



**THE EVALUATION OF TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE UNDER THE AEGIS OF
INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS:**

**THE CASE OF WTO AND ITS
TRADE-RELATED
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE,
CAPACITY BUILDING
AND
TRAINING**

Paul-Henri Ravier
Former WTO Deputy Director-General

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I- INTRODUCTION

WTO is an international organization with no field offices but with a good amount of field operations. Therefore, it can only be accountable for those operations directly managed from the Geneva headquarters. They are basically related to technical assistance (TA) which has greatly expanded in scope and intensity during the last ten years. It exerts an important pressure on WTO staff which delivers a good part of the activities. At the same time, it provokes a large amount of interagency cooperation between WTO and other international organizations.

This paper will present first of all what WTO technical assistance is, before elaborating on its evaluation.

1) TRTA (Trade-Related Technical Assistance) is one of the WTO activities where changes have been the most comprehensive and spectacular in the last ten years, and this for three main reasons.

a) First of all, **because the definition has been broadened.**

WTO started delivering TRTA in a narrow sense¹, i.e. basically lecturing, explaining and updating member states about the rule book. During the last ten years, a shift has taken place towards “real” capacity building which means human capacity building, i.e. training of people (more on this later), administrative capacity building, i.e. helping countries to extract the greatest benefits from the rules (e.g. dispute settlement, negotiating techniques), but also setting up the administrative infrastructures needed to fulfil WTO commitments (setting up a patent office, a standard setting body, a customs administration) and also legal advice that has always existed but gathers momentum with the flow of new members. Those countries obviously have problems in implementing the legislative programme they have to undertake to comply with their commitments.

Altogether, this has led to another shift, from Geneva based activities to the ones delivered on the field.

b) Secondly, because **TRTA goes across the full range of international trade rules.**

It covers subjects as different as the classical ones like tariffs, custom procedures, to brand new ones like e-commerce, the relationship between trade and competition, trade and investment, trade and environment. In other words, it goes across the whole spectrum of the so called “Doha Development Agenda”, which was launched in November 2001 in the Qatari capital and is still under negotiation between members 8 years later.

c) Thirdly, because **TRTA has become an integral part of the negotiating agenda** within the current round of multilateral trade negotiations.

This is new. During the previous rounds, TRTA was part of the “non binding commitments” taken by members. In other words it was in the “best efforts” category. Now, any developing country can say (rightly or wrongly): “I refuse to go forward on that subject

¹ WTO does not follow exactly the distinction between “technical assistance” and “capacity building” as it has been set up by the World Bank. WTO TRTA is a broader concept than the one used by the WB and is more akin to CB. This explains why, in most WTO papers, the two terms are used interchangeably.

because I did not receive the TRTA I was entitled when the current round was launched". It does not prevent some from playing tricks either by trying to buy off some to agree on subjects they don't like or by refusing TA because they do not like the subject. But this is the way it is, and WTO members have now to cope with it.

2) What have been the WTO answers to those new challenges?

a) On the demand side

How to assess the needs of the member states? Different methods to achieve this include the ongoing dialogue with Geneva-based delegations and specific questionnaires sent to "contact points" in capitals. No method is perfect. The broad idea is that it is a **demand driven process**, but "the sky cannot be the limit". It is just not possible to take on board every single demand. Some have to be grouped in regional activities, others have to be postponed. Members have to understand the difficulty (for reasons of time and cost) of envisaging individual needs assessment missions in every single beneficiary country.

Countries have been invited in writing to submit directly to the WTO secretariat their requests for national technical assistance at any time during the year, when the need arises. This flexibility has been found to be indispensable to allow for the delivery of TA that is focused and timely, related to needs that are clearly identified.

Also, as a rule of thumb, developing countries are entitled to two national activities per year, least developed countries (LDCs) to three. This is in line with the scarce human resources in the secretariat, and the experience that there is a natural limit to the number of TRTA activities that can be undertaken in any given year, but also because of the limited absorption capacity in beneficiary countries.

b) On the supply side, there are questions of substance, questions of procedure and questions of means

i-Questions of substance

•**Training or not training?** WTO has been confronted, like other IOs, with a growing **demand in training**. For most member states, real capacity building is equivalent to training, not lecturing about the rules. This explains why WTO has developed for the last ten years a full range of "training products" through its Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC).

-Why such an ITTC? For three main reasons: to make it autonomous (it helps set up relations with other independent-minded academic institutions), to allow it to obtain in extra-budgetary resources (from foundations for instance) and to develop new teaching techniques, notably in conjunction with similar institutions, either intergovernmental organizations or national ones.

-Why a "range of training products"? Like a car manufacturer, the question is to adapt supply to demand: diversified demand needs diversified supply.

In this respect, **the main point to keep in mind is the shift from Geneva based activities only, to field activities**. Here are some examples:

-foreign-based trade policy courses: it started in summer 2002 with 2 in Africa (Nairobi and Casablanca), but has been extended to 5 or 6 other places like, for instance, University of West Indies.

-special courses for trade policy professionals in the field of negotiating techniques: this has been developed in 5 to 6 places in the world, among them China and South Africa for instance.

-distance learning with 2 applications: video conferences and on-line courses.

Altogether, it is now a full range of more than 50 products that WTO can provide to its “customers” through the ITTC, a majority of them being “on the field”.

At the beginning, the very rapid launch of these new field products as opposed to the classical and well known Geneva-based ones has left Members a bit confused and the secretariat had a lot to do in order to dispel that impression by explaining time and again what it was up to.

