

**Tuesday 21 March 2017**

**Session 3: Post Accession - Maximizing the benefits of WTO membership**

**2:30pm – The case of Samoa** [10 - 15 minutes] Hon. Lautafi Fio Selafi PURCELL, Minister of Commerce, Industry and Labour

1. I will speak on Samoa's post – accession experience including a retrospective perspective on Samoa's accession process experience.

Before that, I'd share some thoughts on the discussions yesterday. On the pace of LDC accessions, the most favourable pace is determined by the acceding country's **ownership** of the process and the **resources** to manage this challenging process.

This **ownership** includes political commitment at the highest level. Samoa's Prime Minister, while he was the Minister of Finance at the time, had presented Samoa's application in Geneva at the General Council in 1998. So there had always been that high level political commitment.

Momentum can be lost throughout the years given other priorities and challenges. Such was the case with Samoa with the 2009 tsunami and other natural disasters that frequent the Pacific region. Climate Change now features prominently in all national planning and strategies.

The pace of accessions also depends on **resources**:

- (i) As a small island developing state with limited resources and technical capacity, Samoa relied on external support to enable us to fully participate in the negotiation of our membership to the WTO. Technical expertise, extensive national consultations across sectors and policy/

legislative amendments were required to ensure compatibility with the WTO framework.

- (ii) The technical missions to Samoa by the WTO Secretariat and other development partners / international organisations were invaluable (For example, the Commonwealth Secretariat mission on the Legislative Review); AITIC, ITC, UNCTAD, etc)
- (iii) Funding support to enable Samoa's delegation to attend meetings in Geneva. We had also included our private sector representatives in key meeting delegations to Geneva;
- (iv) A functional national coordinating mechanism is key to ensuring coherence and coordination of available resources and identifying resource needs. This was the role of the National Working Committee on Trade Arrangements (NWCTA), chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister at the time and comprising of key stakeholders of government, private sector and civil society. The committee remains to date the key forum to deliberate and give direction on the implementation of Samoa's post-accession obligations.

Accession is the end of one process and the beginning of another.

On Samoa's post accession experience,

1. In May 2012, Samoa became the 155<sup>th</sup> member of the WTO. Although this was a historic milestone for Samoa, we were aware that it was not only the end of a decade long process, but the beginning of our journey for post accession implementation. We intended to fully engage and integrate into the multilateral trading system and more importantly maximize on the benefits as a WTO member. In doing so, Samoa had

adopted measures in different areas during and following our accession process. It is now almost 5 years since Samoa became a member of the WTO and I will draw on some of the key areas from our accession and post accession.

### **Reform**

2. The accession process complemented our approach to reform programmes to encourage private sector development through a series of policy, institutional and legislative reforms. These included (i) substantial liberalisation of tariffs; (ii) tax reforms; (iii) privatization and (iv) improvements in public-private partnerships and providing an enabling environment for business; local and foreign investment.
3. At the time of our application to become a WTO member, Samoa had just embarked on a comprehensive reform including the liberalization of tariffs and reviewed VAGST and other taxes.
4. The accession process allowed us to review outdated legislation and developed a Legislative Action Plan detailing how Samoa would address the necessary legislative reform. This included reviews and amendments on existing legislation at the time and resulted in new, more modern laws. For example, the Foreign Investment Amendment Act 2011; Customs Tariff Amendment Act 2011; Biosecurity Act; and Food and Drugs Amendment Act 2011, just to name a few
5. The public sector reform in 2003 resulted in trade policy development moved to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The re-structure of the national committee to ensure all national stakeholders are represented at what is now the National Working Committee on Trade Arrangements.

### **Technical Assistance**

6. The WTO Institute for Technical Training Cooperation is an important source of capacity building on WTO rules. Samoa is eligible to benefit from ITTC's national programmes twice a year. This year we have prioritized a national Notifications Workshop which is scheduled to be held in May.
7. Samoa finds the WTO progressive learning programs a crucial capacity building support through the e-learning courses, thematic / advanced courses, Geneva Week programme and internships. But these should also be available to the private sector to enhance their understanding of the WTO rules and obligations. We already encourage our private sector to take up the ITTC online programs. I am pleased that the International Trade Centre (ITC) will be conducting a private sector training on the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in Apia in early April.
  8. The EIF Programme for LDCs provides financial support through Tier 1 and Tier 2 in capacity and institutional strengthening; and development projects such as the Trade Sector Support Programme; and the implementation of our post accession obligations.

### **Post-accession matrix**

1. Soon after the conclusion of our accession negotiations, Samoa, with the assistance of the WTO Secretariat, developed post-accession implementation plan. This mapped out our implementation requirements against our committed obligations in three key areas: (i) Legislative reforms to be undertaken; (ii) notification requirements and awareness required by key implementing agencies and (iii) general obligations and notifications contained in our Protocol of Accession. The action plan included timelines for implementation and the implementing agency responsible. This implementation plan is used internally to monitor and update progress on implementation. More recently, it has been incorporated into national policy documents such as the Trade, Commerce and Manufacturing Sector Plan 2012-2016 and the recent update of Samoa's Diagnostic Trade Integration Study

2016/17. These sector plans are aligned to our national strategic plans, namely the Strategy for the Development of Samoa (SDS) 2016/17 – 2019/20, which is reviewed 5-yearly. Undertaking implementation of post-accession obligations is difficult if they are not aligned with national priorities and sector strategies. It was important for Samoa to incorporate the implementation of our post-accession obligations into our national development strategy and sector plans. The SDS features 'Export Products Increased' and 'Participation of Private Sector in Development Enhanced' as key strategic outcomes and includes emphasis on raising awareness of trade agreements, implementation and development to improve our business capacity to trade globally.

9. As Samoa anticipates our first WTO Trade Policy review in January 2019, the post-accession matrix has become our key reference document.

#### **Participation in key WTO meetings / discussions**

10. Our non-resident status in Geneva exacerbates the need for Samoa to continuously build capacity and take up opportunities to be updated on the Geneva processes. Resources and distance remains a challenge but technology has enabled to bridge this communication gap.
11. Through the Geneva Week programmes, the Pacific Islands Forum Office in Geneva, the ACP Group, Samoa is able to receive updates and allow us to comment on different proposals of interest to Samoa being discussed in Geneva. Samoa is pleased to have been the first and only Pacific WTO member to ratify the Trade Facilitation Agreement which has now entered into force.

Samoa is now going through two –post processes (WTO accession and LDC graduation). It is manageable. We could associate our exposure to the rigorous accession process as one of the contributing building blocks of Samoa's international trade framework today in which we are better prepared to address the preferential market access implications of post LDC status.