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Harvesting ylang ylang flowers on the island of Mohéli, Comoros.

By reviewing both past and ongoing accession experiences within the Arab world, key lessons can be identified to provide guidance for ongoing and future accession endeavours. The successful integration of Arab nations into the multilateral trading system is not only beneficial for their economies but also contributes to the overall stability and prosperity of the region. By applying best practices and adapting them to their specific needs, Arab economies can navigate the challenges of WTO accession with greater success, ultimately reaping the rewards of being more open and connected to the global economy.

The Arab economies' path to WTO membership has been marked by a variety of challenges, including legal, economic and political obstacles. Nevertheless, the determination and commitment demonstrated by these nations in their accession journeys are commendable.

Successful WTO accession requires comprehensive preparation. Arab economies should prioritize institutional and legal reforms, align domestic policies with international trade rules, enhance their trade-related infrastructure and promote their economic diversification.

Involving a broad range of stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and government agencies, is essential to ensure that the accession process reflects the diverse interests and concerns of a given nation.

Investing in capacity building vis-à-vis government officials and trade experts is vital for navigating the complexities of WTO accession and ensuring effective participation in the multilateral trading system. Technical assistance programmes from the WTO and other regional and international organizations are highly important in this respect.

While there are common principles and practices that apply to all WTO accessions, it is important for Arab economies to tailor their strategies and negotiations to their unique circumstances, taking into account their individual economic structures and priorities.

In this final section, we review the key takeaways from the study and highlight some suggestions for the way forward.

How have Arab members that acceded to the WTO after 1995 benefitted from their membership and how can such benefits be enhanced going forward?

WTO membership offers numerous advantages to all members, both those that acceded prior to 1995 and those which have become members since.

We have seen that while accession to the WTO entails undertaking extensive commitments, it also secures export opportunities in the markets of other members in accordance with the latter's obligations and commitments under WTO agreements. The first four members (Jordan, Oman, Saudi Arabia and Yemen) have harnessed their membership and the implementation of their related obligations to support their economic strategies to boost trade, economic growth and regulatory reforms.

The broad scope of regulatory and institutional reforms has enabled these four members to advance their trade and investment regimes in the direction needed to serve their economic reform strategies and enabled them to create more competitive market conditions and a business-friendly environment. While the link between WTO membership and enhanced economic performance is difficult to quantify, the correlation between the two strongly suggests a cause-and-effect relationship, taking into account the host of external factors that have influenced economic performance.

It can be argued that one of the major benefits of membership is ensuring that the overall direction of economic and trade policies is oriented towards maintaining a market economy based on regulatory frameworks that create a competitive environment. This is particularly important for governments seeking to pursue a market economy approach. While the four Arab members discussed here are not homogeneous in their economic structure and natural endowments, they are similar in having a long-standing history of

a dominant role by their government in economic activity. At the same time, they are also similar in their determination to pursue a market economy approach and integrate into the multilateral trading system. This has consistently provided the political will necessary behind the accession process.

It is also true that being part of a rules-based trading system with legally binding commitments leads to a stable and predictable policy and regulatory environment. In turn, this creates an investment-friendly environment. Attracting foreign direct investment (FDI) is always one of the priorities for economies aspiring to achieve higher levels of growth and development. It is also a necessary element in pursuing strategies of economic diversification and job creation.

Additionally, there are benefits derived from the application of commitments relating to good governance such as ensuring the right of appeal by market operators seeking the review of administrative measures by independent tribunals on matters related to WTO obligations. This goes a long way in ensuring the rule of law necessary for business-friendly conditions.

The application and enforcement of intellectual property rights in accordance with WTO obligations also contributes to attracting investments in technologically advanced sectors and industries.

Furthermore, WTO membership encourages the creation of effective mechanisms for consultations with and among government agencies and the private sector to improve policy coherence across different sectors and regulatory frameworks. This collaborative approach enhances the effectiveness of their economic and trade policies.

The process of accession also encourages partnerships with the private sector and consultations with various stakeholders. Such processes lead to better informed positions regarding policy and regulatory reforms as well as negotiations with WTO members.

