

Summary of the Side Event on Trade and the Green Economy at the UNECE Regional Preparatory Meeting for Rio+20

Geneva, Switzerland, 2 December 2011, 13:15-14:45

The event, which was co-organised by ICTSD, the UN Environment Programme (UNEP), the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), sought to provide a forum for delegates to discuss issues relating to trade and the Green Economy; an issue that captured scant attention during the main roundtable sessions of the ECE regional preparatory meeting. The side event provided a neutral space for dialogue where stakeholders were able to engage with the more contentious issues of the debate while drawing on the tangible experience brought by the speakers. They were also able to utilize the wealth of knowledge and experience brought by those delegates that attended the event.

The introductory remarks to the event acknowledged a great need for mutually supportive policies between trade, environmental protection and sustainable development. It is no longer possible to approach the economy and the environment as completely separate entities. One example provided was the need to move the policy debate away from the, oft-used, simplistic example of 'all subsidies are bad' towards a much more nuanced approach.

In their presentations, the invited speakers expanded on the challenges and potential offered by trade under the transition to a green economy, using organic agriculture, sustainable forestry and the green services sectors as examples.

At the beginning of the discussion one speaker noted that a key challenge for trade to contribute to a GE transition in the ECE region, especially for those countries still in transition, is related to their need to build fundamental trade capacity. This included the countries' involvement in multilateral trade negotiations as well as more basic infrastructural requirements.

The rich and frank discussion that followed was wide-ranging; following, but not restricted to, the sectors that were discussed during the main presentations and how they related to specific examples within the ECE region. The issue of labeling and standards was heavily discussed with both the opportunities and limitations of various schemes coming under scrutiny. In the case of organic agriculture, a regional approach was discussed for non-EU states, as a means to promote trade with the EU. The issue of supply-chain management was also discussed, including which means are available to ensure that an 'organic'/'sustainable' certification can be ensured throughout the various levels of production.

The side event brought together a wide range of actors and stakeholders including representatives from their respective Ministries of the Environment from Finland, France, Norway and Tajikistan; representatives from the ECE region, Belgium, Denmark, Kazakhstan and Moldova; as well as other interested non-ECE members, Chile and the Dominican Republic. Civil society was well represented with members from RESO-Femmes, Greenpeace and the ETC group. Various UN departments were also present at the event.

ICTSD would like to thank all the delegates who attended this side event, the panelists for their time and the co-sponsors of the event - UNECE, FAO and UNEP.