•Beyond those training products, the question has also been of **introducing more "training" in classical Geneva based TRTA activities**. This can be done by better targeting people, which implies a certain degree of selection to be conducted by beneficiary countries and the secretariat, better follow-up of people in order to re-train them from one year to the other and training of trainers to improve delivery.

ii- Questions of procedure

•**Inter-agency coordination**: it looks a bit down to earth and it is one of the mantras of TA, but it is essential even if it is easier to say than to do. In fact, coordination is time-consuming, not only as far as logistics are concerned, but also on substance. Different international organizations have different mandates, they do not convey the same messages, be it on trade-development, trade and health, trade and intellectual property rights (IPRs) to quote but a few sensitive topics. But it has to be done in order to make the best use of resources and avoid duplications. WTO goes to great lengths in order to cooperate with its fellow agencies. Here are a few relevant instances: WCO² on customs valuation, WIPO³ and WHO⁴ on TRIPS⁵, FAO⁶ – Codex Alimentarius on SPS⁷, ISO⁸ and other international setting bodies on TBT⁹ and standard setting activities in general, UNCTAD¹⁰ on competition policy, government procurement and investment, UNEP¹¹ on environment.

• The creation of a **TRTA database** is supposed to provide an answer to the question: "Who does what?" Every agency provides technical assistance, and much of it is trade-related. Overlaps and duplications are the rule of the game, but this cannot last because donors and beneficiaries have finally taken a stand. The idea to set up a database has taken up thanks to the joint efforts of the **WTO and OECD** who have worked within the framework of the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in defining agreed and comparable TRTA categories. It has become thus easier for the WTO to build up a matrix combining, for a given country (country-file), both activities delivered and agencies delivering. This joint work with the OECD has been an act of transparency, in the sense that it has contributed in information sharing and holding all stakeholders accountable.

² World Custom Organization

³ World Intellectual Property Organization

⁴ World Health organization

⁵ Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights

⁶ Food and Agriculture Organization

⁷ Sanitary and phytosanitary measures

⁸ International Standards Organization

⁹ Technical Barriers to Trade

¹⁰ United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

¹¹ United Nations Environment Program

• **Coordination with bilateral donors** is no less necessary than with other agencies. Every bilateral donor has a vested interest in favouring those subjects which present greatest interest in fulfilling his strategies, running the risk of duplications and thereby shunning some important subjects not consistent with the immediate objectives of the donors. Once again, the OECD's Development Assistance Committee has been the proper forum in order to deal with this question.

• **Building strategic partnerships with Regional Banks**, Institutions and Commissions is also a fundamental requirement. Regional institutions by definition know their region. They supplement the lack of outside representation of the WTO. Several potential areas of contributions include grant and concessional project-based funding for TRTA. Different memorandums of understanding (MOU's) have been signed with regional banks, starting with the IDB, followed by the Asian Development Bank etc.

• The **Integrated Framework (IF)** shows WTO priority towards least developed countries (LDCs). Beyond the institution, the concept and its key words have to be kept in mind. The concept consists in institutionalizing inter-agency coordination. Six IOs participate in the IF (WTO, UNCTAD, ITC, UNDP, IMF, World Bank) and their task is to set up a common approach for technical assistance dedicated to LDCs. Forty-nine countries are involved, mainly sub-Saharan countries, but also Caribbean and Pacific countries. Twenty-nine of them are non-resident Members of the WTO. On the whole, their share of world trade is less than 1% and their needs, because they are important and specific, epitomize what has to be done in terms of TRTA. After a difficult start, the IF is now running well, and is considered a success. Hence the idea to broaden the institution to other countries. To broaden the concept is probably a good idea, but the institution has to be kept focused on LDCs and their specific needs.

The central idea behind the IF is "mainstreaming" trade concerns in development strategies. It is a well known fact that trade people and development people find it hard to talk to each other, much less work together. A great deal has changed since UNCTAD was created against the GATT in 1964, but cultural differences remain. The IF's main objective (and so far its greatest success) has been to introduce trade concerns in development strategies and practices. It should also be stressed that beyond its active participation in the IF, the WTO has undertaken some other specific actions towards LDCs: reference centres (on-line access to WTO information and documentation) in a number of official institutions located in the countries and "Geneva Week", which takes place twice a year, and aims to give non-residents comprehensive and detailed information about WTO activities.

In the same vein, the Joint Integrated Technical Assistance Programme (JITAP) is operated jointly by the ITC, UNCTAD and WTO and targeted towards 8 LDCs.

• A last word about the **International Trade Centre: ITC** is first of all one of the very few instances of a successful cooperation between two international organizations for it is a 50/50 joint venture between WTO and UNCTAD. ITC is a very useful institution in the sense that, while being insulated from the controversies surrounding trade negotiations (it does not negotiate trade agreements), it provides answers on the question of the "supply side": what businesses should sell, what should they purchase and how? WTO has no answer to these questions. WTO does not build roads, ports and airports. WTO does not answer businesses if and when they ask the question: "Should I sell oranges, T-shirts or both? And where?" ITC does not build infrastructures either (it is the job of development institutions), but ITC provides companies with market studies, practical recipes to cope with labelling, standards, sanitary regulations and the like. It is an indispensable complement to WTO TRTA.

iii- Questions of resources, human and financial

•**Most TRTA is funded through extra budgetary contributions.** The contributions (both past and present) have been merged in a single trust fund known as the Doha Development agenda Global Trust Fund (DDAGTF). It was established in December 2001, pursuant to the commitment contained in the Doha Declaration, to finance technical assistance programmes and training activities for developing and least developed countries as well as economies in transition. One of the purposes for creating a global fund was to consolidate the extra-budgetary funds in one single un-earmarked fund, so as to provide a solid and stable financial basis for the delivery of a global programme.

The actual expenditure is in the range of 30 MCHF (20M€), partly financed from the regular budget and partly through the DDAGTF. The real expenditures in 2007 amount to some SwF24 million, of which SwF18.7 million was covered from the DDAGTF.

