

WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

RESTRICTED

WT/COMTD/W/12

15 November 1995

(95-3543)

**Committee on Trade and Development
Fourth Session
17 November 1995**

TECHNICAL COOPERATION WITH DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Note by the Secretariat

I. Introduction

Since the Seventy-Seventh Session of the Committee on Trade and Development held in November 1994, the technical cooperation activities organized by the WTO Secretariat continued to be guided by the fundamental objective to assist recipient countries in their understanding and implementation of agreed international trade rules and, therefore, in achieving their fuller participation in the multilateral trading system.

At the same time, the conclusion of the Uruguay Round and the Agreements that have emerged from the negotiations have added a new dimension to technical assistance to be provided by the WTO in future. The preamble of the Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization explicitly states the need for positive efforts designed to ensure that developing countries, and especially the least-developed among them, secure a share in growth in international trade commensurate with the needs of their economic development. Moreover, a Ministerial *Decision on Measures in Favour of Least-Developed Countries* provides for measures of technical assistance "in the development, strengthening and diversification of their production and export bases including those of services, as well as in trade promotion, to enable them to maximize the benefits from liberalized access to markets."

As an immediate result, a substantial number of requests for technical assistance from the WTO Secretariat on the Uruguay Round results has been received from developing country Members, least-developed Members, economies in transition as well as acceding countries. Some of the needs expressed in first instance related to assistance in preparing and presenting schedules of concessions on goods and commitments on services by those countries that had one additional year to discharge this obligation under the terms of the decision taken at the conclusion of the Uruguay Round. Following the completion of this process, requests for technical assistance have partly been of a general nature, encompassing a broad range of trade policy issues, and partly very specific, addressing precise and narrowly defined issues.

While the Secretariat could thus continue to discharge its technical assistance programme as in the past and within the limits of the financial and human resources at its disposal, the specific requests that followed the establishment of the new trading system required a simultaneous broadening and deepening of activities, to tailor them to individual needs. This implied that the technical assistance provided thus far through seminars, technical missions, workshops and specialized courses is increasingly becoming a combination of general and specific assistance. It also meant that priorities had to be set, with the highest priority for assistance now being given to the requests made by least-developed country Members. This is reflected in projects that have been launched or are in the process of taking off and which will be discussed in more detail below. One initiative relates to a WTO project intended to yield concrete policy conclusions on how Africa's export performance can be improved. Another initiative

relates to a programme that is currently developed to implement the recently announced WTO Fund for Technical Assistance specially focused on the needs of Least-Developed Countries. In addition, special consideration is granted to countries having acceded recently to the WTO as well as small countries not actively involved in the multilateral trading system.

Another consequence of the new trading system is the recognised need to provide technical cooperation in close collaboration with other international organizations. As this note will highlight, concerted efforts are being made to better coordinate WTO activities with other agencies, in particular in mapping out a joint technical assistance programme with ITC and UNCTAD on Africa.

II. Special Assistance to Least-Developed Countries

High priority is attached to providing technical assistance to the least-developed country Members, not actively involved in the WTO and in the multilateral trading system. Least-developed countries often lack the financial and human resources and the infrastructural capacity to fully participate in the trading system, and cannot therefore take full advantage of the benefits that trade liberalization can offer. To ensure their effective participation, there is a need for particular assistance to enable them to fully grasp all details of the WTO Agreements, and more in particular those that are of direct interest to them; to bring their legislation in line with international obligations, which in return will allow them to fully exercise their rights. Their needs thus are both of a specific and global nature, encompassing a broad range of trade policy issues, which must be addressed urgently.

The policy lines developed for providing technical assistance in order to meet the specific and general requests of the least-developed countries are two-fold: on the one hand a continuation of implementation of technical assistance programmes to these countries, tailoring them as much as possible to meet individual demands; on the other hand developing new strategies that would allow to focus more explicitly on the particular situation of least-developed countries in general as well as on a regional, sub-regional and, where possible, on a country by country level.

In 1995, technical assistance to least-developed countries has been continued and strengthened in the form of technical missions to prepare individual schedules in goods and commitments in services, and seminars to explain the results of the Uruguay Round negotiations and the WTO legal framework. Other activities encompassed provision of data and trade information including tariff evaluation of Uruguay Round benefits and new opportunities for exports of individual least-developed countries. In parallel to these activities, many participants from this group of countries have followed the regular GATT/WTO trade policy courses which are designed to give an in-depth knowledge of the international trading system.

