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OECD Conference to Review the Role of Local Enterprise Clusters in Economic Development

Small firms are critical to economic growth and job creation. They are a particularly strong force when grouped into local networks or clusters specialised in compatible industries and well rooted in specific territories. Many of these small firms, gaining strength by clustering together, are capable of taking on large firms in competition for global markets. They also compete with and learn from other firms within their own cluster, becoming ever more innovative. Economically, these clusters are very efficient and can adapt quickly to the rapid change in global markets. Socially, they can represent a major force in civil society promoting networking and participation in local governance.

The OECD LEED Programme and the French Delegation for Territorial Planning and Regional Action (DATAR) are co-sponsoring a “World Congress on Local Clusters” at La Villette in Paris, 23-24 January 2001. The entire conference is open to journalists.

Journalists are invited to a breakfast briefing with Mr. Jean-Louis Guigou, Executive Director for Territorial Management, DATAR, and Mr. Bernard Hugonnier, Director of OECD’s Territorial Development Service, at 8.30 a.m. on Tuesday 23 January at the Centre des Congrès, La Cité des Sciences, La Villette.

The congress will bring together some 1000 policy makers and managers of enterprises in local clusters from 35 countries, including South Africa, India, and China. They will debate and exchange practical experiences on the strengths, challenges and prospects for local clusters.

Participants will hear about initiatives such as: the Jalisco State shoemaking cluster in Andiamo, Mexico, where 23 enterprises founded a company to develop new products, a common brand and a collective sales force; an association of 20 small textiles employers in Roanne, France, which manages about 40 employees who move quickly between the firms according to demand; and local firms in Biella, Italy, which jointly label and market their exports. There will also be a tour of working clusters in Seine Saint-Denis, Paris.

Some of the issues to be debated include: why clusters form and how they help firms compete; how public policy can support clusters; how clusters profit from new opportunities and challenges such as increased competition, growing multinational investment in clusters and new communications technologies; and how clusters can improve local governance.

The conference programme is available at: <http://www.oecd.org/tds/leed/events/congressSPL.htm> and <http://www.datar.gouv.fr/>

To attend the conference or to obtain further information, journalists may contact Helen Fisher, OECD’s Media Relations Division (tel. 33 1 45 24 80 97 or helen.fisher@oecd.org).

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