

GENERAL AGREEMENT ON TARIFFS AND TRADE

RESTRICTED

COM.TD/W/445
30 October 1986

Limited Distribution

Committee on Trade and Development
Sixtieth Session
11, 12 and 14 November 1986

THE TECHNICAL COOPERATION PROGRAMME OF GATT IN THE CONTEXT OF THE URUGUAY ROUND

Background

1. The technical assistance programme of the GATT was first established in 1956. It comprised training courses in trade policy for officials from developing countries. Apart from training courses, technical assistance on an ad hoc basis was occasionally provided by the GATT secretariat to delegations of developing countries.
2. With the commencement of the Tokyo Round of multilateral trade negotiations, technical assistance was institutionalized by the establishment in 1974 of a Special Assistance Unit within the GATT secretariat. The mandate of the Unit 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".
3. The technical assistance work during the Tokyo Round was based on the individual requirements of developing countries and covered a large number of areas. Data on tariffs, non-tariff measures and trade flows was provided at the request of developing countries to assist them in the negotiations on tropical products, agriculture, tariffs and non-tariff measures. Information in the form of country studies was also prepared, identifying items of export interest for developing countries in the developed country markets. Assistance was provided by way of information on existing rules, regulations and practices at national and international level to facilitate analysis of the implications of the various draft codes and legal instruments that were being discussed in the Tokyo Round. Special attention was given to the needs of least-developed countries through the preparation of general studies covering the trade interests of this group of countries in addition to assisting them on an individual basis. Further, secretariat officials regularly briefed delegates of developing countries on developments in the different areas of the negotiations.
4. The Special Assistance Unit was transformed into the Technical Cooperation Division of the GATT secretariat from the beginning of 1980. Since then the Division has served as the focal point for technical cooperation with developing countries and has been providing technical assistance to developing countries in all fields of GATT activity. In response to requests from governments concerned, the Division has organized an average of eighteen to twenty trade policy seminars, including regional seminars, in developing countries every year since the conclusion of the Tokyo Round.

5. The focus of technical assistance activities shifted after the GATT Ministerial meeting in 1982 so as to cater to the needs of developing countries in the context of the Ministerial Work Programme. In the last two years, in consultations with delegations, short briefing sessions were also organized by the secretariat in Geneva to inform officials, especially those who were new to Geneva, on an informal basis about the ongoing activities of GATT and the work of various GATT bodies. Following the establishment of the Preparatory Committee, the Technical Cooperation Division was also called upon by individual developing countries to provide factual background information on subjects under discussion in the Committee.

6. In his concluding remarks before adoption of the Ministerial Declaration, the Chairman of the Ministerial Meeting in Punta del Este stated that:

"In order to participate fully in the negotiations, developing countries would require technical support. There was agreement that technical support by the secretariat, adequately strengthened, should be available to developing countries participating in the negotiations".

In this context, the secretariat has reviewed its existing technical assistance activities and attempted to examine how these activities may be strengthened and reoriented to meet the expected requirements of developing countries in the course of the negotiations.

7. It seems clear that the Uruguay Round of trade negotiations is soon to be touching on the interests and concerns of a very large number of developing countries. The negotiations cover a very broad range of issues. A number of these issues will be explored for the first time in the framework of a trade negotiation, and requirements by way of data and background information and analysis could relate to both specific trade flows and trade measures affecting individual products or sectors, and to the systematic and normative issues that would be under discussion. For these reasons, it is to be expected that the requests for technical assistance for the secretariat could be both more numerous and more demanding in terms of time and the expertise required to deal with them.

8. In as much as requests for information and data on tariffs and non-tariff measures and trade flows are concerned, the ability of the secretariat to respond to these promptly would depend on the data base available in the International Computing Centre. It is to be expected that this data base as well as facilities available to the Technical Cooperation Division, would have to be strengthened in order, inter alia, to ensure availability of information on a consolidated basis.

Technical cooperation in the Uruguay Round

The following paragraphs give an outline of the basis on which the technical cooperation activities could be organized.

