

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

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TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE BY THE SECRETARIAT TO DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

Note by the Secretariat

Since the announcement in 1972 by a number of major trading nations of their intention to enter into comprehensive multilateral trade negotiations, the Committee on Trade and Development has given attention to what should be done to meet the technical assistance needs of developing countries as regards preparation and participation in these negotiations. In September 1974, the Special Assistance Unit (SAU) was set up within the structure of the Trade and Development Department. The broad task given to SAU was "to keep in continuing close touch with delegations of developing countries so as to assist them, individually or collectively, with appropriate information and advice on all relevant aspects of the various problems relating to their preparations for and participation in the multilateral trade negotiations". At each of its sessions the Committee on Trade and Development has taken note of the technical assistance work performed by the secretariat in connexion with the trade negotiations and from time to time members of the Committee have made suggestions for additional tasks to be carried out.

The multilateral trade negotiations have now entered their final phase. The current meeting of the Committee could be the last occasion on which the secretariat would be reporting to the Committee on the technical assistance provided for the multilateral trade negotiations. The Committee might therefore wish to take note of the extent of the work which has been done since the commencement of the negotiations and to make suggestions for any additional work which might be needed by delegations from developing countries in the final phase of the negotiations. The secretariat has understandably tried to tailor its activities as far as possible to the individual interests and requirements of delegations. It is therefore not possible to give a full global picture of the technical assistance provided. An attempt has nevertheless been made below to give a broad picture of technical assistance activity over the period in question.

Period 1973-1976

(a) Tariffs

In the preparatory phase of the negotiations, notes were prepared analysing the implications for developing countries of various alternative techniques and modalities suggested for negotiations on industrial products and in the field of agriculture (COM.IND/W/85; COM.AG/W/86). The secretariat had also prepared statistical studies analysing the implications of MFN reductions for the Generalized System of Preferences. These studies, which came to be known as Brown and White Books, were intended to enable developing countries to assess the pattern of MFN tariffs and GSP treatment, applicable to their exports and the rates of MFN tariffs resulting from the application of the various tariff-cutting schemes that were then under consideration.

(b) Tropical products

With respect to a number of products included in the list of products notified as being tropical by developing countries the secretariat made available to delegations data relating to trade, tariffs and non-tariff measures and to the extent relevant and available, data on supply, demand, stocks, prices, marketing and distribution systems, etc. Data was compiled on the export dependence of developing countries on individual tropical products. Some material was also provided on the subject of tariff classification, effective protection and internal taxes.

With respect to certain CCCN headings covering products of both tropical and non-tropical origins e.g., CCCN 33.01 essential oils, an attempt was made to identify varieties of products exclusively or primarily produced in the tropical zone and to provide details with respect to those varieties of products to the extent available. The secretariat also assisted certain delegations of developing countries in the identification of tropical products which, although less well known, were nevertheless of significance to the export trade of these developing countries.

(c) Non-tariff measures

The secretariat also prepared background notes analysing the implications for developing countries of such non-tariff measures as health and sanitary regulations (COM.TD/W/190), standards (COM.TD/W/191), customs valuation (COM.TD/W/195), subsidies and countervailing duties (MTN/3B/19) and quantitative restrictions (MTN/3B/20). To assist developing countries in assessing the relevance to their export trade of the different techniques and modalities with reference to agricultural products exported by developed and developing countries, an information paper was circulated covering trade flows and types of import measures applied.

(d) Country studies

In accordance with the recommendations and suggestions made by the Committee and by the Group of Three, a series of country studies identifying for each developing country participating in the negotiations tariff and non-tariff measures affecting products of particular interest to them were prepared during this period. These studies were based on statistics covering the year 1970-1971 which were those available at that time. Ninety-five countries were covered in this programme.

Period 1976-1978

During the active phase of the negotiations, the technical assistance activities of the secretariat have been in general tailored as far as possible to the individual interests, requests and requirements of developing country delegations. It is not, therefore, possible to give a fully comprehensive statement of the assistance provided. In the following paragraphs, however, an attempt has been made to give a picture of the principal areas of assistance in this phase of the negotiations.

(i) Information for the preparation of request lists

Assistance in respect of information on tariffs and non-tariff measures was given by the secretariat in connexion with the initial and revised request lists submitted by some forty developing countries to the eleven developed countries in the areas of tropical products, agriculture and non-tariff measures.

(ii) Assistance in specific areas of the negotiations

(a) Tropical products

As mentioned above the secretariat provided on request technical assistance to some forty developing countries in connexion with request lists submitted in the Group "Tropical Products". Factual information for inclusion in the request lists on tariffs and non-tariff measures applicable to individual products and on trade flows was provided. The secretariat also assisted developing countries in revising their request lists following initial consultations with developed countries. For reference purposes, a consolidated list of requests was prepared and twice updated.

