Group of Experts on Trade Information

Second Meeting

REVIEW OF CURRENT WORK

A Summary of Points and Proposals
made at the Meeting on 15 February 1965

1. The proposals set out below are only those relating to the scope or execution of the work currently undertaken by the Centre.

2. While the step-by-step approach followed in the establishment of the Centre was a practical and reasonable one, experience had shown that the call by the less-developed countries on the services of the Centre had been far in excess of what had been estimated. The Centre would therefore have to be given the means to continue and expand this work. It should not be given new tasks without the resources to carry them out.

Market Information Service

3. The comments and proposals regarding this Service can be grouped under the following headings:

   (a) Selection of enquiries.

   (b) Collection of information.

   (c) Processing of information (preparation of replies).

   (d) Dispatch of replies.

4. With regard to point (a) it might prove helpful to give some countries guidance on how to formulate enquiries. Some form of priority grading of enquiries and also perhaps some screening procedure to keep the number and type of enquiries within manageable proportions might be advisable. This should, however, not limit the possibilities for the less-developed countries of having recourse to the Market Information Service, which might develop into one of the most valuable services of the Centre. It was pointed out that some countries have actually applied to the Centre for help in the formulation of questions regarding markets for their exports.

5. To the extent that information on the market of a given country is collected from the Centre’s liaison agency in that country, the Centre should disclose the identity of the enquiring country; the information needed to reply would normally vary depending on which exporting country is being answered.
6. It might prove helpful to ask for information about the market of a given country not only from that country, but from other countries that might have studied the market concerned.

7. As regards the processing of information, translation is an important element, particularly when lengthy documentation is supplied (e.g. legislation). This might limit the possibility of using information prepared for one country on a wider basis (clearing-house function).

8. The dispatch of replies is sometimes asked for by cable; it might be feasible to charge a fee for the services of the Centre in such a case. The dispatch of heavy sets of documentation by air mail might fall in the same category.

9. The possibility of making available information requested by one country to others who also supply information on the same subject, requires further examination. The treatment of confidential requests for information would fall outside any such arrangement.

Liaison arrangements

10. The strengthening of the Centre's liaison network meant both an extension of the present network at the official and private trade levels and an intensification of these contacts so as to ensure a wider range of sources. In this connexion the case of national export promotion offices acting as liaison agencies was thought to be of particular concern. It was pointed out that the CONTRACTING PARTIES had committed themselves to furnishing information on market opportunities.

Documentation Unit

11. The Documentation Unit of the Centre should be given sufficient resources to be built up with essential published information, as well as supplied with specialized information by the participating countries. With regard to some subjects, consideration would nevertheless have to be given to the frequency of the use of the information collected; it might, in some cases, be more practical to collect such information ad hoc.

FORUM

12. While the quarterly magazine, the FORUM, is basically a promotional vehicle, disseminating information about the problems of the less-developed countries and on the work of the Centre to help in solving them, the Trade Opportunities Notes and the Commercial Policy Chronicle are of direct use to the readership. It might therefore be preferable to publish these two sections in the form of a roneo-typed monthly bulletin. The text of the Commercial Policy Notes might be presented in such a way as to facilitate systematic clipping and filing of the information.
Pamphlets

13. The pamphlet form was considered to be a practical way of publishing the information that the Centre is bringing together on subjects of particular use for the building up of export promotion services in the less-developed countries, in particular the "Manual on Export Promotion Techniques", while the "Register of Sources of Trade Information" would facilitate direct market exploration by all traders. The list of Trade Associations in eighteen developed countries, while useful, could be supplemented by a corresponding list for the less-developed countries.

Training courses

14. The provision of training in export promotion was considered to be one of the most important ways of assisting the least-developed countries in strengthening their export promotion services. The Centre could play an important part in obtaining offers of training from the developed as well as the more advanced developing countries, and by considering the organization - at a later stage - of training courses of its own.

15. A reference was made to the organization of seminars in export promotion for officials from national and regional trade promotion bodies, with the Centre acting as a promoter at the top of a pyramid, the base of which was composed of the individual exporters.

16. Another proposal was made that participants in the GATT in-service training courses for government officials from the less-developed countries spend some time working in the Centre during their six-months stay in Geneva.

Advance proposals for future tasks

17. Advance proposals were made on certain subjects. One, that the Centre might operate an independent clearing-house for trade offers and orders on a transaction basis, charging a commission, will be presented later.

18. Another forthcoming proposal is to organize an annual exhibition of products from the less-developed countries in connexion with the annual meeting of the CONTRACTING PARTIES.