Implementation of the activities under the DDAGTF is subject to the availability of financial resources, which rely on voluntary contributions. In order to ensure a smooth implementation of the TA Plan from the beginning of the year, timely and adequate levels of funding are required. Most activities to be financed under the DDAGTF, and more specifically 'big item' programmes, e.g. regional seminars undertaken by the WTO or in partnership with other organizations and RTPCs, require advance planning of at least 3 months, if not more. Under the financial rules, activities can only be committed to, if the financing is received in the bank.

•Beyond financial means, **human resources, both in quality and quantity, are of an even greater importance to an efficient delivery of TRTA.** Actions have been undertaken on the quality side, a "training of trainers" programme, on the quantity side, recruitment of additional staff on a yearly contract basis, funded on the "programme support fund". These additional staffs have been carefully selected among experts readily available and who can be sent to missions with minimal training.

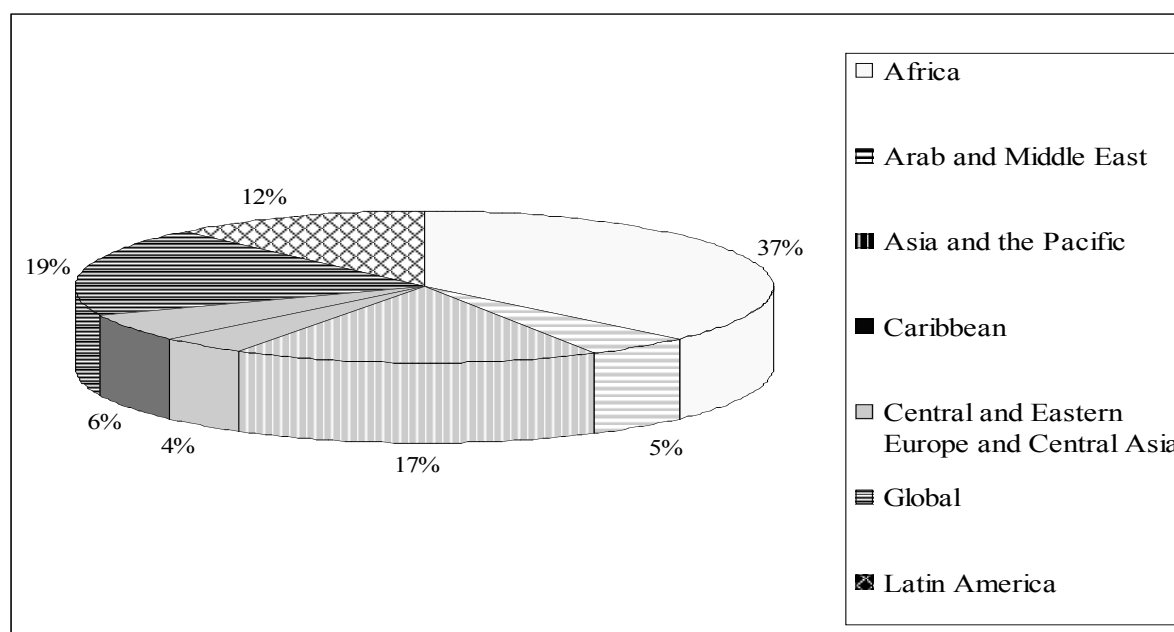
II- THESE DIFFERENT ANSWERS ARE INTEGRATED IN THE YEARLY TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE PLAN

1) Broad overview of the activities undertaken in 2007

a) In 2007, and in line with expectations, **a total of 457 activities were implemented** including Geneva-based activities as well as those held abroad. This number comprises activities of significantly different durations, varying between one day to 12 weeks, and involving as little as one staff member, or as many as over two dozens for the longer courses.

b) As to the **objective of maintaining a regional balance** in the distribution of the technical assistance activities, the majority of them were held in Africa (166), i.e. 37 % of the total, followed by Asia and Pacific (77-16.6%). A total of 55 activities were organized for Latin America (12 %), 28 for the Central and Eastern Europe Central Asia and the Caucasus (6 %), 24 for the Arab and Middle-East countries (5 %), and 19 for the Caribbean (4 %). While the LDCs are not listed separately, it should be noted that out of all activities, LDCs have been associated with around 44 % of all TRTA. This includes national activities (58) as well as regional seminars, workshops and training activities to which those countries were invited.

The following table shows this regional distribution.



Source: WTO

c) In terms of **balance between national and regional activities**, it can be observed that a total of 214 activities were held at the national level and 152 activities were regional events. Thus, while the total number of regional seminars has remained relatively stable, the number of national activities has increased. This is consistent with the notion that more targeted TRTA is required at the national level. In addition, some 91 activities consisted of WTO's participation in activities organized by other agencies and to which the Secretariat was asked

to make a contribution, as well as WTO's representation in trade-related conferences, symposia and high-level meetings. These activities are mostly undertaken as part of the partnership arrangements with other agencies that the WTO cooperates with, and are directly relevant in terms of TRTA and capacity building.

d) With few exceptions, **the logistical and administrative arrangements**, as well as the human resource inputs and the cost relating to regional seminars **are most demanding**. Preparation time requires up to nine weeks, depending on whether the activity is organized solely by the WTO, or whether it is part of a partnership arrangement with another agency. Through the implementation of the partnerships, this burden is lessened somewhat, particularly when other agencies are taking charge, in part or in full, of the logistical and administrative arrangements of the regional activities.

e) **As to the subjects covered**, besides the more general seminars aimed at building capacity, services and assistance provided in support of the Trade Policy Reviews (TPRs) were in strong demand, followed by market access issues (non-agricultural market access, custom valuation, rules of origin), trade facilitation, trade-related Intellectual Property rights (TRIPS), development issues, dumping, subsidies and sanitary and phyto sanitary measures (SPS).

f) **Priority attention continued to be given to LDCs**. Not only is this confirmed with the absolute and relative numbers, but this is also expressed through the products, several of which are specifically geared towards those countries. In this regard, mention can be made of the Integrated Framework (IF) and JITAP, the three-week Introduction Courses for LDCs, Geneva Weeks, the Reference Centres Programme, the Netherlands Trainee Programme (NTP), support provided in the needs assessments and TPRs. Also, it is recalled that LDCs are entitled to three national activities and that they receive priority attention in the accession process.