To enhance the benefits of their WTO membership, Arab members having joined since 1995 may consider the following actions:

- Maintain active and continuous engagement and coordination among relevant government agencies to ensure the mainstreaming of trade policy as an integral part of an overall economic policy strategy.
- Continue efforts to pursue regulatory reforms and to address the regulatory challenges associated with introducing new laws and regulations as well as reforming and empowering relevant institutions.
- Pursue active and continuous consultative efforts with the private sector as the end users of trade rules. Regular consultations can also help identify evolving technical assistance and capacity-building needs.
- Strengthen public-private partnerships to ensure that the private sector's interests are aligned with government objectives and mobilize the proactive participation of the business community.
- Invest in comprehensive capacity-building programmes for government agencies responsible for health, plant and technical control. Training programmes should be designed to cover various provisions of international agreements.
- Prioritize reforms that streamline regulatory frameworks and continue to align them with international standards and ensure continuing compliance with WTO agreements.
- Continue to develop and maintain effective and efficient trade policy institutions that oversee the development and implementation of sound trade policies and regulations.

WTO membership offers Arab members that acceded after 1995 substantial benefits, but consistent efforts are required to fully reap long-term benefits. In pursuing such efforts, elements identified by the first four members included the following:

- Jordan highlighted the importance of technical assistance in developing and formulating trade policies that adhere to WTO rules and commitments. Such assistance may involve training and support in trade data analysis, policy research and the formulation of strategies to enhance trade competitiveness. Jordan also stressed the importance of building institutional capacity to effectively participate in WTO negotiations and implement WTO agreements.

This includes training government officials and stakeholders on WTO rules and procedures, enhancing policy analysis capabilities, and strengthening legal and regulatory frameworks related to trade. In addition, the implementation of best practices to improve trade logistics and enhance the efficiency of trade-related infrastructure was stressed.

- Oman emphasized the need for technical assistance from the WTO and from other available sources to ensure more effective participation in the multilateral trading system. This would involve participation in the regular work of WTO bodies as well as negotiating processes. Oman recognized the initiatives undertaken by the WTO Secretariat and other relevant organizations, with a recommendation to sustain and enhance these efforts to meet the demands posed by new challenges. More specifically, areas identified included customs valuation, trade facilitation, rules of origin, sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS), trade barriers to trade (TBT), as well as trade in services.
- Saudi Arabia stressed the importance of continuing the process of policy and regulatory reforms to raise productivity and competitiveness and to further integrate into global markets. Efforts are stepped-up in accordance with the Saudi 2030 Vision for economic reform. For this ambitious Vision, supportive elements need to be mobilized in terms of technical assistance and cooperation with the WTO as well as other international organizations.
- Yemen has been in a particularly difficult situation post-accession to the WTO due to political instability and conflict which is ongoing. As far as technical assistance and capacity-building needs are concerned, they were initially identified through several meetings and workshops held in June 2014 with the support of the WTO and USAID. This was followed up by a comprehensive and up-to-date assessment in 2018, through a Stability and Economic Success Project in which various relevant government agencies and private sector representatives participated.

- This exercise resulted in the preparation of a comprehensive assessment identifying technical support and capacity-building needs as well as a detailed report on Yemen's compliance with the requirements of the TFA. Yemen has responded positively to the support provided by USAID, in the establishment of the NCTF and implementation of institutional reforms. These included the creation of various departments in the customs authority and initiating the approved economic operator programme, post-audit, risk management, and customs valuation assessment in accordance with the WTO Agreement.

More generally, both domestic and international collaborative engagement, capacity-building programmes that support regulatory reforms, and effective public-private partnerships, are essential for enhancing the benefits of membership. These steps will enable Arab members that have acceded since 1995 to not only comply with international standards but also to thrive in the global trading system, fostering economic growth and stability.

General implications for the accession of Arab economies

Based on the experiences of all five Arab members that have acceded to the WTO since 1995 and to ensure that other newly acceded members reap the full benefits of WTO membership, a wide view of the implications regarding policy, regulatory and institutional reform is needed. Bearing this in mind, attention needs to be drawn to the following aspects:

- The need for an overall economic policy vision to ensure that trade policy is fully coherent with the wider economic policy reform and national development vision. This is particularly relevant in situations where the overall economic policy vision is oriented towards establishing a market economy based on the competitiveness of a leading private sector.

