

LDC Webinar – CTS Chair concluding statement

We have reached the conclusion of our webinar. Let me offer some personal closing remarks

Let me first of all thank all of our speakers, who have put a lot of time and effort in preparing their interventions and tailoring them to our information needs. They have enriched our collective reflection. Without them, the webinar could not have happened, and we should all be very grateful for their contribution.

We heard welcome remarks from the WTO Director-General, Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, the Minister of Chad, His Excellency Mr Kampard, and by Commissioner Mr Emmanuel Mutahunga, representing the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Cooperatives of Uganda. Their opening messages reminded us of the context of this event and set the overall background for our discussions.

The first session of the webinar provided an overview of the landscape of LDC services trade. We were presented with the most recent and disaggregated information currently available. We saw initial data of the devastating impact that COVID-19 has had on LDC services trade. At the global level, we learnt that few LDCs export services, that their exports are concentrated in a few sectors and that they reach relatively few markets. The national perspectives from Bangladesh, the United Kingdom and Turkey confirmed this overall picture.

One message that came through loud and clear is that there are significant services trade data gaps when it comes to LDCs, both for sectors and bilateral partners. We also learnt about some of the work under way to try

to improve the situation but were also made aware that this work requires time and significant effort.

In Session 2, we heard from the protagonists: the exporters and importers of LDC services trade. Exporters in sectors as diverse as audio-visual services, IT services, business and professional services shared their own, direct, hands-on information on their business and on accessing other markets. They explained how their companies operate, how they have developed their export potential and what challenges they overcame or have to overcome. Importers of LDC services also provided their perspective, highlighting the reasons why they import from LDCs and what has enabled them to do so.

Again, one clear thread run through our speakers' interventions: the enabling power of digital technology. Digitalisation and associated technological developments have significantly impacted how these speakers' businesses are run, how they access foreign markets and how they participate in services trade. At the same time, the critical importance of having adequate digital infrastructure to participate in the modern economy the emerged as a key success factor.

In Session 3, we heard from representatives of LDCs, who presented the efforts and initiatives they have undertaken domestically to strengthen their domestic services sectors and support their services suppliers in their attempts to penetrate foreign markets, including efforts to facilitate their integration in value chains, and to increase and diversify services exports. Reference was made to domestic efforts to assist service suppliers to make use of notified preferences.

Representatives of notifying Members and other relevant cooperation partners reported on their strategies, highlighting certain of their technical

assistance and capacity-building measures and programmes to help integrate LDCs into the world economy, and enable their service suppliers to take advantage of export opportunities, including those provided by the preferences. Speakers also shared information on how they have refocused and re-designed some of their initiatives to assist LDC preparedness to "build back better" after COVID-19 and foster economic recovery and resilience. Presentations and contributions were extremely rich and diverse, and offered interesting and valuable insights.

Finally, in the Session that just ended, we witnessed an exchange of views, including about lessons learnt from the webinar. We also heard some suggestions about possible steps that could be taken to increase LDC participation in world services trade.

I am certain that delegations will give further consideration to what they have heard over the last two days. They will certainly bring their reflections to the next meeting of the Council for Trade in Services, which is scheduled to be held on 1 July. I encourage you all to continue to engage proactively in this process.

I hope that the participants found the workshop as interesting as I did, and that the event offered plenty of food for thought and reflection about the possible contribution of the WTO in increasing the participation of LDCs in services trade.