

Country: Benin

Background:

Type of body: There are two trade facilitation bodies in Benin:

WTO Negotiations on trade facilitation support group; and
National Trade Facilitation Committee.

Official name:

Working Group on Trade Facilitation in Benin, and
National Committee on Transport Facilitation and Inter-State Road Transit.

Motivation for its establishment:

The Working Group was created to establish a coordination mechanism for the elaboration of negotiating positions and the adoption of actions by the relevant stakeholders in the context of the WTO negotiations on trade facilitation.

The National Committee was established to remove unnecessary non-tariff barriers to facilitate the movement of goods (reducing checkpoints on the roads, problems related to the transit of goods, discriminatory practices, etc.).

Year of establishment: The Working Group was established in 2005.

Other national bodies dealing with WTO issues and/or with Trade Facilitation: The official institution responsible for following-up WTO issues, in particular trade facilitation, is the Ministry of Foreign Trade, more concretely the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

Former multi-agency group/committee: The Working Group on Trade Facilitation is one of the four groups of the Inter-institutional Commission for the Monitoring and Implementation of WTO Agreements (French acronym, CII). This group works with members from the National Facilitation Committee on Road Transport and Transit.

Current status of the working group (running, pilot phase, not functioning, etc): The Working Group and the National Committee are in running phase.

Institutional Framework:

Degree of institutionalisation:

The CII was created by the Decree N°99-022 adopted in Council of Ministers on 22 January 1999. It is composed of four groups, including the Trade Facilitation Working Group.

The National Committee was created by the Decision
065/MTPT/MFE/MDN/MSP/MICPME/DC/SG/CTTTDGTT/SER.

Type of organisation (ad hoc group, legal entity/organisation, etc): Given that this Working Group is one of the groups of the Inter-institutional Commission for the Monitoring and Implementation of WTO Agreements (CII), there is an institutional framework for the creation of this

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group. It works on trade facilitation issues on a permanent basis and includes representatives from the public sector, in particular border agents and the private sector.

Scope/mandate: The Working Group's mandate is bound by Annex D of the July 2004 package.

Terms of reference: The term of Reference of the Working Group are as follows:

- Managing and monitoring WTO negotiations on trade facilitation,
- Acting as contact point for negotiators based in Geneva,
- Reporting to the Government on the negotiations progress and matters arising,
- Reviewing and amending the proposals of WTO members on Articles V, VIII and X of the GATT 1994 as well as the proposals on special and differential treatment,
- Assessing the needs and priorities of Benin in trade facilitation,
- Defining the negotiating positions of Benin, and
- Promoting and monitoring internal reforms based on recommendations from the needs and priorities evaluation of Benin, not requiring technical assistance.

Coordinating agency:

The Working Group is led by the Directorate-General of Foreign Trade at the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

The National Committee is coordinated by the Directorate-General of Road Transport.

Working structure of the group: The Working Group is chaired by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, whereas the rapporteur is the Directorate General of Customs and Indirect Taxes.

Permanent technical secretariat:

As for the Working Group, the Directorate General of Foreign Trade, as focal point for WTO issues, assumes the role of Secretariat.

As for the National Committee, the Secretariat is assumed by the Directorate-General of Road Transport.

Funding:

Budget: The Working Group's operations are financed from the regular budget of the Directorate General of Foreign Trade.

Items covered by the budget: The covered expenses are related to meeting arrangements.

Objectives / Focus:

Objectives: The Working Group aims to assist Benin in better integrating into the multilateral trading system and benefiting from international trade by trying to remove all obstacles to the movement of goods involving both imports and exports. The specific objectives are the following:

- To be regularly informed about the negotiations progress in the WTO;
- To have regular consultations on the proposals to be submitted to the Government;

To define all the negotiating positions of Benin on special and differential treatment granted to LDCs and Customs matters;

To participate in the negotiation meetings held in Geneva.

The National Committee aims to remove unnecessary non-tariff barriers to facilitate the movement of goods (reducing checkpoints on the roads, problems related to the transit of goods, discriminatory practices, etc.)

Working plan: Yes

Monitoring and evaluation: Through regular meetings of the group.