- The need to establish a policy-making machinery that implements such a vision through coherent policy-making processes across different domains, including investment, financial, industrial and services policies. This would require effective coordination mechanisms across different ministries and government agencies responsible for different policies. Such mechanisms would also require political guidance to ensure consistent policy approaches across diverse dossiers.
- The need to enhance regulatory capacity across different sectors of the economy. This would be necessary to ensure that outcomes of policy-making processes are implemented through sound regulation that is also consistent with WTO obligations and commitments as well as international best regulatory practices. Enhancing regulatory capacity requires the establishment and maintenance of institutions equipped with matching mandates and resources.
- Sound regulatory practices also require maintaining consultative mechanisms across regulatory institutions in different sectors to ensure regulatory coherence. Regulatory agencies must also maintain consultative channels with the private sector and civil society constituencies to ensure that regulatory decisions are well informed regarding specific interests and concerns.
- The need to secure the necessary enabling factors for an effective negotiating machinery. This would entail mobilizing the necessary resources (financial and human) to successfully conclude the accession negotiations. This also requires maintaining a strong negotiating team in the country's capital with the necessary communication channels for different government agencies. It is also necessary to ensure that an adequate representation capacity is present and maintained in Geneva to interact with WTO members and the Secretariat. Additionally, it is of great importance to ensure the continuity of such representative capacity post-accession. This would enable adequate future participation in WTO work to pursue a member's national trade interest.
- For this purpose, technical assistance and capacity building would be necessary, including on specialized policy and regulatory matters (e.g. tariffs, non-tariff measures, trade facilitation, intellectual property, financial services, telecommunications, transport, as well as other sectors). Such assistance is usually mobilized through the WTO Secretariat as well as other international organizations dealing with trade matters. In addition to financial resources available within international organizations, contributions are also often made by governments of WTO members in a position to do so.
- Outreach to the private sector will be needed to ensure that domestic market operators and exporters are fully aware of the market access opportunities secured by WTO rules in other members' markets. This could also provide a communication channel for exporters to report back on any restrictions they might encounter in other members' markets.

General recommendations for the accession process for the Arab region

Maintaining strong political will behind the accession process is key to the sustainability of efforts by the negotiating machinery at large, which includes the ministries and government agencies concerned, as well as other stakeholders. The involvement of the political leadership in an acceding government is always necessary to facilitate the development of agreed positions by different regulatory authorities, particularly on multidisciplinary matters. The adoption of the accession process as a national objective always helps to mobilize the efforts of all agencies concerned.

Strong political leadership would also facilitate the allocation of necessary resources, be it financial or human resources. Such mobilization is always critical to ensuring the effectiveness of the negotiating team in securing outcomes that serve the national interest.

In addition to securing the resources needed, it is necessary to ensure the readiness of the negotiating team from a technical and organizational viewpoint. Substantive awareness of the various subjects and

the complexities of related issues, including the interconnectedness of different policy and regulatory issues (e.g. how investment policies relate to trade in services), is always essential.

Securing technical assistance and capacity building to support the negotiating team is critical. The WTO Secretariat as well as other organizations are always supportive and resources are made available. However, the identification of specific needs is always advisable to ensure that resources are well allocated and that the desired impact is achieved.

Furthermore, the negotiating team and related machinery need to have well-functioning and efficient communication and information systems that ensure the ease of access to needed information from various sources as well as efficient communication among different parts of the negotiating team and related networks.

Recognizing that WTO accession is an intricate and extended process makes it necessary to ensure that the organizational aspects of the process are set up in an optimal way to enable progress. Organizing the negotiating process at the WTO between an acceding government and WTO members is the responsibility of the chairperson of the accession working party together with the WTO Secretariat. From this perspective, the process follows long-established practices aimed at maximizing efficiency and facilitating agreement. The offices of the chairperson and the Secretariat have always proven to be instrumental in moving these negotiations forward.

Effective communication channels between an acceding government and WTO members participating in the negotiations are of utmost importance. This would also need to be coupled with the effective domestic consultative setup in capitals as previously mentioned. It is crucial to institutionalize the preparations for accession. It is therefore advisable that the chief negotiator and members of the negotiating team, to the extent possible, maintain continuity over the duration of the process. It is also advisable to create and engage the national consultative body responsible for shaping negotiating positions (e.g. National Committee on WTO Accession) at different stages of the negotiating process.

General recommendations for the post-accession period for the Arab world

A post-accession phase would normally come with a sense of relief that the negotiating process has been successfully concluded. It also comes with a new sense of commitment to ensure consistency of policies, laws and regulations with the rules of the system. This marks the beginning of a new regime in which continuous conformity with obligations is expected. This requires maintaining adequate resources and organizational structures to enable the new member to reap the benefits of their membership. The mobilization of resources and organizational structures during the accession negotiations, together with the accumulation of knowledge and expertise, should provide a solid foundation for building strong implementation and representation capabilities.

