

GTDF: The Way Forward

By Nicolas Imboden

I. INTRODUCTION

The basic concept of the Conference and the approach of the Geneva Trade & Development Forum (GTDF) were unanimously welcomed. There is a clear perceived need for such a Forum with the following focus:

1. **The concretization and operationalization of trade as a development tool.** The theme group approach bringing in the various stakeholders has been very useful to identify the issues and has led to a strong constituency working on the various issues. The objective of having action plans and concrete ways forward was partially realized. It was a step in the right direction, but clearly only a first step;
2. **Putting the trade issues of poorer countries into the center of the analysis.** The Forum is the only place that puts the concerns of developing countries into the center of analysis. The attempt to address the issues of trade as a development tool from a national, regional and global point of view is a useful and necessary approach;
3. **A reality check for national, regional and multilateral trade rules and policies:** Participants clearly appreciated the opportunity to analyze the various trade policies in terms of their real impact on poverty reduction and development;
4. **A non-negotiatory environment** where participants – who sometimes don't collaborate together – can exchange experiences, concerns and issues on an equal footing and in an open and constructive way, which is often not possible in official conferences.

The GTDF has ambitious objectives. It doesn't want to be "just another conference" but seeks to have an impact on policies and achieve concrete results. The Forum wants to establish a change process. Most participants appreciated and acknowledge this special characteristic. Clearly the two major objectives of the Conference have been achieved:

- A momentum has been created to look critically and constructively at the various issues faced by poorer countries when trying to use trade as a development tool;
- A strong will to continue the work and to create constituencies of change which bring together the various stakeholders concerned has emerged.

The Conference is, however, only a first step in the right direction. The follow-up process will have to address the following two shortcomings:

- The Conference did not go as far as hoped in coming up with innovative approaches to the issues. However, it did identify possible avenues for innovation, both in the process and in the substance. It is now up to the participants to pursue these avenues;
- Most theme groups were not fully successful in elaborating concrete action plans. Indeed, the ways forward show that further work is required to come up with best practice action plans.

To propose a way forward, we have analyzed the achievements and the shortcomings of the forum. We have based this analysis on informal discussions with several participants, the evaluations filled in by participants¹ as well as our own self-assessment.

Your own assessment – which we urge you to communicate to us – will allow us to sharpen our analysis and to ensure that the process of change fulfils your expectations.

II. Assessment of the experience

1. Assessment of the results of the Conference

The major conclusions we have drawn from the GTDF experience are the following:

1. The need for a Forum dedicated to analyze and share experiences and to look into means and procedures to harness trade for development has been validated. The main characteristics of the Forum that received nearly unanimous acclaim are:
 - a. The focus on trade as a development tool;
 - b. The vantage point of the poorer countries in trade issues;
 - c. The multi-stakeholder approach;
 - d. The emphasis on the how rather than what;
 - e. The combination of local, regional and international perspectives;
 - f. The macro-meso-micro approach;
 - g. The brainstorming approach and the absence of the negotiatory environment;
 - h. The theme group approach and the input provided by the theme groups.
2. The Forum created an enthusiastic environment with lots of energy expended to advance our understanding of the drivers of change to harness trade as a development tool. The informal setting allowed for constructive exchange of ideas. Substantive work has been undertaken with engaged and hardworking² participants willing to push the reflection further than is usually the case. The working groups have all extended the time of discussion allocated to them and some of them met – in variable composition – during the whole conference;
3. The Forum's participants concentrated on what each participant can contribute to resolve the issues in front of them, rather than making requests for others to change. It was heartening to see that the representatives of the poorer countries unanimously agreed that the main stumbling block to use trade as a development tool resided in internal policies rather than the policies in developed countries. Developed countries representatives – both private and public – concentrated on the shortcomings of the international system and their own policies rather than giving advice to the poorer countries. There was a clear recognition by all that the multilateral system is the only system which allows us to have a development friendly trade system, but that this system needs substantial reform to fully realize the potential of trade as a tool to fight poverty;

¹ Unfortunately the number of evaluations received has not been sufficient to have a fully representative sample. Of the 25 evaluations received 14 have given an overall rating of “excellent”; 6 have considered the Conference as having a “good” rating; 5 evaluations were critical, giving the rating of “average”; none rated the Conference as “disappointing”. With the exception of one participant, all participants who have answered this question have either said that they would be willing to participate in a “constituency of change” (18) or that they would consider participating in such an exercise (5).