Reporting form and supervisory authority:

The reports are submitted to the Working Group members and the Ministry of Foreign Trade.

Each agency's representative participating in the Working Group submits a report of activities to his/her supervisors.

Membership / Composition:

Public or quasi-public agencies: The Working Group on Trade Facilitation is composed of:

Directorate-General of Customs and Indirect Taxes,
Directorate-General of Industry,
Directorate of Quality Promotion and Packaging,
Directorate of Regional Integration,
Directorate of Strategic Planning,
Directorate of Small and Medium Enterprises,
Directorate-General of National Police,
Department of Livestock,
Directorate-General of Road Transport,
Directorate of Agriculture,
Directorate-General of Foreign Trade,
Ministry of Foreign Trade,
National Secretariat of the Enhanced Integrated Framework, and
Directorate General of Legislation.

Private associations or entities: The Working Group on Trade Facilitation is composed of:

Confederation of Trade Unions of road haulage of Benin,
Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Benin,
Benin National Shippers' Council (CNCSB),
Association of Freight Forwarders,
Consignees and Carriers of Benin,

Benin's shipping company,
Benin's seaport handling company,
Employers Association,
Port of Cotonou, and
Beninese Centre for Standardization and Quality Management etc.

Level of seniority of participants: The participants are Senior Level officer or experts. All members are equal and the decisions are jointly adopted.

Participation:

Frequency of meetings: The Working Group meets at least four times per year and as needed for specific issues.

Level of participation: Satisfactory. The agencies mentioned are represented by one or two representatives.

Meetings format: No

Promotion / Communication:

Communication channels to keep stakeholders informed of TF meetings: The Chair of the Group (the Directorate General of Foreign Trade) convenes the meetings, informs members on various issues, multiplies and distributes documents, and organises events.

The Group convenes in reporting session, where delegates give an account of the work undertaken during their participation in the negotiation meetings held in Geneva.

Interface with other working groups/committees on similar issues: The Chair of the Inter-institutional Commission for the Monitoring and Implementation of WTO Agreements (CII) convenes plenary sessions with members from all groups. During these meetings, the groups present reports on their activities:

Note that the four Working Groups of the CII are:

- Working Group on Trade
- Working Group on Services
- Working Group on TRIPS
- Working Group on Trade Facilitation

In addition, the Working Group ensures consistency between the decisions taken by the National Facilitation Committee on Road Transport and Transit and its decisions.

Undertake information sessions to stakeholders or general public: Yes

Benefits:

Impact:

The agencies working at the borders have a better understanding of the negotiations on trade facilitation,

Reforms have been undertaken in order to facilitate movement of goods for imports and exports, Contributing to integrate Benin into the multilateral trading System.

Benefits for the country's responsiveness to the WTO negotiation process:

The Working Group determines the negotiating positions in the capital. Then, it sends them to the negotiators in Geneva.

Sometimes one or two Working Group members are appointed to participate in the Negotiating Group on Trade Facilitation in Geneva with charge to the WTO Secretariat and/or the national budget.

Concrete operational outcomes:

As operational outcomes, it may be noted:

Reduction of the clearance timeframe of goods at the Cotonou Port,

Publication of Customs clearance texts and procedures,

Relief procedures,

Decrease of incidental expenses,

Facilitation of transit,

Procedures for the installation of a single window,

Much remains to be done to streamline procedures and facilitate the movements of goods.

Lessons learned:

Success factors: To guarantee the availability of enough material and financial resources in order to support the Group's functions.

Greatest obstacles: The Working Group is already established, but it lacks of financial resources.

Lessons learned from your experience:

The Working Group was set up and really energized from the preparatory work and the national workshops on self-assessments of priority and needs on technical assistance in trade facilitation.

The Working Group's members have understood the challenges for Benin coming from the commitments to be undertaken at the end of the Doha Round.

Future plans:

Plans for further development:

To continue the Group work;

To study the proposals submitted by the WTO members;

To follow-up the negotiations up to the conclusion of the Doha round;

To ensure that the Benin's concerns as LDCs are taken into account in the negotiations, and



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to monitor the implementation of the commitments.

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