It would also be necessary to maintain effective communication and consultative mechanisms with stakeholders, particularly in the private sector. This would ensure that their concerns and interests will always be present in positions taken in the WTO.

The implementation of obligations contained in the WTO agreements relating to trade in goods is guided by their relevant provisions. While related policy decisions are of great importance, the implementation of negotiated outcomes does not challenge preexisting regulatory practices. The same is also true for the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS Agreement) where the introduction of laws and regulations for the protection of intellectual property rights is not a novel regulatory practice. However, when it comes to trade in services, the situation is less clear regarding how to address the challenges related to domestic regulation of services in the context of liberalizing services trade.

While the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) aims at progressive liberalization of trade in services through commitments that guarantee market access and national treatment (NT), such market opening must be coupled with sound pro-competitive

regulation that ensures the attainment of non-trade legitimate national policy objectives. Such objectives include consumer protection and ensuring the quality of the service provided, the integrity of the financial system, and public safety and security, amongst other issues.

While each services sector has its specificities and complexities when it comes to regulation, there have been common factors that, over the years, have been identified to constitute best practices in facing the regulatory challenge. Some of these factors can be associated with developing regulatory rules while others are associated with desirable features of regulatory institutions.

Key considerations in addressing the challenges of developing new rules include:

- **Design:** The choice of which rules may be contained in general legislation, and which may be left to other forms of regulation, decrees, or administrative guidelines, is important. It should be made in a manner that facilitates effective application. At the same time, the design should consider the need for possible future flexibility for adjustments in the light of market developments.
- **Content:** The rules relating to the supply of the service need to be clearly stated and drafted, based on objective criteria, and should be coherent. They should also, to the extent possible, reduce the scope for discretionary decision-making.
- **Coherence:** The interface between central and sub-central government levels is important to bear in mind. Both levels must act in a coherent and complimentary way. The same applies to the interface between sector-specific and cross-cutting types of rules (e.g. telecommunications and competition policy).
- **Transparency:** Rules must be transparent, including their underlying rationale. They should be easily accessible. Furthermore, the regulatory process itself needs to be transparent, allowing different stakeholders to observe and, where appropriate, participate.

Key policy considerations in addressing post-accession reforms to build and maintain effective regulatory institutions include:

- **Mandate:** The institutional framework for the development and implementation of regulations is key. The mandate of a regulatory institution must be carefully drawn up to reflect its objectives, functions, and *modi operandi*. Often mandates need to be reviewed (sometimes completely changed) to reflect the change of policy direction, for example from a government-controlled to a competitive market structure.
- **Independence:** The independence of regulatory institutions needs to be ensured. A regulator must be independent from any commercial market interest as well as from political influence. The risk of falling captive to vested interests must be avoided.
- **Interface:** The institutional structure should provide for an effective interface between different governmental institutions dealing with different regulatory frameworks of mutual relevance. The interface with private-sector institutions, think-tanks and civil-society organizations should also be encouraged and facilitated.
- **Accountability:** A regulatory body must be accountable for its decisions and the achievement of its objectives in a manner that does not compromise its independence. The authority to whom a regulator should be accountable and the terms of such accountability must be drawn up carefully to ensure the right balance between effectiveness of accountability and independence.
- **Human resources:** Institutions must be equipped with the required expertise and sufficient capacity. A sound human resource base is key to the sound functioning of regulators. In view of technological developments and the dynamic and innovative nature of competitive markets, this aspect should be a priority.

When steps are taken to reform any regulatory framework, the regulatory authority concerned might consider such elements as desirable characteristics to enhance the effectiveness of regulatory reforms and ensure their alignment with policy objectives.

Members having acceded to the WTO since 1995 have put forward proposals for technical assistance aimed at developing and formulating trade policies

adhering to WTO rules and regulations. This assistance should encompass various aspects such as training and support in trade data analysis, policy research, and the formulation of strategies to enhance trade competitiveness.

To improve trade logistics and enhance the efficiency of trade-related infrastructure, the implementation of best practices is recommended. This would involve adopting measures related to logistics, streamlining processes and optimizing trade-related infrastructure.

Building institutional capacity is another crucial aspect, ensuring effective participation in WTO negotiations and the implementation of WTO agreements. Government officials and stakeholders would receive training on WTO rules and procedures, policy analysis capabilities would be enhanced, and legal and regulatory frameworks related to trade would be strengthened.