² Sessions scheduled early in the morning or late in the afternoon were also (surprisingly) well attended.

4. The need for partnerships both between Governments, private sector, civil society and between representatives of poorer countries, emerging countries and developed countries was clearly expressed: we do need constituencies of change among people from all sides who have different points of view but who share one common objective: to assure an inclusive system that provides opportunities to realize the potential of all people in the global village. Action by such constituencies of change both in the developed and developing countries at the local, regional and international level are required.
5. There has been a clear willingness to participate and to collaborate in such constituencies of change.
6. There was a clear mandate to continue the work and to make the Forum a permanent and continuous platform. The issues are complex and they require a long term effort to make a real difference. The Conference was seen as a very useful first step. Its ability to bring change will depend on the follow-up action.

2. Assessment of the GTDF process

1. There were too many theme groups (11 in total) and their subjects may have been too varied. The GTDF has endeavoured to launch a bottom-up process and has left the leeway to its partners to develop their work in their own way. In this perspective, it was sometimes difficult to see the common thread of the various theme;
2. The results of the theme groups have been available too late. The time required to constitute the stakeholder groups for each theme and the time the group members could devote to such tasks was under-, respectively overestimated. Consequently, the documentation was only available some few days before the Conference not allowing the participants to familiarize themselves with the analysis and the recommendations.
3. The time to prepare action plans was underestimated. Participation in the theme groups was based on voluntary and pro bono work. While this assured high motivation, it also meant that the participants had to take away time from their already overextended agenda to work on the themes. Many participants complained that they were frustrated not to be able to put in the time and resources required. It would be more efficient to assure that the theme group work is part of the work program of the participating institutions rather than an add-on. Partnerships with the institutions and more ownership by the institutions (rather than only the individuals) are probably required;
4. The high level advisory group has not fulfilled its task. Members have to be better integrated into the work of preparation to foster ownership;
5. Research and think-tanks from the target countries have to play a larger and more defining role in the preparation of the Conference. Longer term partnerships have to be established.

III. Issues to be addressed

Based on the above assessment, the following aspects of the Forum and Conference approach can be improved:

