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UNCTAD - SPECIAL WORKING PARTY ON THE EXPANSION OF MARKETS FOR DC
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PRESENTATION OF PROMEX-PMA

In September 1990, in Paris, during the second United Nations conference on the Least Developed Countries (LLDC), the President of the French Republic announced his intention to create a body in charge of promoting the exports of these countries.

This decision, which fitted into a set of French commitments for said countries, gave rise to the birth of PROMEX-PMA (PMA/Pays Les Moins Avancés), the French Agency Promoting the Exports of the Least Developed Countries. The latter began to exercise its activities during the course of 1991 and was officially inaugurated during the same year in the presence of most of the ambassadors of the LLDC in Paris.

The LLDC form a permanent priority of the French development policy which, let's recall the fact, alone provides more than 10% of the official aid for world development, making it rank third worldwide. The total French aid represents more than 0.60% of its GNP, of which 0.16% is earmarked for the LLDC, a percentage which should be raised to 0.20% in the year 2000.

This important aid takes on many forms, whether it is offered in a bilateral or multilateral framework, and whether it is in the financial area, in particular by the remission of debts, or in the commercial area.

In this context, the creation of PROMEX-PMA meets a very specific need : providing the least developed countries with practical and operational aid for their export efforts in order to avoid their growing marginalization in world trade. Their share in world trade has indeed fallen from 1.4% in 1960 to 0.9% today.

ORGANIZATION OF THE AGENCY

An independent body, the Agency is located in Paris in the premises of the *Centre Français du Commerce Extérieur* (French Foreign Trade Centre), which provides it with logistic support. Furthermore, although the *Centre Français* is entirely devoted to aid for French exporters, it has a wealth of information (statistics, regulations, etc) on international trade, also useful to PROMEX-PMA.

The Agency's events and activities programme are defined by a Committee grouping representatives of the Ministry of the Economy and Finance (via the Directorate for Foreign Economic Relations), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Cooperation. Three personalities from the private sector chosen for their competence in this area also sit on the Committee, as well as the Agency Executive Director.

The Agency is linked to the 47 LLDC via the network of French official representations : Embassies, *Fastes d'Expansion Economique* (French Services for Economic Expansion Abroad), and Cooperation Missions. With the support of this network - particularly dense it is to be stressed - it can better appreciate the potentialities and the needs of the LLDC and draw closer to their public and private operators.

In France, it endeavours to be in contact with the organizations and bodies which also intervene in the development of trade with these countries.

Right from its creation the Agency set up links with the official bodies and professional organizations in the LLDC to inform them of its existence and the services it could offer. It thus entered into relations with the foreign trade promotion centres, ministry specialized departments, chambers of commerce and industry, professional organizations, etc.

These steps were also renewed on the occasion, for example, of the circulation of Agency publications or specific activities started in common. The Agency's contacts then become more personalized and consequently more efficient.

Finally, the Agency seeks all possibilities of working in contact with the international organizations concerned by development questions, such as the GATT-UNCTAD International Trade Centre (I.T.C.), and UNIDO. It strives to associate in their activities for the LLDC and endeavours to make its own means available to them, while quite naturally being aware that this collaboration is modest compared with the importance, the long experience and the programmes of these organizations.

It also compares its experience with that of the Import Promotion Bureaux of other countries with which it meets within the framework of the I.T.C.

Through this network of contacts and thanks to the information which has been circulated (for example by appearing in the Import Promotion Bureaux directory edited by the International Trade Centre), PROMEX-PMA has made itself known to the LLDC operators and has rapidly been able to enter into relations with them, either by answering requests sent to it, directly or through the French representations, or by proposing personalized action to them itself.

Furthermore, the Agency has itself taken the initiative to set up work instruments catering for frequently expressed needs.

ACTIVITIES OF PROMEX-PMA

To fulfil the mission assigned to it - "promoting the exports of the Least Developed Countries" - the Agency acts in two directions : in the first instance, making it easy for LLDC operators to learn about the French market, its outlets and the necessary conditions to gain access here ; in the second instance, facilitating business contacts.

To reach these two objectives, it uses highly varied means of intervention.

FACILITATING KNOWLEDGE ON THE MARKET

- Lists of importers

One of the Agency's first tasks has been to compile lists of French importers to answer the offers of LLDC exporters.

At present, the Agency has about sixty lists in a wide variety of sectors (leathers and hides ; textiles ; crafts ; fishery products ; tropical woods ; essential oils ; jewellery, etc). These lists, grouping several hundred addresses, concern very precise products or product ranges and have been compiled following personalized contacts with French importers. Their number is growing at the same rhythm as the requests received.

They are handed to visitors to the Agency and sent to exporters in the LLDC who ask for them.

Sometimes the Agency is led to ask some of its correspondents to give more details concerning their offers so as to place them in relation with potential buyers in the most efficient possible manner.

- Publications

In cooperation with the GATT-UNCTAD International Trade Centre, PROMEX-PMA compiles market briefs providing, in a few pages, information on the outlets offered by the French market for a product, the necessary regulations for its export, the main importers, etc.

To date, the following products have been dealt with :

- sesame seeds,
- essential oils,
- costume jewellery,
- medicinal plants.

Others briefs are being compiled or are at planning stage : spices, prawns/shrimps, aquarium fish, natural fibre sacks, dried flowers, bamboo articles, musical instruments.

These market briefs have been and will be sent systematically to all the official and professional organizations concerned by foreign trade. They will of course be available to interested manufacturers and exporters, bearing in mind all the Agency publications are simultaneously edited in French and in English.

The information provided by the market briefs is necessary but is not sufficient since a good knowledge of the access conditions to a country and of the marketing techniques is necessary to export there.

