

Doha Mandates

Paragraphs 38-41 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration deal exclusively with overall technical assistance and capacity-building. Paragraphs 42-43 focus more specifically on assistance to least developed countries.

Para. 38 instructs the Secretariat "to support domestic efforts for mainstreaming trade into national plans for economic development and strategies for poverty reduction. The delivery of WTO technical assistance shall be designed to assist developing and least-developed countries and low-income countries in transition to adjust to WTO rules and disciplines, implement obligations and exercise the rights of membership, including drawing on the benefits of an open, rules-based multilateral trading system. Priority shall also be accorded to small, vulnerable, and transition economies, as well as to Members and Observers without representation in Geneva."

Para. 39 underscores the importance of co-ordinated delivery of technical assistance with relevant bilateral, regional and multilateral institutions and calls for consultations with relevant agencies, bilateral donors and beneficiaries to identify ways of enhancing and rationalising the Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least-developed Countries and the Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme (JITAP).

Para. 40 instructs the Committee on Budget, Finance and Administration to develop a plan for adoption by the General Council in December 2001 that will ensure long-term funding for WTO technical assistance.

Technical Assistance and Capacity-building

Several developing country Members see the technical assistance and capacity building (TACB) provided by the WTO Secretariat as the heart of the "development" dimension of the Doha Round. The financial commitment, attention, and effort put into TACB has increased significantly in the past two years, largely in response to demands from developing country delegates for a more coherent and better co-ordinated program that addresses the needs of developing country delegations.

Earlier critiques of the TACB programme -- that it focused more on quantity than quality, failed to provide long-term capacity building, lack of national ownership and short duration of many activities, and the failure to take into account the needs of beneficiary countries -- have been recognized through the monitoring and evaluation process and efforts to address these problems have featured prominently in the 2004 and 2005 Technical Assistance and Training Plans. These efforts are part of an ongoing process which one delegate described as a "continuum" towards a TACB program that leads to a long-term enhancement of institutional capacities in developing countries.

Current State of Play

The draft 2005 Technical Assistance and Training Plan (TATP, WT/COMTD/W/133/Rev.1) notes that Members emphasised that beneficiaries needed to "identify and prioritise their requests for assistance, based on a process of needs identification." At the WTO Ministerial meeting held in Cancun in 2003, the Secretary-Generals of the WTO and the United Nations International Development Organization (UNIDO) signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) providing for roundtables with TACB beneficiary countries to sketch out a preliminary needs assessment.

The need to ensure local ownership and enhance the long-term local capacity building effects of technical assistance activities has led to an increased emphasis on partnerships and outsourcing. Beyond the MoU with UNIDO, the WTO Secretariat increasingly partners with regional organisations such as the UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) as well as academics in developing countries.

The 2005 draft TATP stressed that delivering quality TA was also dependent on ensuring the participants' expectations match those of the Secretariat. The plan also put special attention on increasing the duration of TA activities and decided to limit attendance at training workshops, courses and seminars to 30 participants.

Despite the need to plan in advance to ensure co-ordination and coherence, the Secretariat is increasingly aware of the need for flexibility, and therefore developing countries can request assistance on any topic at any time. Owing to scarce resources and the self-described "natural limit" of approximately 450 Secretariat-designed activities that can be effectively delivered in a given year, each developing country can request two national-level TACB activities per year and least developed countries (LDCs) can request three. This is expected to be particularly pertinent in 2005 in the run-up to the Hong Kong Ministerial.

Coverage in the 2005 Technical Assistance Plan

The WTO will continue to hold Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs) along with a variety of other "products", including introduction courses for officials from LDCs and courses on Trade Negotiations Skills. This is in addition to a variety of academic support and internship programs. The

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Para. 41 instructs the Director-General to report to the fifth Session of the Ministerial Conference, with an interim report to the General Council in December 2002, on the implementation and adequacy of the technical assistance and capacity-building commitments identified in different paragraphs of the Declaration.

Para. 42 lists meaningful market access, support for the diversification of their production and export base, and trade-related technical assistance and capacitybuilding as essential for integrating least-developed countries (LDCs) into the multilateral trading system. Para. 42 also instructs the Sub-Committee for LDCs to design a work programme taking into account the trade-related elements of the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action adopted at LDC-III.1

Para. 43 endorses the Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least-developed Countries (IF) as a viable model for LDCs' trade development. It also requests the Director-General to provide an interim report to the General Council in December 2002 and a full report to the fifth Session of the Ministerial Conference on all issues affecting LDCs.

The Declaration is has specific technical assistance and capacity-building provisions for various negotiating mandates.

Yet more specific technical assistance provisions are to be found in the Decision on Implementation-related Issues and Concerns (WT/MIN (01)/W/10) also adopted in Doha.

TATP specifies that Regional Seminars will be held on agriculture, customs valuation, dispute settlement, government procurement, non-agriculture market access, regional trade agreements, rules, sanitary and phytosanitary measures, services, technical barriers to trade, trade and development, trade and environment, trade facilitation and trade-related intellectual property rights.

Controversial elements in the 2005 plan include the exclusion of three of the Singapore Issues (transparency in government procurement, investment and competition policy) after they were dropped from the agenda at the Cancun Ministerial (see Doha Round Briefing Vol.3 No.6 on Trade Facilitation) and the inclusion of a regional seminar on textiles and clothing (T&C). The 2005 TATP was approved by the Committee on Trade and Development only after being blocked for over a month by Members who did not want T&C included in the Plan (see Doha Round Briefing Vol. 3 no. 4 on NAMA, Textiles and Clothing section).

LDCs and Small Economies

The Integrated Framework (IF) continues to bring together the International Monetary Fund, International Trade Centre, UNCTAD, UNDP, World Bank and the WTO in an effort to deliver complementary trade-related assistance to LDCs to enhance economic growth and development capacities and ensure that national trade policies are integrated into the overall development and poverty-reduction strategies for each country. The IF process currently covers some 35 countries. The Integrated Framework Steering Committee (IFSC) in December 2003 identified eight main areas where fine-tuning was required in the program, namely, the scope of the IF; country selection; LDC participation and ownership; consultant selection; planning, management, monitoring and evaluation; capacity development; communi-

cation; and governance, which the IF has incorporated into a "revamped" program.

Key issues in the WTO Sub-Committee on Least-developed Countries since the Cancun meeting have included TA for acceding LDCs, TA for supply-side problems, market access issues (particularly in regards to Australia and Canada), the phase-out of textiles and clothing quotas and IF-related issues including a WTO Secretariat Report on the next phase of the IF (WT/IFSC/7).

The Dedicated Session of the Committee on Trade and Development continues to meet and grapple with the difficult mandate it has been given under Paragraph 35 of the Doha Declaration to "frame responses to the trade-related issues identified for the fuller integration of small, vulnerable economies into the multilateral trading system, and not to create a sub-category of WTO Members." Members have discussed several challenges particular to small economies and landlocked countries, but attempts to take action on these problems have been stymied by the fact that the group does not — and can not, according to the Doha declaration — exist as a group. One option small economies hope to use is a "characteristic-specific" approach that would link the needs of small economies to action-oriented provisions in the WTO, thereby helping them surmount the sub-category issue.

Documents related to technical assistance and capacity-building can be found at <http://docsonline.wto.org> under WT/COMTD/W/* using 'technical assistance' as the search criteria.

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