1. The work in the theme groups was clearly the major contribution of the Conference. Three issues should be addressed:
 - The existence of 11 theme groups and 4 panels dedicated to discuss – in a larger and more abstract setting - did not allow to go sufficiently into depth in the general discussion;
 - There might have been a feeling of differentiation between participants who were linked to theme groups and others. People who had no connection with the theme groups felt somewhat estranged. As a consequence, panels were either too vague for theme group participants or too specific for the others;
 - The link between the work of the theme groups and the panels can be strengthened. The plenary sessions did not take full advantage of the richness theme groups' work.
2. The objectives of the panels can be better defined and the time for discussion expanded to go a little more into depth:
 - Panels often had two objectives which could not be easily reconciled: On the one hand, their objective was to raise awareness of the importance of the issue discussed for development and to provide examples of solutions to the non-specialist. On the other hand, the panel discussion was thought to deepen the knowledge and understanding of the issue on the topic;
 - The subjects of the panels were often too encompassing to do justice to the subject in the short time available. Often the discussion had to be ended once it started to become really interesting. It might be better to cluster the various panels to address fewer issues but to have successive panels on various aspects of the problem.
3. While the conference provided many interesting ideas on how to tackle the problems discussed, the action plans and the way forward were still too focused on saying what should be done rather than how to accomplish it. The conference crystallized the issues and provided useful guidance of the drivers of change that need to be put into place. Few actionable action plans have come forward and the ways forward are largely blueprints rather than actionable change agendas.
4. The number of participants and their distribution was largely on target. The following improvements could be made:
 - There was a general feeling that 250 participants was about right to have a sufficiently large variety of experiences represented and still not to lose the intimacy of a common purpose group. Given the fact that not all 250 participants stayed for the whole period, the number could be somewhat increased without losing the intimacy of the gathering;
 - The African presence might have been somewhat overbearing for representatives of non African developing countries. An effort should be made to have a better participation, in particular from Latin America;
 - The presence from the developed world was about right. There was a lack of participants at the Ministerial level from the OECD countries. This was largely due to the change of date of the Conference from July to September. Additional efforts will be put in involving non-European developed countries;
 - Given the importance that was given to the inclusion of the private sector in the discussions, the private sector was underrepresented. While there was a sizable contingency of representatives of the private sector from the South, their presence was not really felt in the discussions. A substantial effort should be made to have a better representation of the private sector from OECD countries.
5. Intermediate goals during the 18 months work are required for two reasons:
 - Deadlines that can not be changed are necessary to assure timely production of papers and ideas;

- Preparatory conferences allow the participants in the Conference to familiarize themselves with the subject matter and to influence the outcome so that the work can be pushed further ahead in the conference than when they are confronted, unprepared, with new ideas at the Conference.

IV. The way forward

We believe that there was a clear mandate to continue the work of the Forum and the momentum created by the Conference. We also think that the process should be improved to better meet the objectives of the GTDF. Taking into account the experience of this first edition and on the basis of this assessment, we propose the following approach for the continuation of the Forum:

1. A second Conference is necessary. The date of such a Conference should be based on the following considerations. It should be:

- sufficiently close to keep up the momentum;
- sufficiently far away to allow good preparation;
- announced now to have a clear target date for the preparatory work.

We believe that an 18 month interval would best respond to this requirement. We therefore propose to hold the second Conference of the GTDF **end of June/early July 2010**;

2. Identify a maximum of six constituencies of change:

- a. **Pro-poor, pro-trade, inclusive industrial and service strategies for the 21st century** based on regional and global integration and their implication for national, regional and global governance. This group would continue the work already accomplished of the following theme groups:

- Supply enhancing policies in development countries;
- Framework conditions to build up entrepreneurship in poorer countries;
- Technology transfer and knowledge based development;
- Employment enhancing policies.

It is proposed to look at these issues in view of the creation of public private partnerships.

The group would work on concrete examples of such policies, establish best practices and attempt to identify changes required at the national, regional and international level.

- b. **Inclusive policy shaping and making. This group would have the following objectives:**
 - How to include the private sector and the civil society in national policy shaping and in the definition of negotiating strategies. This objective would be attempted to be reached through the creation of a policy shaping capacity for the private sector in developing countries;
 - The creation of a development oriented private sector constituency in the North and in emerging countries;
 - The creation of a pro development private sector constituency at the international level for the shaping of the international trade architecture;
- c. **Temporary migration as a source of technology and resource transfers through new models of cooperation.** This constituency of change would continue and deepen the work of the migration group and include policy makers and private sector representatives. It would work on the basis of third generation cooperation agreements between source and receiving countries of migration and concentrate on the following issues:
 - Regional versus national agreements;
 - Agreements between poorer countries and OECD countries versus South – South migration;

- Best practices for negotiating strategies for poorer countries: using their bargaining power for development and coalition building;
 - Best practices for the implementation of third generation agreements.
- d. Opportunities and challenges of **climate change and environment for trade and development** policies. This group would address the following issues:
- Negotiating strategies for poorer countries in the context of the Kyoto II negotiations;
 - Protecting the environment in an open trading system;
 - Changes in the comparative advantage due to environmental concerns and measures to allow poorer countries to profit from them.

