

INCSOC Partners' Meeting
8th August, 2010, Dakar, Senegal

Brief Report

1. Background

1.1 A meeting of the International Network of Civil Society Organisations on Competition (INCSOC) was organised on 8th August 2010, on the sidelines of the final conference of the 7Up4 project. This meeting was attended by some existing members of INCSOC, and was primarily held to sensitise stakeholders (participants) from West African countries and other parts of the continent, who had gathered in Dakar to participate in the 7Up4 Final Conference, about the network its past activities and the future agenda. It was expected that a few of these stakeholders would joint the network, through this process. The agenda was set to be free-flowing, with CUTS representatives initiating the interactions with an introduction to INCOSC and its work programme.

2. Summary of Discussions

2.1 Introducing the network, Rijit Sengupta, Centre Coordinator and Deputy Head, of CUTS CCIER gave a brief historical account of INCSOC, especially the reason this network was formed in 2003, when it was felt that it was necessary to include a voice of southern civil society on competition policy reforms at the global level. CUTS has been operating as the Secretariat of the INCSOC network, with Pradeep S Mehta (Secretary General, CUTS) acting as one of the Co-Chairs of INCSOC. Noted scholar on consumer protection and regulatory policy issues, Allan Asher being the other Co-Chair.

2.2 Since its inception, INCSOC has functioned to ‘promote a healthy competition culture, globally’. This has been undertaken by bringing in new members to the network (primary and associate members) by sensitising them of the need for competition reforms in the interest of consumers. Till date, there have been 5 international meetings of the network and this meeting in Dakar was the first being held in the region and also conducted in French.

2.3 Participants were informed that INCSOC has been involved with a variety of activities to strengthen partners’ capacity on competition policy and law issues especially in the developing world, including the following:

- i. Networking and continuous engagement with Partners
- ii. Partners’ Meetings
- iv. International Events
- iii. World Competition Report (2006)
- iv. International Campaigns: World Competition Day & International Competition Fund

2.4 The fact that the interest on competition policy and law issues has increased progressively among civil society organisations across the developing world can be testified by the fact that there has been a progressive increase in the network members.

Currently, there are over **160 members** from around **60 countries**, who are part of this global alliance on competition policy issues. Further, it was indicated to the participants, that there is no fees to become a member. Only an interest on the subject and an assurance to continue working on the competition agenda is enough for CUTS (which functions as the Secretariat of INCSOC) to include a civil society organisation as a **primary member**. Further, it was also explained that competition agency representatives and even some Parliamentarians have become members of INCSOC (**associate members**).

2.5 The current work programme of INCOS was also discussed with the members. These include:

- i. **Consumer Protection Regimes in the World** – a n initiative that CUTS has started about a year ago, which involves collection of country-specific essays on the state of consumer protection, being contributed by network partners voluntarily. The idea is to come up with a first edition of this volume containing approximately 40 country essays. CUTS would be happy to consider papers from the participants, regarding their respective countries, if they were interested to contribute them. Credit would be given to the writers for the individual country chapters.
- ii. **World Competition Day** – a global campaign has been initiated by CUTS to stimulate the adoption of World Competition Day at the international level by lobbying UN and other IGOs. In order to complement this effort, CUTS is also requesting its partners to mobilise interest among national government and stakeholders in the countries by pushing for the adoption of **National Competition Day**.

2.6 In the discussions that ensued, a number of points were made by some of the participants, which have been enumerated below:

- i. Ibrahima Sidi Traore from CRT, Mali indicated that it would be useful to have a big international meeting of the members, so that the members get to know each other and the agenda of the work programme of INCOSC can be better evolved.
- ii. Leonard Ugbajah a competition consultant from Nigeria indicated that a West African chapter of INCSOC should be established, and the responsibility of coordinating its activities in the region be provided to a local organisation. CUTS would be in-charge of the overall work agenda, but the local/regional coordination would be done by these local organisations. There is a process under the ECOWAS for incorporating inputs from civil society on various issues, and the establishment of a regional chapter of INCSOC would ensure better transmission of inputs from INCSOC to ECOWAS on competition policy issues.
- iii. Aladjou T Agouta of ATC, Togo indicated that instead of a virtual presence, it is better to have a physical presence for such an important network. He also added that INCSOC should explore the possibility of charging some fees (annual or one-time) from its members. Small amounts can be contributed as

membership fees. There was some discussions on the issue of membership fees, with some other participants like Lewis Sheikh (COSPAG, The Gambia) indicating that some organisations might not be able to pay such fees – and their exclusion (just for the fact that they can't pay) could be counter-productive to the spirit of this alliance.

- iv. Eleanor Fox, University of New York, USA indicated that INCSOC should explore the possibility of engaging university students in an effort to popularise INCSOC. She added, if the linkage between competition reforms and poverty can be well demonstrated to university students; and how having a **National Competition Day** can lead to expediting the national competition reforms process – them the student might take interest in this ‘movement’. She said that some of the existing members are teaching in Universities – and can engage these students.
- v. Adedji Babatunde Abiodun from CEON, Nigeria indicated that consumer organisations would also need to be involved in order to push for the adoption of the National Competition Day. He asserted that these occasions can be used to push governments to reform national competition legislations, as well.

3. Future Actions

- 3.1 All the participants would like to become members of INCSOC. They felt that by participating in the meeting, they were by default members of this alliance.
- 3.2 The participants from Nigeria, Togo, Mali, etc. expressed desire to take up the advocacy at the national level to adopt **National Competition Day** in their respective countries.
- 3.3 Many of the participants indicated their willingness to contribute country chapters to the INCSOC volume on *Consumer Protection Regimes in the World*.

4. List of Participants

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