Following the submission of request lists by developing countries, the secretariat assisted delegations in making arrangements for bilateral and/or plurilateral consultations and negotiations and compiled on request relevant background data.

After the submission of initial offers in the Group, the secretariat prepared a listing of requests and offers with respect to tariffs and non-tariff measures at the tariff line level. This listing has been revised three times in the light of developments in the MTN and other trade policy developments, including, inter alia, additional offers submitted, concessions and contributions implemented, and relevant offers submitted in the negotiations in other groups.

Following the adoption of request and offer procedures by the Groups "Agriculture" and "Non-Tariff Measures", the secretariat assisted delegations of developing countries in the re-submission of requests still pending or not adequately dealt with in the tropical products negotiations, as well as in the identification of items incorporating or derived from tropical products, which had not been covered by requests in the Group "Tropical Products".

(b) Rapid evaluation of tariff-cutting formulae

Following the March 1976 meeting of the Group "Tariffs", tabulations were prepared at the request of individual developing countries providing information on imports, tariff treatment, and tariff reductions resulting from tariff-cutting hypotheses selected by the requesting developing countries. Successive series of tabulations have been supplied covering imports in the years 1972, 1974, 1975 and 1976, on request, as the data have become available. During the period 1976 to the present, over seventy developing countries participating in the negotiations have been supplied with this information for eleven developed markets.

(c) Information for the examination of offers

At the request of individual developing countries, details setting out offers made by the main developed countries against products of export interest to these countries were supplied. Some forty developing countries were covered in this exercise. In addition, the secretariat has maintained a comprehensive filing system for the information of delegations on the requests and offers made on products of interest to developing countries.

(iii) Special studies of the trade situation of individual developing countries

A considerable number of ad hoc studies were requested by individual countries in order either to provide supplementary supporting data for requests, or to clarify aspects of offers as background for bilateral and plurilateral consultations. As far as these can be quantified in the period 1976-1978, these particular types of study were prepared for some fifty countries.

(iv) Least-developed countries

In addition to assisting the least-developed countries on an individual basis, two series of general studies covering the interests of the least-developed countries were prepared.

(v) Miscellaneous general studies

(a) Various studies dealing with tropical products (COM.TD/W/189 and Addenda, COM.TD/W/205); data on quantitative restrictions, quotas, State trading, licensing requirements etc., and products in which developing countries have notified an export interest (COM.TD/W/203 and Revision 1 and 2) etc.

(b) A study on the implications of the sector approach for copper in relation to the trade interests of developing countries including their copper-based industries (MTN/SEC/W/17 and Corr.1).

(c) Notes containing information on handicraft products regarding their identification, tariff treatment and non-tariff measures applied in the main import markets (MTN/SEC/W/16 and MTN/SEC/W/19).

(d) Papers on fish and fish products, hides and skins and articles thereof, wood and wood products, and pulp and paper products (MTN/SEC/W/2 and Add.1 and Add.2).

(e) At the request of jute producing countries participating in the MTN a note was prepared on trade flows and commercial policy affecting jute and jute products.

(f) Technical assistance note containing a summary of factual information on government procurement practices.

(g) Identification of tariff and non-tariff measures affecting agricultural products.

(h) Ad hoc notes for particular individual delegations in connexion with aspects of specific commodities and other trade problems relevant to the MTN.

(i) Identification of products subject to quantitative restrictions.

General

With respect to negotiations on certain codes of conduct etc. the secretariat has provided on request clarification to developing countries with respect to provisions in the draft texts and such other information that it could give on developments in this area of the negotiations.

The secretariat has throughout the period of the negotiations taken the initiative as far as this has been practicable to keep delegations which were new to the MTNs and those which have not had resident missions in Geneva informed of developments of interest to them. The secretariat has also been frequently called upon to provide technical facilities required by delegations for informal exchanges of views or consultations.

Documents

In order to assist developing countries particularly those which are not in a position to regularly follow MTN meetings, the secretariat has provided and kept up to date, a guide to MTN documents of particular relevance and interest to developing countries as well as a document containing a selection of MTN and other GATT material providing on a product basis, factual information and data of interest to developing countries.

Seminars

The secretariat arranged a special seminar in 1973 and 1974 designed to familiarize senior officials from capitals in developing countries with various aspects of the MTN. Some sixty-six senior officials from some fifty-seven developing countries participated in this seminar.

The secretariat also at the request of a number of developing countries, organized in Geneva in 1977 and 1978 briefing sessions of short duration for officials from capitals on specific MTN topics of particular interest to the countries concerned.

Between 1975 and 1978, the secretariat on request made available the participation of secretariat staff in eleven seminars held on a regional or sub-regional basis under the auspices or joint sponsorship of UNDP, UNCTAD, UN regional economic commissions and other inter-governmental organizations such as the Commonwealth Secretariat.