2) Special focus (1): Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs)

a) **Five of them were conducted in 2007**: three in partnership with the University of Chile (for Latin America), the University of Namibia (for English-speaking African countries) and the National University of Singapore (for the Asia-Pacific region). One consolidation course was held in partnership with the University of the West Indies, Jamaica (for the Caribbean zone) and one four-week regional introduction course in partnership with the University of Yaoundé, Cameroon (for French-speaking African countries). The partner educational institutions are responsible for the on-site running of the RTPCs. For both the University of Chile and Namibia, 2007 was the third and final year of partnering with the WTO on the RTPC. The experience gained by both partner universities over the previous two years led to increased efficiency in the running of their respective RTPC in 2007. For the National University of Singapore, 2007 was the first year of partnering with the WTO on the Asia-Pacific RTPC. This course was considered to have been carried out very successfully.

b) **Some 170 government officials from developing countries participated**. The five regional courses represented 215 days of training (with sometimes two or more courses being held in parallel), corresponding to 1,290 hours of training. They were funded from the Global Trust Fund.

c) **The specific focus of the RTPCs in 2007** was to strengthen and monitor the three global changes that had been introduced in 2006: theme sessions, communications skills workshops

and the introduction of final revision sessions. This was to keep the focus of the RTPCs on practical, interactive training.

d) The Consolidation Course was a three-week course comprising three one-week modules on regionalism, trade in services and TRIPS, co-delivered by WTO officials and regional resource persons, and was held in partnership with the University of the West Indies (UWI) for the Caribbean region. It was agreed with UWI that 2007 would be an opportune time in which to hold a consolidation course which would allow former RTPC participants to solidify the training received during the RTPCs. Sixty-seven government officials participated. Following the success of this course, it is proposed to hold another one in 2009.

e) The Regional Introduction Course held in partnership with the University of Yaoundé took place instead of the RTPC for French-speaking Africa originally planned. Unforeseen difficulties which arose in the preparatory phase proved to be insurmountable within the necessary time-frame. A month-long Regional Introduction Course to the WTO was held instead. This course was co-delivered by WTO officials and academics from the University of Yaoundé II.

f) Lastly, three preparatory workshops were organized at the WTO for the regional resource persons co-delivering the RTPCs in 2007. The purpose of the workshops is to provide an update on WTO activities to the regional trainers to assist them in their preparation for the RTPC. The programme for the workshops in 2007 have evolved over the years and consisted of a series of updates on the Doha Round together with roundtable discussions on WTO-related topics involving WTO officials, workshop participants, and on occasion, Geneva-based delegates. The programme also included RTPC preparatory meetings between WTO officials and regional resource persons who would co-deliver training together. Participants to the workshops commented on the usefulness of the programme and the opportunity to meet and interact with WTO officials as well as other members of the regional network. Issues which arose during the 2007 preparatory workshops and which still need to be addressed include how to overcome the challenges inherent in co-training.

3) Special focus (2): courses on trade negotiation skills

a) Those courses are designed to provide participants with skills and knowledge concerning appropriate strategies and tactics for the conduct of negotiations, as well as techniques of systematic decision analysis for monitoring and managing the negotiating process. The core of the course encompasses all the stages in trade negotiations—from the consultation stage to actual negotiations, involving real give-and-take. The use of the DDA mandate for the simulation exercise makes this training program particularly relevant since participants can apply their strengthened skills immediately to real world negotiations in Geneva and other forums.

b) Six such courses were held at regional level in 2007, in Malaysia, Ghana, Singapore, Vienna, Yemen and Senegal, and a national one in Mali. The participants assigned to the developed country groups had the opportunity to engage in trade policy formulation and consultation process from the perspectives of developed countries – a rare opportunity to view the same issues from different perspectives. The courses have been found to be very valuable, bringing participants into real negotiation mode. Feedback from participants has been very positive and reassuring. Virtually all participants indicated in the evaluation forms that they

had benefited from the course and expanded their knowledge of bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations. Several participants indicated that they would use the knowledge and skills acquired in preparing their countries' positions for the ongoing Doha negotiations, in preparing their countries' services offers, in ACP-EU-EPA negotiations, as well as accession negotiations.

c) The WTO has built partnership with the APEC-Economic Integration project, Canadian International Development Agency and the Conference Board of Canada in running courses in Asia. In Africa, partnership has been built with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF), the University of Pretoria, the University of the Western Cape (South Africa), the University of Dar es Salaam and the University of Nairobi. The IsDB has been involved in partnership arrangements in the Middle East. The partners contributed, both in terms of resource persons and financial resources.

This technical assistance started in 1997. Over ten years, the programme has expanded to 108 countries, 25 regional organisations and 20 country representations (currently a total of 153 RFCs are on the list) embracing the entire eligible membership of WTO. The programme implementation was to a large extent ad hoc and supply-driven. The related field missions were managed on a one-by-one basis. The annual expenditures of about CHF 330.000 do not appear to be too high if one takes into account that it included some 20-25 technical missions, hardware and software. It was noted that during this 3 years period under review, 1178 persons benefited from the RFC-related technical assistance.

