

TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

SUPPORTING BENEFICIAL INTEGRATION INTO THE INTERNATIONAL TRADING SYSTEM



GLOBAL CONTEXT



Trade remains an important instrument for economic growth and development. However, what countries liberalize and how and in what sequence they liberalize their economies matters, as do the complementary policies and national development strategies that they choose to implement. The engagement of countries in the international trading system and trade negotiations therefore remains important, and needs to be consistent with the overall development imperatives as enunciated in the Sustainable Development Goals and national development objectives and priorities.

In this light, reaping effective development benefits from participation in the multilateral trading system, as well as parallel and proliferating plurilateral, regional and subregional trade integration processes, remains an important challenge for national policymakers and trade negotiators. The multilateral trade architecture continues to be a central element of the global partnership for sustainable development as provided under target 17.10. It should therefore be continuously supported and strengthened, and countries' efforts aimed at their integration therein need to be facilitated, for it to serve as an essential enabler of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Within this global context, UNCTAD provides capacity-building support to developing countries, in particular LDCs, and countries with economies in transition, in their engagement in multilateral and regional trade negotiations, including accession to the World Trade Organization, South–South trade cooperation and preferences and the Continental Free Trade Area negotiations, addressing such specific substantive policy areas as agriculture, market access, services, rules, special and differential treatment, dispute settlement and other trade-related rules, disciplines and procedures.



HOW DOES UNCTAD DELIVER SUPPORT ON TRADE NEGOTIATIONS?

UNCTAD support on trade negotiations aims to help beneficiary countries enhance their human, analytical, regulatory and institutional capacities in trade negotiations and agreements. The ultimate objective is to allow them to better draw benefits from international trade and the international trading system. Greater emphasis is placed on building national capacities to establish negotiating priorities and identify practical policy options in multilateral and regional trade negotiations, through research supporting evidence-based policymaking, along with advisory and capacity-building support to regional coordinators, national negotiating teams and regional institutions through various intervention methods.

At the multilateral level, UNCTAD works closely with the regional coordinators of developing country groupings, such as Africa, LDCs and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, as well as individual countries, to provide analytical and advisory support for their consideration of negotiating issues, implications and options, upon request. For countries acceding to the World Trade Organization, UNCTAD provides



PROGRAMME FACTS AND FIGURES

Scope: All developing countries, including LDCs and countries with economies in transition

Start date: 1990

Countries assisted: 70+

Website: unctad.org/tncd



Sustainable Development Goals addressed:

Directly: 10

Indirectly: 8, 9 and 17

hands-on support to national negotiating teams to build national capacities and institutions to effectively conduct policy reform and manage all stages of accession, that is, before, during and after. At the regional level, UNCTAD partners with regional entities such as the African Union, the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and regional economic communities, such as the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the Economic Community of West African States and SADC, to support their constituencies' effective engagement in regional trade negotiations, such as the negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Union and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States, as well as Continental Free Trade Area processes.



RESULTS AND IMPACT AT A GLANCE

- A 2015 external evaluation, in assessing subprogramme 3 (international trade), pointed to recognition of the comparative advantages of UNCTAD: “Stakeholders note that UNCTAD provides valuable support to LDCs and developing countries in pre-accession and accession stages in ways that others cannot... Unlike [the World Trade Organization], which can only address technical aspects related to rules and must refrain from any policy advice, UNCTAD’s mandate tasks it with providing advice on policy options and alternatives for acceding States and backstopping the accession process. UNCTAD has flexibility to advise on bilateral and regional trade agreements, which are beyond the mandate of [the World Trade Organization].”
- UNCTAD has assisted the following countries that have acceded to the World Trade Organization: Afghanistan, Algeria, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bhutan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Cabo Verde, Cambodia, China, the Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iraq, Jordan, Kazakhstan, the Lao People’s Democratic Republic, Lebanon, Liberia, Nepal, the Russian Federation, Samoa, Sao Tome and Principe, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Seychelles, the Sudan, Syrian Arab Republic, Tajikistan, Timor-Leste, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Vanuatu, Viet Nam and Yemen. Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Liberia and Seychelles became full members of the World Trade Organization in 2014–2016.
- UNCTAD support on Continental Free Trade Area negotiations has been appreciated by its partners. In a letter to the Secretary-General dated 10 March 2017, Ms. Fatima Haram Acyl, Commissioner of Trade and Industry, African Union, stated that the contribution of UNCTAD to the Continental Free Trade Area Negotiating Forum was critical and noted her “sincere hope that you will continue to make your teams available to support the [Continental Free Trade Area] in its various institutions – including but not limited to the [Negotiating Forum]”.

“My colleagues were very impressed with [UNCTAD] knowledge and experience in trade matters. The [draft] trade development act has come out very well...”

Joint Secretary,
Ministry of Economic Affairs, Bhutan, following
an UNCTAD consultative mission, 2015

“I am also very happy to have had the opportunity to see UNCTAD deliver and perform so well at the country level...”

UNCTAD does make a difference, a message I have conveyed to my capital in capital letters.”

Ambassador of Norway, Member of team of
independent evaluators, at a session of the
Working Party on the Strategic Framework and the
Programme Budget



DONORS/ FUNDING SOURCE

Past: China, Finland, France, Germany, Norway, Spain, Sweden (through the United Nations Industrial Development Organization), the United Kingdom and United Nations Development Account