A) Objectives, policy and principles

9. The objective of the GATT technical cooperation programme would be to help developing countries in their preparations for and participation in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, by providing data, information and background documentation focusing on issues and problems in the negotiations, of interest to developing countries. The programme would thus aim at facilitating the more effective participation of developing countries in the Uruguay Round.

10. The approach to be followed in the implementation of the technical cooperation programme would be as follows:

- a) The programme would be guided by the objectives set for the Uruguay Round by the Declaration adopted at Punta del Este and stay within the framework of matters and issues dealt with in the Declaration.
- b) Technical assistance activities would be undertaken, as in the past, upon specific request of developing countries. These would be tailored to their individual requirements. Every effort would, however, be made to ensure that the technical assistance facilities are available, on an equitable basis, to all interested developing countries. The programme will be flexible and will be adjusted according to the priorities in the different phases of the negotiations. To that end, the Technical Cooperation Division will remain in close contact with delegations of developing countries. Special attention will be given to the needs of least-developed countries. Particular efforts will be made to help these countries in pursuing issues of interest to them in the process of negotiations.
- c) Information and data, as well as technical notes, that will be provided to developing countries by the secretariat would be of a factual nature.

11. The Technical Cooperation Division of the secretariat will continue to be the focal point dealing with requests for technical assistance. Technical assistance activities could, as before, continue to draw upon the expertise available in operational divisions responsible for servicing the negotiations.

B) Areas of technical assistance

12. Delegations of developing countries have already made known their initial requirements of technical assistance in the early phase of negotiations. As a result of contacts with delegations both in Geneva and during the Ministerial Conference in Punta del Este the secretariat intends to focus on the following broad areas of technical assistance:

(i) Country studies: Information would be provided, upon request of individual developing countries, identifying items of their export interest in different developed country markets and the relevant data on tariffs, non-tariff measures and trade flows. This would assist developing countries in determining their priorities in the negotiations.

(ii) Tariffs, NTM and trade data: Data on tariffs, non-tariff measures and trade flows in respect of various products and product sectors would be made available, upon request, so as to help developing countries in submitting request lists, as appropriate, in the areas of tropical products, tariffs, non-tariff measures and natural resource-based products. To the extent possible, data requirements of developing countries in the context of standstill and rollback commitments will also be met.

(iii) Factual background notes: Delegations of developing countries have suggested to the secretariat that they may need factual background notes on issues of interest to them in various subjects of the negotiations included in the Punta del Este Ministerial Declaration.

(iv) Negotiating techniques: Delegations of developing countries, especially those new to the GATT, in order to take a more effective part in the Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations, have requested for information on negotiating techniques and rules and procedures used in the past rounds of trade negotiations in the GATT.

(v) Briefing of delegations and officials: Because of the complexity of the new round and due to the large number of subjects for negotiations, delegations of developing countries, particularly those belonging to small missions, may not be able to follow developments in all areas. It is the intention to assist them with periodic briefings, as necessary, on developments in specific negotiating groups and bodies. To this end, the secretariat could also prepare for the Committee on Trade and Development, a periodic summary of developments in the different areas of the negotiations, with special emphasis on issues of interest to developing countries including in particular the least-developed countries.

(vi) Seminars and country missions: Trade policy seminars and country missions have proved to be useful and there has been a continuous demand for these since the conclusion of the Tokyo Round. Request for such seminars and country missions focusing on the Uruguay Round and on the regular work of GATT is likely to grow, keeping in view the awareness of developing countries of the rôle of GATT in the international trading system and the desire of these countries to participate more effectively in the GATT activities and in the new round of trade negotiations. Seminars and country missions would also provide an opportunity for GATT officials to make contact with senior trade policy officials of the host countries and to discuss developments in the negotiations and other problems of mutual interest. The secretariat remains prepared to respond to the requests of developing countries for seminars and country missions.

Resources

13. It is expected that most of the additional activity could be handled through redeployment of existing staff, any additional requirement of personnel and other resources being carefully scrutinized with a view to keeping these to the minimum.