III. Africa

An initiative with regard to addressing the particular situation of Africa is reflected in a programme entitled "Elements for a Plan of Action for Africa", in response to the Ministerial Conference held in Tunis in October 1994. At that occasion, participating countries requested the provision of specific technical assistance by international agencies, in particular the WTO (then GATT), in order to enable them to take advantage of the new elements embodied in the Uruguay Round Agreements. A particular concern related to exploring avenues and perspectives for diversification, and to promote the development of new forms of joint action designed to secure a greater share of world trade for the African continent.

This is the basis for a programme that the WTO is preparing in cooperation with the ITC and UNCTAD and which will be presented shortly, which aims at providing a dynamic approach to issues of relevance to the African countries and permitting immediate action. This Plan of Action includes

short-term, medium-term and longer-term elements. It covers briefings for trade officials in Africa, assistance to implement the results of the Uruguay Round with particular emphasis on implementing regulations and legislations, training, assistance to the business community in respect of identification of trade and market opportunities, and diversification of the export base.

In addition, the WTO Secretariat is conducting a research project and organizing a symposium for African countries, which will include their active participation. This research project on "Africa's Trade and Development in the New Multilateral Trading Environment" is intended to yield concrete policy conclusions on how Africa's export performance can be improved in the new trading environment. An important component will be the preparation of a number of pragmatic in-depth studies of particular aspects of Africa's economies and trade, which will be conducted in a closely cooperative and complementary way with other major multilateral institutions.

The WTO is also collaborating with the European Union, which has agreed to provide the funding to organize sub-regional seminars for ACP countries in 1996. This series of seminars is being organized in cooperation with the ACP Secretariat and will include six sub-regional seminars in Africa, one in the Caribbean and one in the Asia-Pacific region.

IV. WTO Fund for Technical Assistance

The Norwegian Government has made a contribution of US\$ 2.5m towards a WTO Technical Assistance Fund for the benefit primarily of least-developed countries and African countries as a group. The main purpose is to help these countries build the human and institutional resources and expertise necessary to participate fully in the international trading system, and in particular to be in a position to meet their WTO obligations and benefit from the system. These funds will cover a three year implementation period. The WTO and the Norwegian Government expect other countries to contribute to this Fund, thus enlarging its application.

The programme that to this effect has been designed by the WTO defines, to the extent possible and within the binding constraints of the Fund, specific activities to be undertaken. The guidelines that will be followed in executing the project are based on the concept of sustainable development and the activities will focus on training and more broadly on human capacity formation and institutional reinforcing.

The WTO will have responsibility for the operation of the Fund and for the supervision and execution of the project. Activities will be conducted under its terms of agreement and may utilize outside resources - such as consultants, country experts, etc. - as the WTO may find necessary and appropriate. It will be implemented in close collaboration with other multilateral or regional organizations such as UNCTAD, ITC, UNEP, the World Bank and regional development institutions.

V. Training, Institution and Capacity Building

Workshops and Seminars

In May 1995, the Technical Cooperation and Training Division organized a Workshop on Notification Requirements of the GATT/WTO legal system. The objective was to contribute to a better understanding of notification requirements and to help WTO Members discharge their obligations in a more effective way. The Workshop was primarily intended for trade policy officials from developing countries, but the meeting was also open to officials from other Members and to countries which are in the process of accession. The Workshop included practical and detailed presentations and written documentation and indicative notification formats were made available. One day was also devoted

to individual consultations by participants with Secretariat officials responsible for notifications under the various Agreements.

During 1995, the Technical Cooperation and Training Division organized over sixty national or regional seminars, workshops and technical missions in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Some of these were of a general nature while others concentrated on technically more complex issues, such as the harmonized system, customs valuation, rules of origin, agriculture, the sanitary and phytosanitary Agreement, anti-dumping, subsidies and countervailing duties, services, TRIPs, trade and environment. Also, some seminars were organized for the benefit of countries in the process of or contemplating accession. A number of technical cooperation missions assisted officials in the capitals of least-developed countries and smaller developing countries in the preparation of Schedules of concessions on goods and commitments on services.

