



Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
18 August 2015

Original: English

Economic Commission for Europe

Steering Committee on Trade Capacity and Standards

First session

31 August-2 September 2015

Item 9. of the provisional agenda

Information on the Conference on Unlocking Economic Potential for Sustainable Development

UNECE Conference on Unlocking Economic Potential for Sustainable Development: Background Note

I. Introduction

1. A key feature of the new United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is improving access to basic services that contribute to poverty alleviation such as: sustainable and affordable energy; healthcare; education and affordable Internet/broadband; and safe drinking water. In the case of water, it is calculated that USD 20 trillion will be required to meet a target of universal access to safe drinking water by 2025. Achieving this sustainable development goal, and others linked to basic services, is beyond the financial reach of both donors and the majority of governments.

2. The international community will need to develop new means of implementation based on partnerships, innovation and greater efficiency coupled with increased local expertise. The UNECE is in a unique position to contribute to these new means of implementation: First, because of its working model which is already based on strong partnerships; Second, because of its wide range of standards, best practices and policies that support stronger partnerships, innovation, efficiency and greater local expertise.

3. The challenge of sustainable development is to reconcile the aspiration of current generations for economic prosperity with the need to preserve our planet for future generations. The changes required to make our production and consumption patterns more sustainable have the potential to spawn new industries and to open up new opportunities for economic growth. This Conference will bring together leading policy makers and experts from the UNECE region to discuss how the UNECE can build on these opportunities in order to help countries unlock the economic potential for SDG implementation through international trade, innovation and public-private partnerships.

4. The conference will be divided into two segments, with the first focusing on the potential of trade and, particularly, agricultural trade to support SDG implementation with a focus on creating a more efficient, transparent and barrier-free trading environment. The second segment will focus on innovation policy and the promotion of PPPs, and how they can contribute to sustainable economic growth.

A. Theme 1 - Increasing the economic benefits from agricultural trade

5. Agriculture supports many low-income families in the UNECE region so improving trade in agricultural produce is a key pro-poor strategy. The panel speakers for Theme 1 will address questions such as:

- a) From farm to market: responding to the requirements of global supply chains
- b) Transformation in agricultural productivity: the role of regulatory and procedural measures.
- c) How can quality standards be used to transfer knowledge to agricultural practice?
- d) Quality and safety requirements: how to strike a balance?

B. Theme 2 - Faster, Cheaper and More Efficient Trade in Support of Equitable Growth

6. The integration of low and medium-income countries into regional and global value chains is a key element in sustainable economic growth. Still, it remains an elusive goal given the demanding requirements placed on traded products. Many of these are needed in order to protect human health and safety as well as the environment; at the same time, we need to ask how these important social objectives can be met without creating trade barriers. The panel speakers for Theme 2 will address questions such as:

- a) Getting the fundamentals right: the role of participatory assessments.
- b) Creating an enabling trade environment: Quantum leaps or incrementalism?
- c) One-size-fits all solutions: the art of drawing lessons from others' experiences
- d) Which regulatory environments best support sustainable trade?
- e) What best practices and tools for harmonizing processes, procedures, and information flows to promote sustainable trade?

C. Theme 3 - Innovation for Sustainable Development – Policies and Good Practices

7. Innovation will be essential to achieving sustainable development; because only through innovation will it be possible to economize on scarce natural resources while sustaining economic growth. The panel speakers for Theme 3 will address questions such as:

- a) How to preserve or increase competitiveness while improving sustainability?

- b) How to steer private sector innovation efforts towards priority areas for sustainable development?
- c) How to scale up and diffuse innovations with an impact on sustainable development?
- d) How to support the emergence of markets and demand for sustainable technologies?
- e) How to transform innovative ideas into green innovation through effective financing?

D. Theme 4 – Putting PPPs on the Path to Sustainable Development

8. Public-Private Partnerships (PPPs) will play a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in areas such as energy, healthcare, education and affordable internet/broadband, and safe drinking water. The SDG targets cannot be met without a high-level of private sector engagement. At the same time, many governments are still facing enormous challenges to develop sustainable PPP projects that can bring transformational changes to their communities by building upon the private sector's knowhow, innovation and finance. International leadership and guidance is needed to help all parties to develop effective and sustainable PPPs that put people first. The panel speakers for Theme 4 will address questions such as:

- a) How can international PPP standards help to bridge the capacity gap?
 - b) How can governments better engage with the private sector to achieve sustainable PPPs for resilient infrastructure and deliver key public services to citizens?
 - c) How can the private sector contribute to and make the greatest impact in the implementation of the SDGs?
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