade Organization (WTO) emphasizes the importance of the trade and environment nexus in paragraphs 31-33 by: a) mandating further negotiations; b) instructing the Committee on Trade and Environment to give attention to issues including the effect of environmental measures on market access; and c) recognizing the importance of technical assistance and capacity building in trade and environment to developing countries. The Arab Declaration by the Arab Ministerial Meeting Convened to Prepare for the Sixth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (Beirut, 30 November-1 December 2005) also took note of the relationship between trade, environment and development, and in particular topics related to environmental goods and services, non-tariff barriers, market access and the need for special and differential treatment for developing countries. These issues were also addressed in the Ministerial Declaration following the Sixth Ministerial Conference (Hong Kong, 13-18 December 2005), which reaffirms the need to enhance the mutual supportiveness of trade and environment.

9. The Regional Program on Trade and Environment Capacity Building in the Arab Region seeks to enhance the capacity of Member States to formulate coherent trade and environment policies in response to global, regional and national mandates. The program focuses on three pillars, namely the need to enhance market access, competitiveness and the skills needed to engage in negotiations and dispute resolution on trade and environment topics. This workshop will address these priorities by focusing on environmental measures affecting market access and mechanisms for assisting Member States to prepare for negotiations. As such, the workshop also supports the objectives of the United Nations Development Account project, which seeks to enhance the capacity of developing countries to appropriately respond to the environmental standards of developed countries thus improving market access to developed country markets, while helping developing countries to better manage the pressures on the local environment arising from increased trade flow into and out of developing countries.

III. OBJECTIVES

10. In view of the above, the regional workshop will seek to provide practical training on major topics and priorities related to trade and environment negotiations and policy-making at the global, regional and national levels, with a focus on issues related to increasing market access for exports and environmental sustainability.

The workshop will focus specifically on issues related to current trade and environment topics being negotiated in international trade agreements and selected trade-related multilateral environment agreements at the global and regional levels. Special emphasis will be placed on ways that Member States can prepare for international negotiations and decision-making on trade and environment topics by drawing on sound analysis, impact assessment and policy coordination tools.

IV. MAIN TOPICS

11. The workshop will examine and provide training on:

- Legal and policy frameworks for trade and environment decision-making
- Issues for negotiation in international trade agreements including regional perspectives on agriculture, fisheries, subsidies and domestic support for key industries
- Selected topics being negotiated and implemented within the framework of trade-related multilateral environmental agreements
- Environmental requirements and their implications for market access and competitiveness, with emphasis on key sectors and voluntary arrangements, including eco-labeling
- Sustainability impact assessments of free trade areas: methods and analytical tools
- Sustainability Impact Assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area: provisional findings and recommended mitigation and enhancement measures
- Trade and environment priorities, policies and coordination mechanisms in the region
- Negotiations training, including practical exercises, for enhancing national and regional preparedness for international negotiations on trade and environment topics.

V. PARTICIPANTS

12. ESCWA has invited two government representatives from each ESCWA Member State to participate in the workshop. Special effort will be made to involve senior officials in ministries of trade and ministries of environment serving on national committees responsible for trade and environment policy coordination. Additional representatives from the Arab region have been invited by the LAS. Representatives from other institutions engaged in trade and environment policy issues may also participate.

13. The workshop will be supported by international and regional experts in the fields of trade, environment and sustainable development, including representatives from the League of Arab States, UNEP, UNCTAD and ESCWA.

VI. DATE, VENUE AND DURATION

14. The three-day workshop will be conducted at the Faculty Club Hall at Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, Oman from 25 to 27 March 2006.

15. The workshop was originally scheduled to be conducted from 15 to 18 March 2006 at the United Nations House in Beirut, Lebanon; however local considerations required that the meeting be relocated outside of Lebanon. Sultan Qaboos University graciously accepted to host the meeting during the new dates. The workshop is now organized as a back-to-back venue with the Regional Workshop on Trade and Environment for Arab and Middle East Countries, which is being organized by the World Trade Organization (WTO) in Muscat, Oman from 28 to 29 March 2006.

VII. LANGUAGE

16. The languages of the workshop will be English and Arabic. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

VIII. LOGISTICAL ARRANGEMENTS

17. ESCWA is collaborating with the WTO to cover the cost of travel and the daily subsistence allowance for one delegated representatives from the ministry responsible for trade and one delegated representative from the ministry or agency responsible for environment affairs in each ESCWA Member State. The LAS and UNEP/ROWA will support the participation of representatives from other Arab countries. Additional participants are expected to cover their own expenses.

18. Room reservations have been made for participants at the Golden Tulip Hotel in Seeb, which is located on Exhibition Street, Muscat, tel: (968) 24-510-300; fax: (968) 24-510-055. Ground transportation will be provided for participants between the Golden Tulip Hotel and Sultan Qaboos University in order to facilitate their participation in the workshop.

IX. DOCUMENTATION

19. The documentation for the workshop will include the following:

- *Environmental standards and competitiveness of key economic sectors* (E/ESCWA/SDPD/2005/4) – study available at:
<http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/sdpd-05-4.pdf> (English)
<http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/sdpd-05-4-a.pdf> (Arabic)
- International agreements and Trade Issues : Environment – study available in Arabic at:
<http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/grid-03-32-a.pdf>
- *Sustainability Impact Assessment of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area (SIA/EMFTA)* Phase I and Phase II – project information and reports available at www.sia-trade.org/emfta/en (English) or www.sia-trade.org/emfta/ar (Arabic)
- Southern Agenda on Trade and Environment: Arab Region Resource Paper – study available at http://www.trade-environment.org/output/southernagenda/arab/arab_backgroundpaper.pdf (English)
- *Trade and Environment for Sustainable Development*, CD-ROM, 2005 (MedPolicies Initiative of the Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Program (METAP)/ESCWA and World Bank)
- *The Achievements in Agricultural Issue Negotiations in the Doha Round and Expected Impact on Market Access for Arab Agricultural Exports* (E/ESCWA/GRID/2005/3) – study available in Arabic at:
<http://www.escwa.org.lb/information/publications/edit/upload/grid-05-3-a.pdf>
- *The Impact of Environmental Regulations on Production and Exports in the Food Processing, Garment and Pharmaceutical industries in Selected ESCWA Member Countries* (E/ESCWA/ED/2001/14)

Full documentation and training materials will be provided to participants during the workshop.

X. COMMUNICATIONS

20. All correspondence concerning the workshop should be addressed to:

Dr. Anhar Hegazi
Director
Sustainable Development & Productivity Division
P.O. Box: 11-8575
United Nations House \ Riad El-Solh Square
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (961-1) 978-502 (direct)
or (961-1) 981-301, ext.1502
Fax: (961-1) 981-510 / 511 / 512
E-mail: hegazi@un.org

Ms. Carol Chouchani Cherfane
Acting Team Leader \ First Economic Affairs Officer
Technology & Enterprise Development Team
Sustainable Development & Productivity Division
P.O. Box: 11-8575
United Nations House \ Riad El-Solh Square
ESCWA
Beirut, Lebanon
Tel: (961-1) 978-518 (direct)
or (961-1) 981-301, ext. 1518
Fax: (961-1) 981-510 / 511 / 512
E-mail: chouchanicherfane@un.org