



International Centre for Trade
and Sustainable Development

Press Release

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New Consortium to Enhance Exchange of Information on Regional Trade Agreements

BALI, INDONESIA – A consortium of three institutions – the International Center for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) – today announced the launch of the "RTA Exchange" a knowledge and dialogue platform aimed at promoting international dialogue, deeper analysis and information-sharing on regional and preferential trade agreements (RTAs). The announcement was made at the bi-annual Trade and Development Symposium, this year held in Bali concurrently with the 2013 WTO Ministerial. The idea is the result of deliberations of experts in the context of the ICTSD - World Economic Forum "E15 Initiative", a major undertaking that works towards strengthening the multilateral trade system.

RTAs have proliferated around the world in the past two decades alongside and independent of the multilateral trading system. By now more than 300 RTAs are in place, and several further ones are being negotiated, including the so-called "mega-regional" agreements, the Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership agreement (TTIP).

Though RTAs are emerging as the center of gravity in global commerce, there is no one instance that would systematically bring together all relevant information on RTAs around the world, let alone encourage dialogue and sharing of experiences among the various stakeholders interested in RTAs, such as policymakers, think-tanks and private sector leaders. The purpose of the RTA Exchange is to bridge this gap and contribute to the construction of a robust, efficient and more updated international trade regime.

The RTA Exchange will be a first-in-class global clearing house of information on RTAs. It is a web-based platform aimed at curating the world's information and expertise on RTAs, a mechanism to undertake research and analysis on RTAs, and a venue for policy dialogue and sharing of experiences among trade negotiators, private sector leaders, and other stakeholders. It will also help build countries' capacity to benefit and develop RTAs that deliver higher quality development, and a broader participation of firms from all over the world in global markets.

The RTA Exchange is highly policy-relevant: it enhances RTAs' transparency, facilitates the transfer of lessons-learned and best practices across RTAs, lays the groundwork to foster coherence between RTAs and multilateralising RTAs' best practices, and helps generate fresh thinking on ways to complement RTAs for trade and development.

"We are friends of an effective rules-based, inclusive WTO and aim to support its evolution through this ground-breaking initiative," said Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz, CEO of ICTSD. "The RTA Exchange will help enhance the capacities of small and mid-size enterprises to take advantage of the various RTAs in doing cross-border business," said Antoni Esteveordal, the Manager of the IDB's Integration and Trade Department. Ganeshan Wignaraja, Research Director at the ADBI commented, "this tool will



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be very useful for economies in Asia and other world regions that are seriously engaged in RTAs and negotiating mega-regionals, and it will further cross-regional learning and sharing of good practices on RTAs.”

The RTA Exchange intends to convene its first policy dialogue in Geneva in 2014.