
TUESDAY, 24 APRIL 2012, 12:00-14:00
QATAR NATIONAL CONVENTION CENTRE (QNCC), AUDITORIUM 2

WORKING LUNCH/PANEL DISCUSSION
CO-HOSTED BY THE INTERNATIONAL TRADE CENTRE (ITC) AND
THE QATAR EXPORT DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (TASDEER)
FREE TRADE AGREEMENTS: NECESSARY BUT NOT SUFFICIENT -
LESSONS FROM THE ARAB REGION

BACKGROUND

The proliferation of trade agreements around the world has changed the pattern of world trade flows and has brought mixed results in terms of trade integration, with meaningful integration in only some areas of the world, in particular in Asia and Latin America. Empirical evidence shows that regional integration can have substantial direct and indirect employment creation effects on the economy.

In the case of the Arab countries trade integration has not gone very far, despite deep cuts in tariffs. This is largely due to trade impediments including non-tariff barriers that represent major obstacles for exploiting the opportunities offered by the trade agreements existing in the Arab region. Involving the business community to identify challenges to regional trade will assist policy makers in addressing these impediments. In a region where on average 27% of the active population is unemployed and 60% of these are estimated to be the youth, it is essential that urgent measures are taken to remove trade impediments affecting regional trade. This will help unleash the entrepreneurship potential of the youth and create jobs for an increasing number of highly skilled young people.

The event will address the following questions:

- Do free trade agreements implicitly result in increased regional trade integration?
- What are the main reasons for weak regional trade integration in the Arab region - seen from a business perspective - and what lessons can one draw from this?
- What could be the economic impact of an improvement of the regional business environment particularly on welfare and jobs in particular for women and youth?
- How can ITC's work in the Arab region provide some examples of creating jobs for women and youth through regional integration?

AGENDA

Welcome remarks

H.E. Hisham M. Badr, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Geneva

Hassan Khalifa Al Mansoori, Executive Director, Qatar Export Development Agency (TASDEER), Doha

Keynote address

Pascal Lamy, Director-General, WTO

Presentation of ITC findings: Job creation through reduced trade barriers and related transaction costs – opportunities for the Arab region

Jean-Marie Paugam, Deputy Executive Director, ITC

There is significant evidence of the potential benefits of trade integration within the Arab region and the possible effects it would have on employment, particularly among youth and women. This includes the potential welfare gains, including for job creation, of removing trade barriers within the region. Certain export sectors have a greater scope for creating jobs and unleashing the entrepreneurship potential of women and youth than others. Concrete examples of how ITC has made a small but meaningful impact in the Arab region by identifying key barriers to trade and by building export capacities of women and young entrepreneurs are presented.

Panel discussion and Q&A:

Entrepreneurship and competitiveness – how can better trade integration pave the way for employment creation?

Moderator: **H.E. Hisham M. Badr**, Ambassador, Permanent Mission of the Arab Republic of Egypt, Geneva

Elham Zeadat Aranki, General Manager, Bloom, Jordan

Mohamed Saâd Berrada, CEO, Michoc, Morocco

Joseph Nkole, National Coordinator, Cotton Association of Zambia

Removing trade barriers can potentially provide excellent opportunities for trade. However, these opportunities cannot by themselves result in greater trade unless exporting firms have an exportable offer which is competitive in international markets. For many developing countries the private sector can be a powerful engine of economic growth, productivity, innovation and employment, but it is often confronted with substantial challenges which hinder its international competitiveness with adverse effects on trade and employment. Such challenges include weak productive capacities, weaknesses in the domestic business environment, lack of institutional support and limitations in key areas of trade competitiveness such as packaging, branding, quality, certification and marketing.

What are the initiatives to be taken to make Free Trade Agreements work for SMEs, so as to enhance their competitiveness and create sustainable employment in the process?

Panellists representing the private sector will present key challenges related to competitiveness that they have encountered and will share how they have overcome these challenges and grown their business, thereby generating increased employment.

Closing remarks

Patricia Francis, Executive Director, ITC

Lunch will be served during the event.