This is why the Agency has compiled and circulated a document entitled "Approach to the French market, a guide for LLDC" providing 120 pages of information on the French economy ; French aids for LLDC ; terms of sale in France (distribution, payment, transports, etc), as well as the tariff and regulations framework (preferences ; taxes ; controls ; standards, etc).

This document also contains practical information and a list of organizations which LLDC operators can contact to obtain complementary information on all the points addressed in the work.

Another document dealing with an aspect of packaging ("Manual on the packaging of fresh fruits and vegetables") is to be mentioned as it is a good example of the collaboration aimed at by PROMEX-PMA. This manual had already been compiled by the ITC and PROMEX-PMA is translating it into French and will later take care of its circulation.

Finally, since it is equally useful both for the Agency and the local economic operators to have information on the export potentialities of a country, PROMEX-PMA has undertaken a study on the "Promotion of exports of manufactured products from Bangladesh" which gives a good insight into the orientations of the country's development.

Yet all these publications do not exempt the Agency from continuing to reply to the specific requests it receives, as it has done so since its creation. Such requests, whether they are in the commercial, regulations, customs or standards area, are given tailor-made answers.

PROMEX-PMA is permanently available to inform LLDC operators. This is an aspect of its operation which endeavours to be as operational and concrete as possible.

- Visits to specialized trade shows

Knowledge of a market is not gained only by means of publications. Therefore, in certain cases, to meet the needs of a precise economic context, the Agency is led to participate in welcoming to France representatives of LLDC who wish to visit specialized trade shows.

These visits, always very personalized, have a double objective : gaining knowledge on offer and competition in given sectors ; learning about the recent technological developments. They are organized by PROMEX-PMA in cooperation with the French representations.

The Agency thus received on the occasion of the SIAL (Salon International de l'Alimentation - International Food Fair) His Excellency the Minister for Agriculture of Uganda. This visit was part of a programme of contacts organized by the Agency with specialized organizations and government representatives.

Mention is also to be made of the visit to the International Leather Week by the director of an important tannery in Malawi. As the subject of this show may be of interest to several LLDC, the Agency has envisaged new invitations as part of its 1993 programme.

In this same respect, invitations have also been planned to other shows presenting products which the LLDC could supply.

- *Participation in training sessions and seminars*

The publication "Approach to the French market" endeavours to answer the many questions asked by operators wishing to sell in this market. With the same view in mind the Agency has been led to participate in training programmes on international trade intended for executives dealing with operational duties in local bodies, and consequently in a position to recirculate information in their turn.

Mention can thus be made of : a training session organized by the Agency for an executive from the Burundi A.P.E.E. (Agence pour la Promotion des Echanges Extérieurs - Agency for the Promotion of Foreign Trade) ; the participation of PROMEX-PMA in the seminar organized by the Franco-Thai Chamber of Commerce in Bangkok in favour of a delegation from the Vientiane National Chamber of Commerce and Industry led by its Chairman.

Insofar as the Agency precisely attaches great importance to synergism with other organizations, it has proposed to associate operators of the neighbouring LLDC in a training session organized by UNCTAD in Madagascar on the subject of access to the Common Market.

Finally, from the point of view of technical training and with the concern to improve production processes and the quality of products, the Agency is to make the services of a technician available to the companies of Bangladesh working in the leather sector.

These few examples illustrate the Agency's approaches in this area. They also delimit their application framework.

FACILITATING BUSINESS CONTACTS

The Agency is in a position to organize the business contacts of LLDC exporters wishing to meet buyers. It regularly receives businessmen and representatives of professional organizations for whom it represents, in any case, a first access to the French market, and to whom it can supply information - most of the time immediately - on the outlets for their products and references of potential buyers.

During the last few months, PROMEX-PMA has provided information for visitors from many countries : Benin, Guinea, Madagascar, Malawi, Mauritania, Nepal, Tanzania, Togo ...

Furthermore, on request by the official or professional organizations of LLDC and notably through international organizations or the French representations, the Agency organizes programmes of appointments in Paris and in the French provinces. These programmes meet the needs of delegations wishing to establish immediate business contacts or to inform themselves on the possibilities the French market offers for their products.

Varied examples can be quoted :

- . Uganda : contacts in the agri-foodstuff and agro-industry area ;
- . Tanzania : search for outlets for textile products ; search for buyers for essential oils (Zanzibar) ;
- . Bangladesh : business contacts in the textiles and leather sectors.

The Agency is naturally open to other means of intervention which, in the framework of its mission and its means, enable aiding the Least Developed Countries to develop their trade.

It is in this spirit that PROMEX-PMA has provided its aid for the holding of an African crafts stand at a specialized French show. This stand presented creative works from eight LLDC, adapted to the clientele's tastes.

It is also in this spirit that the Agency plans to organize in Paris, in association with the French Foreign Trade Centre, an information meeting devoted to Laos and the investment possibilities offered by this country.

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The examples presented above illustrate the activity of PROMEX-PMA and give a better insight into its operation based on concrete action and practical modes of intervention.

A recent structure and thus likely to develop, PROMEX-PMA is also an original structure. Indeed, among the many national bodies dealing with development questions, it is the sole to be entirely devoted to the Least Developed Countries and promotion of their exports.

This is a broad mission indeed. No matter how big it is - and this is not the case of the Agency - an isolated structure could not cope with its sole means. Therefore the Agency seeks efficiency by basing itself on its relational role.

In France, it is in relation with the national organizations working in the same direction, and also with the business circles with which it is so important to be in contact to find outlets.

It is also in relation with the international organizations within which PROMEX-PMA has met attentive interlocutors and found irreplaceable sources of information.

On this occasion, the Agency wishes to thank them and sincerely hopes such precious collaboration will continue.