III- EVALUATION OF “ON THE FIELD” WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

1) TRTA cannot be developed on a large scale without proper monitoring procedures. It has been done along the following lines:

a) First of all, benchmarks regarding the funding of the DDAGTF have been established by members: (i) by 31 December of the year preceding the fund's revolving annual target period, contributions amounting to 25 per cent of the total estimated costs of the TA Plan should be in the bank, (ii) by 31 March, another 50 per cent for an overall 75 per cent of the total, and (ii) by 30 June, 100 per cent of the funds needed.

b) Further, it was decided by member states to set up an in-house but independent audit, drafting a complete methodology for back-to-office reporting of TA missions building up on other UN agency practices, provide member states, donors and beneficiaries alike with proper feedback on the effect and impact of TA. A more long-term objective will be to have some form of external audit.

In order to monitor the quality of the products and to ensure that the needs of the beneficiaries are best catered for, the activities are assessed through the back-to-office reports (BTORs), which are systematically analyzed by the technical cooperation audit unit (TCAU), leading to follow-up recommendations.

c) Lastly a “strategic review” was undertaken in 2006.

It was based on a combination of desk-studies, questionnaires and interviews with TRTA participants, donor representatives, key staff of cooperating organisations and delegates attending WTO meetings in Geneva. Field visits were undertaken in nine selected countries: Bangladesh, Barbados, Cambodia, Ecuador, Kenya, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Senegal and Yemen.

2) Evaluation of on the field technical assistance in 2007

a) Overall satisfaction of participants and providers

An event is usually considered successful if at least 80% of the participants rated it “very successful” or “successful”. For 2007, a higher than standard satisfaction of participants can be noted i.e. 98% of them rated the attended TRTA “very successful” and/or “successful”. This performance is about the same as in 2005 and 2006.

TRTA providers continue to be more demanding, in the sense that 93% of them only rated the workshops, courses, seminars, etc. “very successful” or “successful”. In 2006 the related figure totalled 92.5%, and in 2005, it was about 89%. The providers' rating was based on reflecting on their observations on the quality of the exchanges and level of interaction with the participants and the analysis of the performance evaluation forms.

b) Effectiveness and Impact

Objectives were deemed fully achieved by 84% of the reported TRTAs. It reflects a good performance and a bit even higher than in 2006. The audit standards recommend that an 80% achievement rate, although it is ambitious and demanding, continue to be considered as a “standard expectable rate of effectiveness”.

c) Two field products, i.e. the trade negotiations skills (TNS) courses, and the WTO reference centres (RFCs) programme were reviewed in 2007 for identifying and demonstrating effects and impact.

i- Feedback on the TNS courses showed that more than 95% of the participants expressed satisfaction while some 87 % marked the full achievement of the course objectives. All participants expanded their knowledge of bilateral and multilateral trade negotiations. A number of them indicated that they would use the knowledge and skills acquired in the current multilateral trade negotiations, accession negotiations, bilateral and regional negotiations, in advising their delegations and in their daily work. Since most participants are selected from key government ministries responsible for trade negotiations, this course has the potential to achieve a sustained impact on future trade negotiating capacity in the countries concerned.

This positive impact is welcome, but auditors have underlined that all the courses delivered in the development of trade negotiations skills would benefit from cross-fertilization, a regular exchange of experience and the analysis of best practices. It is recommended that providers of TNS courses should regularly consult with one another. Such collaboration may result in a homogenous set of training materials and even higher impact.

ii-The evaluation of the WTO RFC Programme covered its operations between 2004 and 2006. Twenty-nine of the RFCs responded to the evaluation questionnaire. The impact of RFCs is linked to the use of information and data retrieved through the RFC at work, e.g. in trade policy formulation, preparation for trade negotiations, preparing notifications, etc. All the RFCs responding to these questions confirmed such use and 88 % of them are convinced that the RFCs play a role in national trade-related capacity-building efforts. It was found that 28 % of the respondents disseminate information to actual and potential users regularly, while the rest do it frequently or occasionally. In addition, 75 % of the respondents also organise information sessions regularly, frequently or occasionally. 76 % of the responding RFCs are operational full time, and some 24 % function often or occasionally.

The reliability of the Internet connection is crucial in effectively accessing WTO-related data and information. In this regard 61 % of them had occasional or frequent problems and 11% reported permanent problems with payment for Internet connection. There is clearly a need for securing funds for effective participation in the multilateral trade system for which fast and reliable Internet connection has become a sine qua non.

In some countries, where staff members have on-line desktop access to WTO, and/or the entire volume of information available at the RFC was copied to the server of the internal network, the question was raised if there is really a need for a separate RFC. The answer is still yes, as long as the RFC intends to benefit people outside the recipient ministry, e.g. other ministries, business community, academia, civil society, etc. 67 % of the RFCs reported frequent or occasional use by people from academia, e-trainees, business community, NGOs etc. 15% reported use by these groups of users all the time, and 19 % reported no use at all.

Slow or no access to Internet, poorly organised documentation, lack of adequately trained RFC staff and shortage of space, ignorance of the whereabouts of the RFC, security rules to be applied in accessing it in the host ministries' buildings, official working hours, etc., might lead to sub-optimal use of the Centres.

However, the RFCs, as a whole, have the potential to become an important element of national trade-related capacity building.

Once established by WTO, the sustainability of the RFC lies in the hands of the host ministry. Some of the responding RFCs suffer from understaffing and under-budgeting as well as low-speed and unreliable Internet access, others are lacking adequate office space and even basic stationery (paper, toners, etc). All these factors menace the sustainability of their services. In this regard it is recommended that in the future the Centres, which can do without WTO, might need a minimum attention only (newsletters, downloadable additional information, etc,) and, at request, occasional follow-up in the future. On the other hand, the RFCs which cannot continue without WTO assistance, would need more frequent WTO interventions on the basis of individual needs assessment. Overall, all the host ministries should be encouraged to respect their obligations and commitment to the RFCs. The exact needs should be triggered by the annual reports by the RFCs to WTO.