For example, to enhance the competitiveness of Jordan's agricultural products, support is proposed in areas such as agricultural policy development, market access, compliance with food safety standards, and adherence to sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) measures. Additionally, technical assistance in technical standards and quality infrastructure would aid in improving product quality and meeting international requirements.

Furthermore, technical assistance is recommended to evaluate potential accession to various WTO member-state initiatives in services. This includes resources such as the Services Domestic Regulation and Investment Facilitation for Development. The objective of seeking accession to these initiatives is to strengthen Jordan's engagement in the multilateral trading system and further facilitate the liberalization of its economy.

These proposals aim to provide comprehensive technical assistance to members that have acceded since 1995, particularly Jordan, in various areas of trade policy and implementation. By addressing these key areas, the goal is to enhance Jordan's trade competitiveness, improve infrastructure and logistics, strengthen institutional capacity, and facilitate its integration into the global trading system.

Development of technical assistance and support for WTO Arab acceding governments

Gaining membership to the WTO is a complex undertaking, requiring expert guidance for acceding governments to navigate the intricate rules, obligations and negotiation procedures. They must also understand and respond to the requests placed upon them during the accession process by WTO members. Additionally, acceding governments are automatically involved in negotiation rounds and must stay informed about the issues discussed, as they will be expected to accept outcomes of ongoing negotiations (for example, fisheries subsidies) upon becoming WTO members.

The WTO offers trade-related technical assistance and training within its areas of expertise to acceding least-developed countries (LDCs), developing, and low-income countries undergoing transition. Its primary objective is to help applicants comprehend and implement WTO obligations effectively and enable them to exercise their rights under WTO agreements once they become members. Technical assistance activities aim to help developing countries take full advantage of the multilateral trading system. Within the WTO Secretariat, these activities are coordinated by the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation, based on technical assistance and training plans. The Committee on Trade and Development regularly oversees all trade-related technical assistance activities.

The WTO itself does not provide trade-related technical assistance to address supply-side issues, such as the challenges faced by new members in producing exportable goods and services and accessing export markets. However, the WTO collaborates with other providers of trade-related technical assistance operating in this domain. It emphasizes the importance of effectively coordinating the delivery of technical assistance with bilateral donors and relevant international and regional intergovernmental institutions.

To this end, the Coordination Group on Accessions-related Technical Assistance was launched in 2022 to facilitate coordination between development partners and acceding governments to ensure that the evolving WTO accession-specific technical assistance needs of acceding governments are met throughout the accession process as well as post-accession.

The WTO Secretariat coordinates its technical assistance plans informally and on an *ad hoc* basis whenever possible. Additionally, it has partnered with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to establish the Trade-Related Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Database to gather information on the assistance provided by donor countries and agencies to beneficiaries.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) places significant importance on regional economic integration as a fundamental component of its programmes. Its objective is to promote economic and social development among its members. In line with this vision, the Islamic Centre for Trade Development, authorized by the OIC General Secretariat and relevant committees and Ministerial Conferences on trade and investment, is responsible for implementing various initiatives.

These initiatives aim to enhance trade and investment collaboration among member countries, support economic integration projects, promote regional cooperation, address global trade matters, and reduce both customs and non-customs barriers to facilitate intra-trade. Achieving these goals involves close cooperation with institutions such as the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and regional organizations dedicated to economic cooperation.

The IsDB WTO-Programme, launched in 1997, aims to enhance the human and institutional capacities of member countries to adapt to the multilateral trading system. It focuses on raising awareness of WTO agreements and their implementation, facilitating member countries' accession to the WTO, and providing a platform for officials to discuss trade matters.

Recently, the programme has prioritized assisting member countries in their WTO accession and

strengthening negotiation skills through the Islamic Development Bank Technical Assistance Program for Regional and Global Integration in Trade (IsDB TAP). This programme now aims to build capacities in multilateral trade negotiations, including collaboration with regional trading arrangements, to promote effective participation in the global economy and foster regional integration.¹

Identification of needs

The technical assistance and training plans of the WTO encompass comprehensive information regarding all the "products" offered by the WTO Secretariat in terms of technical assistance. Additionally, these plans provide detailed information about individual activities within the scope of technical assistance.

On the other hand, the WTO addresses specific national and regional requirements in accordance with its Progressive Learning Strategy, which offers training at various levels to participants of its courses. To monitor and evaluate these activities and enhance the assistance provided, a results-based management approach is employed.