A Regional Seminar for Asian developing countries, financed through a voluntary contribution by the Government of Japan, was organized in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, from 13-16 March 1995.

Technical Missions on Implementation of WTO Obligations

A series of technical missions on implementation of WTO obligations were conducted in several countries of Africa, Asia and Latin America. Other missions covered specific issues related to the disciplines included in the Agreements resulting from the Uruguay Round.

Courses

In accordance with Article 27.3 of the Understanding on Rules and Procedures Governing the Settlement of Disputes, the Technical Cooperation and Training Division jointly with the Legal Affairs Division organized the sixth Special Training Course on Dispute Settlement Procedures and Practices from 12-15 September 1995. The objective was to brief and train officials from developed and developing Members, including non-Members in the process of accession, on these matters. The programme consisted of theoretical lectures on the GATT/WTO legal system, followed by presentations on the dispute settlement procedures and practices, with special emphasis on special provisions in favour of developing countries. In addition, it included exercises on case problems relating to the fundamental principles of the multilateral trading system and a simulation of panel hearings.

Briefing Sessions

Briefing sessions for Geneva-based delegations and visiting officials of least-developed countries, developing countries, economies in transition and countries in the process of accession are organized on a regular basis. These briefings are given either for individual delegations and officials or in the form of briefing sessions for several delegations. These activities constitute a very important aspect of technical assistance and allows to address specific concerns of individual or groups of countries.

Trade Policy Courses

The WTO has continued GATT's practice of organizing training courses for developing countries on trade policy, international trade law and the multilateral trading system. Offered in English, French and Spanish, the courses are open to officials from developing countries, including countries which are not GATT or WTO Members. The first course for 24 officials was held in French, from 23 January to 28 April 1995. The second course, in English, includes twenty-six officials and runs from 28 August to 1 December 1995. Courses address the results of the Uruguay Round and the rights and obligations

of WTO Members, have a practical orientation and are designed to help officials prepare themselves for the tasks awaiting them in their national administrations. The participants already have responsibilities for the formulation and conduct of foreign trade policy and are nominated by their respective governments. The programme includes participation in seminars and group discussions, a workshop on negotiating techniques and simulated exercises for conducting trade negotiations and for settling disputes.

Two other special Courses were organized for officials from economies in transition. A Special Trade Policy Course for Eastern and Central European and Central Asian Countries (the fifth of this kind) was financed by the Swiss Government. A main consideration for holding this course was the need to facilitate effective participation of these economies in world trade and the consolidation of their processes of economic reform. An additional reason was to provide explanations and training to officials from some of these countries while in their accession negotiations to the WTO. At the request and with the financial support of the Government of the United States of America, a Special Trade Policy Course (the second) was organized for officials from Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

In 1995, a total of ninety-nine officials from developing countries and from economies in transition participated in the Trade Policy Courses.

Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM)

During the period under consideration, technical assistance was provided to several developing countries in the preparation of their trade policy reviews. While the frequency of reviews of developing and least-developed countries is lower than for developed countries, it represents a major and intense exercise for these countries; the number of requests has thus gradually increased. The Secretariat is prepared to provide assistance in this area to all requesting developing countries, in particular African and least-developed.

Provision of Technical Information

The Technical Cooperation and Training Division has continued to prepare studies on individual products of interest to developing and least-developed countries. Upon request, data on trade flows, tariffs and non-tariff measures needed for consultations and negotiations have often been made available. Information was also provided towards the assessment of other countries' offers in market access in goods of relevance to developing countries' export interests. They have also received technical assistance designed to help them assess the impact on their services trade of specific commitments on services made by developed countries.

In addition, comprehensive studies on the outcome of the Uruguay Round for requesting individual countries or groups of countries, as well as background notes on specific issues in different areas of the negotiations, have been prepared.

VI. Joint Technical Assistance with Other International Organizations

The WTO technical assistance activities are being closely coordinated with a number of other international organizations which provide technical assistance on trade issues. The WTO Secretariat has made available the services of its officials for participation in seminars, workshops or courses sponsored by other organizations, in particular the International Trade Centre, UNCTAD, the World Bank, the IMF, and Regional Economic Commissions. The Technical Cooperation and Training Division has also coordinated participation by WTO officials in conferences and other events organized by these international organizations.