69 % of the respondent RFCs (in spite of their obligation) have never prepared an annual report about their functioning, users, results, etc., for the WTO. More vigorous efforts were made in this regard, however, in 2006 and 2007 to redress the situation, monitor this obligation and sensitize targeted RFCs on the importance and value the secretariat attributes to feedback from them on the usefulness of RFCs. By November 2007 this weakness was on the way to be remedied and the first batch of 11 reports (55 %) requested from 20 RFCs assisted in 2005 were received, and after a reminder, another five.

Coordination with other TRTA programmes is more an exception than an established practice. Since 2006 the coordination has improved..

With a view to further improving the efficiency, it was recommended that WTO's other TA activities, including e-Training, should capitalize on the availability of the RFCs and the host

governments should make the RFC an integrated component of their national capacity building efforts.

d) Efficiency of TRTA activities

i- During the year 2007, the efficiency of the reported activities was found high: 82 % were deemed very efficient and 9% were rated at satisfactory efficiency. The results match the standard rate of success (80 %). In other words the large majority of the TRTAs were deemed both effective and efficient. Good efficiency was often attributed to factors such as cost sharing with other agencies, organising back-to-back missions, improved preparations and prior circulation of the programme and training materials, which reduced the cost of reproduction of documents for instance.

ii- On the other hand, some TA providers identified TRTA elements that pulled down efficiency, e.g., non-availability of simultaneous interpretation, interpreters paid by WTO, power cuts during presentations, slow Internet speed, or non-availability of it in demonstrating the effective use of WTO's services and databases, organisation of TRTAs without due regard to the heavy agenda of the on-going negotiations that influenced the rate and composition of participants.

iii- Other factors, some of them not new, that negatively influenced efficiency, were last minute revisions and/or preparation of presentation papers, which made the delivery less efficient by increasing the on-the-spot reproduction and communication costs. Such actions were explained by an excess of work and no time for sufficient preparation. Regional workshops, that were not attended by a good percentage of the invited countries, while advance payments for hotel bookings for full participation had to be made, also influenced efficiency negatively. Reasons for these phenomena should be explored. From the point of view of capacity-building, the value of workshops attended by more than a hundred participants is highly questionable.

iv- Lastly, even if the participants of RTPCs need the best expertise to be shared by Geneva-staff, one may wonder if it is really worth making people travel long distance for one or two days to deliver a few lectures. This practice is not only daunting on the persons but involves high costs too. To meet such needs the more frequent use of video-conferencing is recommended, as an alternative.

Most of the weaknesses can be remedied by better identification of needs, improved planning and organisation of work. Furthermore, a better awareness of the cost implications among TA providers would certainly improve efficiency.

e) Gender balance among the beneficiaries of WTO TRTA

Equal opportunity and equal treatment of both men and women in TRTA is a basic principle. It should be respected and promoted in all workshops, courses, seminars independently from their subject, duration, location or source of funding. TCA's review of the reports received show that women's proportion among participants in 2007 increased to 39 %, which is higher than in the year before (37 %). This is a laudable development.

f) Implementation of previous recommendations

-Overall the picture is favourable and the responding divisions of WTO secretariat rendered account of progress made in the areas of TRTA design, implementation and dissemination of methods, tools and results.

-Improvement is a process and the efforts to maintain WTO comparative advantages in TRTA, to make it even more relevant, the results more sustainable and its management more effective and efficient, takes time. Appropriate and systematic action on the agreed-upon recommendations of the strategic review and on the recommendations included in TCA reports as well as the application of the lessons learned will further improve the quality, relevance and impact of WTO TRTA activities.

-During the period under review TCA continued to assist in the office-wide application of the concepts and methods of the results-based management in TRTA. It should be mentioned that the importance of integrating evaluation with other management functions is still not yet generally understood, accepted or exercised. Office-wide change in perceptions, approaches, behaviours, operational management practices is slow. Evaluation culture is improving, but it has to progress further until all staff concerned with TRTA become results and effect-oriented. Also key to this progress is the explicit expectation from senior management regarding the timely and analytical reporting on TRTA activities and the systematic follow-up to recommendations. In other words, there is still room for improvement. In this respect TCA has regularly shared its observations on BTORs with the authors, recognized good quality or, when it was due, suggested ways of improving TRTA planning, design, implementation, evaluation, and reporting in the future. The positive reaction of the staff concerned, as well as the weaknesses encountered, encourages TCA to continue with this kind of support service in order to further the quality of the technical cooperation activities and their reporting.

g) As far as financing is concerned, it is unfortunate to note that most benchmarks set up by members were missed, and the implementation of some activities under the DDAGTF had to be put on hold pending the receipt of contributions. This recurring issue was raised with members during meetings and informal consultations with a view to finding a long-term solution. Also, the Director-General drew the attention of members to this situation at the level of the General Council in May 2007. Even if, on paper, the available funds were relatively close to the target amounts, the target was systematically missed, and undermined the planning, bearing in mind that activities would normally not happen earlier than three months after the moneys have come in. Hence, the uncertainty in the timing of when the funds will be received almost automatically implies a back loading of the activities themselves.