The type of assistance provided by the WTO is determined by the evolving needs of its members and acceding governments. These needs are expressed through requests for national activities made by the applicants themselves. Additionally, global trade developments influence the technical assistance activities conducted at regional or global levels. The Secretariat's primary focus is to ensure that the technical assistance offered aligns with the needs of its members and acceding governments.

The WTO determines specific national and regional needs for its assistance through a combination of approaches and mechanisms that the WTO Arab economies can follow:

- Requests by Arab economies whilst in the accession process: WTO Arab economies themselves play a crucial role in expressing their specific assistance requirements. They can submit requests to the WTO Secretariat, outlining their needs in terms of technical assistance

and capacity building. These requests serve as important indicators of the specific areas where WTO Arab economies seek support.

- Needs assessments: The WTO conducts needs assessments to gather information and analyse the trade-related challenges and capacity gaps faced by members and acceding economies. These assessments often involve consultations with governments, trade officials and relevant stakeholders to understand their specific needs and priorities. The assessments are mainly conducted in relation to trade facilitation.
- Dialogue and consultations: The WTO engages in ongoing dialogue and consultations at the regional level with WTO Arab economies through various channels, including formal meetings, working groups, committees and consultations. These interactions provide opportunities for WTO Arab economies to express their needs and concerns directly to the organization.

It is crucial to note that the provision of trade-related technical assistance is separate from the formal accession process of the WTO outlined above. WTO members have not agreed to make the implementation of WTO commitments contingent upon receiving trade-related technical assistance.

Algeria, an acceding economy, made the following recommendations to enhance WTO support for acceding governments, in response to the questionnaire (see Annex I).

- Conducting specialized training programmes: Algeria proposes organizing specialized training courses covering a range of topics related to accession negotiations. These courses would be tailored to the specific needs of each government, taking into consideration the working language adopted by each government.
- Strengthening negotiating capabilities: To facilitate the process of joining the WTO, Algeria suggests enhancing bilateral and multilateral negotiating capacities. This would enable acceding governments to effectively engage in negotiations and navigate the complexities of the accession process.

- Addressing specific technical assistance needs: Recognizing the unique requirements of economies seeking to join the WTO, Algeria emphasizes the importance of considering their special needs in terms of technical assistance. Tailored support should be provided to address the specific challenges faced by each government during the accession process.
- Involving international and regional organizations: Algeria recommends involving international and regional organizations and bodies in providing technical assistance to economies seeking accession. This collaboration would particularly benefit Arab economies, fostering greater support and expertise from relevant organizations in the region.

By implementing these proposals, the WTO can provide enhanced support to acceding governments, ensuring that they receive the necessary training, negotiating capabilities and technical assistance to navigate the accession process successfully. These measures would contribute to a more inclusive and effective framework for economies seeking to join the WTO.

Sudan has proposed several measures to enhance the participation of Arab economies in the WTO. Firstly, it suggests adopting Arabic as the fourth official language of the WTO, alongside the existing languages, to promote inclusivity and provide better accessibility for Arab economies. Secondly, Sudan recommends expediting and simplifying the accession process, enabling acceding economies to join the WTO more efficiently. Thirdly, Sudan emphasizes the need for intensive and specialized technical assistance and capacity-building programmes tailored to the specific needs of Arab economies during the accession process.

Lastly, Sudan encourages the active support of all working party members to facilitate the accession of Arab economies. These measures aim to foster greater representation and engagement of Arab nations within the WTO, facilitating their successful integration into the global trading system.

Development of a technical assistance plan

WTO Arab economies are invited by the WTO to submit written requests for national technical assistance to the Secretariat, based on their individual needs. On the other hand, the WTO offers technical assistance programmes dedicated to acceding governments. Such technical assistance plans can be country specific (during and post accession) or for a group of economies at a regional level.

Technical assistance offered to acceding governments must be tailored to their specific needs, which differ from those of WTO members. This distinction arises from the unique nature of the work undertaken by the negotiating team responsible for the accession process. Additionally, the negotiation policies and strategies employed during the accession process vary from those conducted among WTO members. Technical assistance also varies across economies, considering the economic characteristics and circumstances specific to each.