The group would identify a leading think tank/research group for each of the questions and organize synthesis meeting with the various stakeholders so as to come up with an overall strategy for poorer countries in Copenhagen in 2009 and then for the Conference in July 2010.

- e. An **inclusive international trade architecture**. This constituency of change would address the major issues identified by the ministerial caucus i.e.
- Content of a development oriented strategy for negotiating liberalization;
 - Sequencing and policy space for an open and development oriented international trade architecture;
 - Coalition building and inclusive negotiating methods;
 - Regionalism versus multilateralism;
 - Agenda setting for international and regional trade negotiations;

This constituency would attempt to create a powerful and dedicated coalition of Ministers from developing, emerging and OECD countries which is dedicated to propose - at the international and regional level - changes in the international trade regime to enhance the development content of the international trade architecture. The ministerial group would be supported by a secretariat composed of developing country think tanks, OECD specialists and private sector representatives to elaborate concrete proposals to be submitted to the regional and international organizations in charge of the trade architecture.

- f. **Food security** is clearly a major concern from all points of view: poverty reduction, employment creation as well as integration and liberalisation efforts. The Conference has shown the need to look at food security in a regional context / regional organisation (ECOWAS). It is proposed to see how food security can be achieved in an open trading system and the implications for national, regional and international policies.

Discussion of these different issues under one roof is an important part of the process. It is believed that the sum of the overall discussions will be bigger than the addition of each effort. The Conference is not only a gathering of specialists on specific issues but should also promote transversal exchange and coherence. Activities in one area have an impact in another and to foster sustainable development, cross-cutting reflection and overall perspective are required.

3. Proposed modalities in the preparation of the Conference

The following process of the working of the Forum and the preparation of the Conference in 2010 are proposed:

1. **Ownership of the process.** It is proposed to identify a small, but dedicated group of countries for each theme that would drive the process at the political level. These constituencies of change would be constituted by a small group of Ministers and /or other policy makers from poorer countries, OECD countries and emerging countries and would meet at least 2 times before the Conference (i) to review work done and give guidance; (ii) to approve and adopt concrete proposals to be submitted to the relevant organizations for change proposals that go into the direction of the objectives of the group;

(iii) to define the work of the preparatory group; (iv) to host smaller and more targeted conferences on the subject matter.

2. **Vetting of the process in the poorer countries:** It is proposed to identify and empower a developing country institution for each constituency of change. This institution would be responsible to work out the proposals and to take initiatives leading to the change required. They would enter into cooperation agreements with leading institutions in the North on the subjects concerned and closely cooperate with them. They would organize, in their countries of origin, seminars on the issues to be analyzed with all organizations which work in that field to harness the existing knowledge and built on that. Their role would be (i) to gather the knowledge existing on the questions concerned; (ii) to translate existing research and knowledge into policy proposals; (iii) to function as secretariat for the constituencies of change.
3. **Creation of dedicated institutions as secretariat for the constituencies of change:** Pro bono work has its limits. To assure sufficient dedication and time for the tasks ahead it is important that the tasks required by the Forum are part of the institutional work plan of the institutions to which the dedicated people belong. It is therefore proposed to elaborate individual projects for each of the constituencies with a budget which would be attributed to the lead organization.
4. **Furthering of personal contacts.** Experience during the past exercise has shown that modern communication tools – although very helpful – have their limits in an exercise like this: meetings with the stakeholders are essential to create dedicated constituencies. More missions to the countries concerned and the more frequent meeting of the persons who are working on these issues are an essential part of the proposed follow up.
5. **Institutionalizing partnerships.** Many think tanks/ research institutions have accumulated a lot of knowledge and experience on the issues we address. Often they do not enough outreach activities. It will be the challenge of the follow up of the conference to institute partnerships with leading institutions on the various questions and to make sure that the Forum and its Conference become an integral part of their outreach program.