IV – CONCLUSION

Drawing from the regular internal reports as well as those made by the main donors, the following remarks can be made:

1) Needs assessment could be more effective

a) Despite the importance of national needs assessment to ensure effective TRTA, **in few countries is there a clear process for doing this, let alone an action plan that details how those needs should be met.** Yet TRTA needs assessment can be effective when undertaken by recipient governments in collaboration with national stakeholders. Donors and/or regional/multilateral agencies can provide help in this process. The WTO has a variety of tools to assist needs assessment and planning; e.g. internships, trade policy reviews (though these are not sufficiently frequent) and the WTO/OECD database. The WTO should help recipient countries to introduce/improve domestic national needs assessment procedures and make better use of the existing tools. At the local level, inter-ministerial committees can be effective in developing plans for training needs.

b) **Trainee selection processes could be more focussed and transparent.** The selection process appears to be ad hoc in many countries. Many governments centralize selection of participants in the international trade department or foreign affairs ministry, though other agencies involved in trade are encouraged to nominate trainees. Little general pattern of gender discrimination in the selection of participants is found. It is difficult to ensure both greater uniformity in the knowledge level and expectations of participants, as well as broader representation of stakeholders from other parts of government and non-government agencies. It would therefore be a good practice to encourage recipient governments to establish a sub-committee within the national trade ministry to manage and review the selection process, and make it accountable to the trade minister and trade mission in Geneva. ITTC should establish benchmarks for identifying participants for all courses and work closely with governments to screen participants.

2) WTO has a comparative advantage in TRTA, but it can be improved

a) **There is widespread agreement among both member states and beneficiaries of TA that the WTO secretariat has a strong comparative advantage in knowledge and information** about the WTO system of rules and procedures, and the related history of their negotiation and use, particularly from a legal perspective. This is highly valued. Likewise, WTO is considered less biased than many other official agencies involved in TRTA. But the requirement for neutrality can limit the scope of its advice and sometimes it appears to be pro-liberalisation. On the other side, it seems WTO has less capacity to provide technical assistance and training on the development dimensions of trade rules, the political aspects of negotiations (both in terms of domestic politics and in relationship to major trading partners), and on analytical techniques.

This leads to the conclusion that there is scope for greater collaboration with specialized and regional agencies for training and capacity building on such issues, which would complement WTO's expertise and training. Outsourcing of basic training on WTO issues would be consistent with the preference of some donors. More importantly, it would allow the WTO to focus on more technically complex issues, given its limited resources (human as well as financial).

b) The WTO has greatly expanded the number of its partnerships, but those have yet to show their full potential. Partnerships are often managed informally, 'in a pragmatic way'. Several partner agencies find informal relations to be less effective than the WTO, arguing that a memorandum of understanding can clarify several aspects needed to ensure that partnerships work well. This applies notably when TA is moved from Geneva-based activities towards a more regional and in-country approach. This implies to delegate more responsibility for courses to the partners, leaving the WTO to play a supportive role only.

c) WTO is seen as having developed good training courses taught by people with strong subject knowledge. These courses have become better planned since the formation of the ITTC, which is a part of the WTO secretariat. However, **the ITTC is not as fully developed a training institution as others that have been involved in training** for longer and on a larger-scale and/or in a more integrated fashion. The ITTC's mandate may limit the scope and approach of training offered, relative to an institution with training as its primary mandate. From this stems the idea to build the capacity of subject matter experts to deliver training and not just content lectures. This could involve obligatory annual/biennial training courses and the creation of a training 'help desk' in ITTC for trainers to consult as needed, and particularly when developing a new course. Likewise, to create and support networks of trainers so that they can regularly exchange notes and ideas. The ITTC should systematize training of trainers and develop teaching materials for courses and workshops to be used by the trainers, both in government and in other training centres. It has to work with recipient governments to help trainees become capable trainers and to strengthen the autonomy and freedom of ITTC.

3) The above remarks lead to the paramount question of the quality of trainers.

a) Most of them are legal experts and, in general, their quality is considered high, particularly on legal aspects of WTO rules, their negotiating history (past and current) and their implementation. ITTC staffs are considered more adept, while those from other WTO divisions are considered more knowledgeable at a substantive level. Newer ones are generally considered as good, but perhaps more concerned than others about maintaining 'neutrality'. Some consider that WTO trainers are more doctrinaires than non-WTO ones, though the latter also have strengths (such as their knowledge of the regional and national context) and weaknesses. There appears to be differences in performance between resource persons (trainers) from ITTC and from operational divisions of the WTO as well as between 'newer' and 'older' trainers. This results in reduced consistency and, ultimately, overall performance of WTO-provided TRTA. It is not clear that the demand for more training on economic analysis can be met by the relatively few economists at the WTO.

b) It seems therefore that while increasing non-WTO trainers' involvement and autonomy might dilute the WTO 'brand', it would help address the general request for greater national and regional content and more variety in perspectives taught. In the same vein, to include more economists amongst WTO trainers as well as a greater number of

non-WTO trainers in order to provide more comprehensive training becomes necessary as well as involving non-WTO trainers in the planning of WTO courses and increase the degree of their autonomy in teaching. At the same time, to include a training performance indicator in the annual evaluation of WTO staff would be a good idea.