The WTO Secretariat develops specialized training courses in various areas, catering to the specific expertise levels of negotiating teams. These courses cover a wide range of topics, including:

- Understanding the trade policy perspective: These courses provide a comprehensive understanding of trade policy principles, concepts and frameworks, as well as how trade policy relates to other economic policies, thereby enabling negotiating teams to navigate the complexities of trade policy formulation and implementation.
- Trade policy for decision-makers, including parliamentarians: These courses are designed to equip decision-makers, such as parliamentarians, with a solid understanding of trade policy issues, enabling them to make informed decisions and effectively contribute to trade-related discussions, legislative agendas and negotiations.
- Background on WTO agreements: These courses offer in-depth knowledge of the various agreements within the WTO framework, including the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade

(GATT), the General Agreement on Trade in Services, the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights, the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade, and the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures, among others.

Such courses should be delivered at the government official level of relevant ministries and agencies, the negotiating team, academia and researchers, media, and the business community, with the aim of providing learning opportunities and resources on WTO matters to various stakeholders. This aims to ensure a well-informed and empowered national-level participation in the accession process, leading to satisfactory outcomes in negotiations, improved trade policy formulations, the effective implementation of obligations, and integration into the global trading system.

- Goods Schedules and negotiations: These courses focus on the specific aspects of goods trade, covering topics such as tariff negotiations, non-tariff measures, rules of origin, customs procedures and market access for goods.
- Services Schedules and negotiations: These courses provide insights into the complexities of negotiating services commitments, drafting of Services Schedules, including understanding modes of supply, understanding the application of basic concepts of market access and national treatment to the supply of services, as well as the classification of services for scheduling purposes.
- Background on negotiating techniques with respect to goods and services: These courses aim to enhance the negotiating skills of teams, providing guidance on effective negotiation techniques and strategies, specifically tailored to goods and services with best practices and lessons learnt from other members.
- Preparing accession background documents: These courses assist negotiating teams in preparing essential documents required during the accession process, such as the Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime (MFTR), tariff profiles, trade statistics (exports and imports), checklists, questionnaires and other relevant materials.

- **Thematic sessions:** These courses delve into specific thematic areas of trade negotiations, addressing issues such as agriculture, intellectual property rights, trade in services, trade and environment, and trade facilitation. These sessions allow teams to deepen their understanding of specialized topics and their implications for negotiations.
- **Negotiations simulation and exercises:** These courses involve practical exercises and simulations that replicate real-life negotiation scenarios. Participants engage in mock negotiations, enabling them to apply their knowledge and skills in a simulated negotiation environment.

Partnerships for further support

Besides the WTO, other organizations also support governments applying for accession by offering technical assistance. Experts provide advice on distinctive aspects of the process, such as guidance and advice in reviewing and drafting laws and regulations, to ensure domestic regulations align with the multilateral trade agreements. Furthermore, such organizations offer support in preparing market access offers for goods and services. Notably, ongoing projects providing assistance to acceding governments have been supported by the European Union, among others.

An example to illustrate this is the support to Iraq's accession to the WTO provided by the strengthening the agriculture and agri-food value chain and improving trade policy project (SAAVI). SAAVI's primary objective is to support Iraq in aligning its trade policies, regulations and practices with the international standards established by the WTO. Through the provision of technical assistance, capacity building and advisory services, SAAVI aims to help Iraq meet the requirements for WTO membership.

The project focuses on several key areas that are crucial to Iraq's accession, including trade policy formulation, legal and regulatory reforms, market access and institutional strengthening. SAAVI brings in experts and advisors who work closely with Iraqi officials, offering guidance on reviewing and drafting laws and regulations, conducting policy analysis, and preparing market access offers for goods and services.

An essential aspect of SAAVI is the enhancement of Iraq's institutional capacity. This is achieved through targeted training and workshops provided to government officials, parliamentarians, stakeholders and relevant institutions. The capacity-building efforts include workshops covering WTO rules and procedures, trade negotiations and the effective implementation of trade policies.

Considering the unique challenges faced by Iraq in its accession process, SAAVI tailors its assistance to address the specific needs and requirements of the government. By supporting Iraq's accession to the WTO, the programme seeks to foster economic growth, expand trade opportunities, and facilitate Iraq's integration into the global trading system.

Lebanon has also benefitted from various technical assistance programmes, projects, workshops, training courses and seminars offered through different institutions and organizations. These include the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), WTO, Arab Monetary Fund (AMF), the EU, and the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for West Africa (ESCWA) among others.

