



International Associations Build Local Capacity

by Maria Livanos Cattai
International Chamber of Commerce

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Business associations and chambers of commerce in all parts of the world share a common mission to promote, develop, and further the economic well-being of member companies by providing a collective voice in advocacy for members' interests, as well as providing quality services to help members enhance their competitiveness and succeed in their businesses locally and abroad. However, the institutional problems of some associations damage their ability to represent their constituent members. Low membership, poor financial management, and non-acceptance by governments are all factors which limit their effectiveness. The International Chamber of Commerce, now in its eighty-fifth year, helps businesses and associations overcome these challenges and facilitate international commerce and openness.

No country has been successful in meeting the material needs of its citizens and financing the social and other key roles of government on an ongoing basis without a dynamic private sector. It is the engine of growth in most countries. When supported by effective institutions and relevant regulations, the market economy is the most effective environment for achieving sustained growth and poverty reduction.

Chambers of commerce play a pivotal role in the development of the private sector and in the contribution that the private sector makes to economic, social and environmental objectives of the countries in which they operate at the local, regional and national levels.

Chambers from all parts of the world share a common mission. This mission is to promote, develop, and further the economic well-being of member companies (predominantly SME's), by providing a collective voice in advocacy for members' interests, as well as quality services to help members enhance their competitiveness and succeed in their businesses locally and abroad. This contributes significantly to the economic progress of the nation. Governments are regularly calling on chambers to help shape the country's policy framework and positions in international issues.

However, faced with such demands, chambers in many countries are still inadequately prepared to respond effectively. Factors such as low membership, poor management, insufficient financial resources and limited or non-acceptance by governments all affect their ability to achieve these tasks. The tools and knowledge required to fulfill such a role are not always available locally.

For all chambers of commerce and business associations, ICC provides the range of business tools and services, essential elements to assist chambers in effectively fulfilling their mission to serve the business community, advance economic reform, and build market institutions.

In 2004, ICC celebrates its 85th anniversary. Eighty-five years as the voice of world business championing the global economy as a force for economic growth, job creation and prosperity, of helping to open up markets and build a rules-based global economy.

The Center for International Private Enterprise is a non-profit affiliate of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and one of the four core institutes of the National Endowment for Democracy. CIPE has supported more than 800 local initiatives in over 90 developing countries, involving the private sector in policy advocacy, institutional reform, improving governance, and building understanding of market-based democratic systems. CIPE programs are also supported through the United States Agency for International Development.

Center for International Private Enterprise
1155 15th Street NW • Suite 700 • Washington, DC 20005 • USA
tel: (202) 721-9200 • fax: (202) 721-9250
web: www.cipe.org • email: forum@cipe.org

Eighty-five years as the world's premier business organization, writing rules for the conduct of international trade, resolving commercial disputes, and speaking up for business whenever government decisions affect the bottom line.

ICC activities cover a broad spectrum from arbitration and dispute resolution to making the case for open trade and the market economy system, business self-regulation, fighting corruption or combating commercial crime.

Business organizations in all parts of the world use ICC tools to facilitate business and make a difference.

Setting rules and standards is the foundation of ICC's work. ICC rules make it easier for companies in different parts of the world to trade and make contracts. They include the ICC rules on arbitration, Incoterms – standard definitions of trade terms – and the Uniform Customs and Practice for Documentary Credits, which are used by banks all over the world to finance international trade. ICC voluntary codes cover marketing and advertising, corporate governance, the suppression of extortion and bribery, and sound environmental management practices.

Today, sixteen ICC commissions of experts from the private sector cover every specialized field of concern to international business. Subjects range from banking techniques to financial services and taxation, from competition law to intellectual property rights, telecommunications and information technology, from air and maritime transport to international investment regimes and trade policy.

ICC's work at the international level has an immediate impact on national economies. In a world of globalization, even national government decisions have far stronger international repercussions than in the past. Chambers of commerce are one of ICC's most effective mechanisms in ensuring that economic development is based on internationally accepted business rules.

ICC's rules and policies are actively used by chambers in their lobbying and dialogue with their own national governments, reinforcing a united international voice of business at all levels of government. Chambers are active in the development of this work, often representing the interest of their SME members, as well as in turn encouraging and informing members of these practical business tools.

In building and strengthening national and regional economies, ICC works together with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), helping some of the world's poorest countries to attract foreign direct investment. In addition, in partnership with UNCTAD, ICC has set up an Investment Advisory Council for Least-Developed Countries (LDC) aimed at providing LDC governments with advice and recommendations intended to help increase the level and quality of foreign direct investment.

ICC Commercial Crime Services (CCS) has saved companies and individual investors billions of dollars in potential fraud and theft through its ability to recognize early warning signs. CCS deal with maritime and trading crime, product counterfeiting, financial malpractice, and all other forms of commercial crime. A special cybercrime unit tackles crimes affecting electronic commerce and keeps companies informed about this fast-evolving field of criminal activity.

In helping business do business cross-border, ICC set up the ATA Carnet, a service delivered by chambers in over 58 countries to date, allowing their businesses temporary duty-free admissions of their goods and samples. This service is managed by the World Chambers Federation (WCF), ICC's specialized division for chamber affairs.

WCF is a unique forum where chamber leaders and senior executives can communicate with each other and collaborate on matters of mutual interest, whether solving problems or realizing opportunities. WCF activities involve chambers of all types (local, regional, national, bilateral and transnational) and from all parts of the world.

One of WCF's key tools is the World Chambers Congress. The Congress gives chambers an opportunity to share best practices and learn from their counterparts some of the important tools needed to successfully manage and run a chamber of commerce. These tools and lessons learned allow chamber managers to better contribute in building long-lasting service for their members, which will help support the growth of a functional domestic private sector. Over 50% of delegates come from

developing countries. The 4th World Chambers Congress will be held in Durban, South Africa, 20-22 June 2005.

A key feature of the Congress is the World Chambers Competition, designed to bring international recognition to local chambers, to foster the continued pursuit of excellence and innovation, and to encourage the exchange of information and business development amongst chambers. The Competition has a real impact on chambers, with finalists and winners opening up new dialogue with government and industry following their involvement in this award.

WCF continues to provide practical services to help chambers develop trade. WCN Business Opportunity service opens up business ties between chamber members in all parts of the world, reinforcing the strength of the international chamber brand.

ICC's next eighty five years will certainly see a new range of products and services to help chambers and their businesses be equipped to be active partners in building strong economic development.

Maria Livanos Cattai serves as Secretary General of the International Chamber of Commerce, a organization representing thousands of businesses in more than 130 countries. The ICC and its members work to build functioning economic systems and improve standards of living around the world by advancing the development of the global free-market economy and promoting competition, free flows of goods, services, and capital.

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