4) Response to national and individual needs can be improved

a) The course's content and approach is still lagging in terms of response to specific national needs

i-WTO TRTA is predominantly modular with too limited flexibility to adjust its content to recipients' specific needs. National courses offer more flexibility, but are limited in number. Where practical examples are used to illustrate particular issues, they are often not relevant to national experiences. Outsourcing has begun to allow for a broader approach and to address specific national and regional needs, but it is still too limited, except in the case of Regional Trade Policy Courses. Besides, being too focused on legal aspects and less on economic and social analysis, gives a sense that training builds officials' capacity as effective rule-implementers rather than rule-makers.

ii- In that sense, a greater use of regional and national experts alongside WTO trainers helps to provide more relevant perspectives and material. The ITTC should draw more on case-study material and research from within WTO and from outside. Ask participants to prepare brief reports on country-specific problems and/or issues, for presentation and discussion during a course. Provide more training of national and regional experts to provide advice and act as trainers used by the WTO for regional and in-country courses. Move from WTO-centric content to a more comprehensive approach, which addresses the broad range of trade policy issues now facing many developing country trade ministries.

b) Product-related objectives are only partially met

i- Short TRTA activities (i.e. less than one week) provide substantial information but do not allow sufficient time for digestion and simulations or practical exercises. Material is mostly useful, but not always adequate to needs. It is not systematically sent out to participants in advance of training. The size of classes is generally considered appropriate, but lack of uniformity of participants in terms of knowledge, language proficiency, experience, responsibility and interest are cited as practical problems. The present language tests do not appear to have weaned out those unable to comprehend training or participate in discussions. Proper selection of participants is key to fulfil specific and product-related objectives. Some differences among participants can provide the basis for useful exchanges of experience, but when they are too pronounced they distract trainers and undermine discussions and other group exercises.

Shorter courses, especially national workshops, do not allow sufficient time for the amount of information covered to be discussed and digested. Taking neutrality too far can reduce the relevance of technical assistance and fail to provide recipients with the full range of technical insights or capacity building skills and knowledge that they had sought.

ii- Therefore, courses and workshops should be more interactive, with trainers working as facilitators instead of lecturers. More case studies should be introduced, as well as simulations and other practical exercises. Adding 1-2 days would allow workshops to include more practical and regionally relevant content, without compromising the time needed to absorb details of WTO rules and procedures as well as expanding pre-training, for instance with electronic courses, to bring people up to the same level in advance of a course. To

include more national or regional trainers to address language problems and expand the range of materials and instruction in all three official languages and consider the same in other regional languages such as Russian and Arabic also seems necessary.

5) WTO TRTA has a mixed impact which can be enhanced

a) For those who view the TA as having been relevant in a general way, the capacity to design national trade policies and to negotiate at the WTO remains rather weak. First of all, there is limited reporting and dissemination process of the training received. Typically the WTO-related knowledge of individuals working within trade ministries has been enhanced, as has their capacity to understand and implement WTO obligations, though their analytical capacity is still weak. Besides, most trainees have had insufficient training, whether in the WTO or other courses, to become trainers themselves. Second, there is a human resource management problem that has diluted the impact of WTO-provided and other TRTA. This is related with high turnover rates, departmental restructuring and departure of some officials to the private sector. This is compounded by a lack of continuity at Geneva missions as well as in other diplomatic posts. Thirdly, financial constraints on participation in WTO meetings and access to data also limit the capacity to put training into practice.

b) For those reasons, there is a need to adopt an institutional rather than an individual focus, and to enhance the skills and knowledge of trade ministries as well as other agencies and stakeholder groups working with them. This could be done through assistance to recipient governments in putting in place an information management system to ensure that WTO materials collected are appropriately archived and thus accessible to others. At the same time, to work with donors and recipients to consider various incentives for retaining recently trained staff in order to curb the loss of human capital has to be undertaken.

6) There is room for improvement in management and efficiency

a) Moving beyond trainee self-evaluation

At present, evaluation is geared towards measuring 'customer satisfaction' rather than the absorption and subsequent performance of a trainee. More importantly, at present it does not assess a country's interests, in other words there is no feedback from supervisors and/or responsible trade officials as to changes in national capacities to engage in the multilateral trading system. This is without doubt the main weakness of most TRTA programmes.

It is necessary to introduce more systematic evaluation of trainees performance via written or oral tests, alternatively trainees could be required to complete and present back-to-office-reports and subsequently action-taken-reports.

b) Adopting multi year programmes

i-Budgets are provided to ITTC on an annual basis and do not cover a longer-term period. Members should consider ways to ensure a more predictable and longer-term funding.

ii-WTO needs to adopt a programmatic approach and develop a long-term plan for its training courses. This would require not only some reflection on how different courses relate to each other, whether different courses add up to a coherent programme for a country or set of countries, but also what pre- and post-training activities might be needed to maximize benefits of such courses and what complementary funding might be involved. ITTC should develop an

overall plan to allow trainees to go through a structured programme of learning. This would include introductory courses and more advanced course for officials to ensure their trade expertise progresses over time. Such an overall plan would respond to national trade-related human resource development plans, which ITTC should assist recipient country trade ministries to develop.

c) Obtaining an increased value for money

Detailed budgetary information to compare the costs of different WTO training activities with those of other international, regional and national agencies does not seem to exist. WTO's national courses tend to be the most cost-effective, as many more national officials and others can attend them compared to the much smaller number of individuals who normally participate in other courses, including Regional Trade Policy Courses.

d) Submitting TRTA to an external audit

As long as such an audit will not have been decided and completed, it will be difficult to give an entire credit to internal evaluations, especially when the latter are largely based on the self evaluation of beneficiaries.

Although difficult to measure quantitatively, WTO-provided TRTA has clearly brought benefits. WTO courses effectively share information and transfer some knowledge to trainees, but there are still questions about empowerment. Further, WTO courses have generated some political returns in terms of goodwill towards the WTO, as well as the perceived legitimacy of its rules and participation in the negotiations. Lastly, WTO-provided TRTA is considered particularly valuable by countries with less access to bilateral/multilateral funds.

Nevertheless, there is room for improvement to increase efficiency and effectiveness as well as to boost relevance. Notably, needs assessment processes can be improved, planning and delivery more demand-driven, selection of participants more transparent, coordination and cooperation with other TRTA providers more formalized, a more programmatic approach – with systematic follow-up – adopted, and a move from individual to institutional impact.