V. Action Plan for IDEAS Centre in the next six months:

1. **Reporting and evaluation of the exercise so far with the donor countries:** A detailed report on the exercise and the financial report are being finalized and will be sent to the donors within two weeks. A donors' meeting is foreseen for end of November/beginning of December;
2. **Obtaining support for the proposed approach:** We will submit to the donors a more detailed general action plan to implement the proposed approach and seek their agreement in principle for the continuation of this exercise. **Target date: end of December 2008.**
3. **The launching of the constituencies of change:** Based on the involvement in the Conference and on other knowledge of interested parties, we will try to identify and to receive the commitment of two countries (one from the target group and one from OECD/emerging countries) to serve as the shepherds for the various constituencies of change. The role of those shepherds would be to create and animate a small group of Ministers interested and dedicated to the issue chosen and to serve as steering committee for the operational theme groups to be created on the issues. Target date: **First meetings of the constituencies in February and March 2009**
4. **Creation of theme groups as support to the constituencies of change:** This task includes the following steps:
 - a. discussions with the shepherds of the 11 groups to determine their ideas on how to continue and their willingness (and requirements) to be able to play a leading role in the follow up: **Target date for completion of this task: end of December 2008;**
 - b. Identification of shepherd institutions in the target countries and in OECD/emerging countries. Unlike in the first phase of this project, we will attempt to have an institutional rather than only a personal involvement: **Target date: end of January 2009;**

- c. The elaboration of partnership agreements with the institutions functioning as shepherds for the theme groups and participation of the shepherds in the first meeting of the 6 constituencies of change: **Target date: February/March 2009**
 - d. The elaboration of project documents and the search of funding for each of the 6 constituencies and their theme groups by the partnership organizations and IDEAS Centre: **Target date: April/May 2009**
 - e. The constitution of the theme groups representing the various stakeholders and first meeting of the theme groups. **Target date: May/June 2009**
 - f. First meetings of the 6 constituencies of change with the shepherds of the theme groups and adoption of the one year work program: **Target date: June/July 2009**
 - g. Concrete specific proposals for change to be submitted in the relevant national/regional and/or international instances adopted by the constituencies of change. **Target dates: October/November 2009;**
 - h. Adoption of an agenda of change by each constituency of change: **Target date: April/May 2010;**
 - i. Dissemination of the agenda of change to a larger public and to the participants to the Conference: **Target date: May/June 2010;**
 - j. Mobilization of support for the agenda of change by as many participants to the Conference as possible: **Conference in early July 2010.**
- 5. Obtaining of commitments to participate in the exercise and the Conference by major players in the fields of the constituencies of change.** Experience with the first conference has shown that it is not enough to get an agreement in principle to participate in the exercise. To assure that participation in the exercise is not overshadowed by daily priorities, it is necessary to get a personal commitment of key participants early in the process and to keep them involved during the whole process. For this reason, IDEAS Centre will:
- a. Identify and meet key participants to assure their commitment to the process;
 - b. Regularly inform and consult them during the process;
 - c. Organize the support of the constituencies of change to mobilize the support of these people in the process and to assure their participation.
 - d. Confirm that beginning of July is the best timing to assure high-level participation in the Conference.

VI. Conclusion

Through our discussions with several participants and the evaluations, we have sensed the enthusiasm to continue the effort launched by the September Conference. There has been a clear buy-in into the methodology, the philosophy and the objectives of the GTDF. The challenge lies now in the follow up to this first promising debut which will determine if the Forum can really meet the expectations raised.

We are confident that with the road map described above and the partners met throughout the process we can make a difference in making trade really work for development. The GTDF and the September Conference have been described as special and different and are believed to have the potential to make things change.

This assessment has been very frank and honest with the objective of transparency. We would very much welcome your assessment and feedbacks to better analyze how we can improve this effort. This Forum will only be alive if stakeholders participate in it and support it.