A series of projects were provided by UNDP and USAID throughout Lebanon's accession process in collaboration with the Ministry of Economy and Trade (MoET). This contribution included:

- **Policy support:** Supporting the MoET in developing and implementing policies related to WTO accession, including improving the business environment, strengthening trade-related institutions, and promoting regional and international trade.
- **Outreach and stakeholder engagement:** The UNDP has been working with the MoET to engage with stakeholders, including the private sector, civil society and other government agencies, to promote understanding and support for WTO accession.
- **Capacity building:** By providing technical assistance to the MoET to help build its capacity to negotiate and implement WTO agreements. This has included training on trade policy, research and analysis, legal issues and negotiations.

An initial technical assistance project by USAID was implemented by PricewaterhouseCoopers and the Services Group in May 2000 with the aim of assisting the MoET in drafting the MFTR. A second USAID-funded project related to Lebanon's WTO accession efforts was initiated in June 2003 and ran until October 2007. During this phase the project assisted in the preparation of background documents for working party meetings including the goods and services offers, drafting and translating legislation, and awareness raising.

From November 2007 to November 2012, another series of projects were implemented to assist the Government of Lebanon in its accession process and to support USAID. The four core task activities were:

- Task 1: Technical support for WTO accession.
- Task 2: Assistance in the implementation of key reforms.
- Task 3: Institutional capacity building.
- Task 4: Building public support for WTO accession.

Another example of a supportive partnership, although not focused on accession, is Yemen's collaboration with USAID on the implementation of the TFA. Through a comprehensive exercise, Yemen underwent a thorough assessment to identify its technical support and capacity-building needs. The outcome of this assessment was a detailed report evaluating Yemen's compliance with the requirements of the TFA. In response to the capacity-building support provided by USAID, Yemen has demonstrated a positive response by establishing the National Committee for Trade Facilitation (NCTF) and implementing institutional reforms.

These reforms included the establishment of various departments within the Customs Authority, the initiation of an approved economic operator programme, the implementation of post-audit procedures, the adoption of risk management practices, and the implementation of customs valuation assessments in accordance with WTO agreements. To further strengthen their capabilities, Yemen's government agencies responsible for health, plant and technical control underwent an

intensive capacity-building training programme focused on the provisions of the TFA.

In addition, with the support of USAID, Yemen prepared and obtained approval for a national plan for trade reforms covering the period 2021–2023. This plan, endorsed by the Ministry of Industry and Trade, served as a strategic road map for implementing trade-related reforms in Yemen and aligning it with international standards and best practices.

Furthermore, the technical assistance provided has fostered dialogue and partnership between the public and private sectors in Yemen. This collaborative approach promotes a cooperative and inclusive environment for trade facilitation and economic development.

Yemen's collaboration with USAID in trade reform demonstrates its commitment to strengthening trade facilitation, enhancing institutional capacity, and promoting sustainable economic growth. The comprehensive assessment, capacity-building initiatives, national reform plan, and the promotion of public-private partnerships all contribute to Yemen's ongoing efforts to streamline trade processes and integrate into the global trading system.

Bilateral coordination between Arab members that have joined the WTO since 1995 and Arab acceding governments

Despite the amount of time since the Arab members that acceded after 1995 joined the WTO, there are valuable opportunities for Arab economies in the accession process to benefit from the experiences of these members. These experiences can provide useful insights in several areas, fostering greater coordination internally, effectively addressing the challenges associated with the accession process, and relating the commitments made during accession to domestic reforms.

On internal coordination, these members have gone through the process of aligning their domestic policies, regulations and institutions with the requirements of the WTO. In this process, they have experienced the need

for effective coordination among government agencies, ministries and stakeholders to ensure coherence and consistency in implementing WTO commitments. Arab acceding countries can benefit from such experiences and adopt best practices in establishing internal coordination mechanisms to streamline trade-related policies and ensure effective implementation of WTO obligations.

Accession to the WTO involves addressing various challenges, such as conducting negotiations with

existing WTO members, undertaking legal and institutional reforms, and aligning trade policies with international standards. The Arab members that have acceded since 1995 have navigated through these challenges and can share their experiences with Arab acceding economies. This may include strategies for addressing specific trade-related concerns, negotiating market access for goods and services, and managing complex issues such as tariff reductions, customs procedures and intellectual property rights.

Endnotes

1. IsDB TAP programme - the 2023 report can be found here: <https://www.comcec.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/1-IsDB-TAP-for-Regional-and-Global-Integration-on-Trade-Update-2023-COMCEC.pdf>.