

Third Technical Workshop on Afghanistan's Accession to the WTO

WTO AGREEMENTS IN AGRICULTURE, SANITARY AND PHYTOSANITARY MEASURES, TECHNICAL BARRIERS TO TRADE AND TRADE REMEDIES

28-29 October 2013, New Delhi

CONCEPT NOTE

I BACKGROUND

Afghanistan applied for WTO membership in 2004 and had its first working party meeting in the same year. The negotiations for accession resumed in 2012 the country having submitted initial offers for market access negotiations in goods and services. The third working party meeting was held in December 2012 with discussion on bilateral market access negotiations and in the spring of 2013, Afghanistan committed to starting bilateral negotiations with interested WTO members.

With the fourth working party meeting held in late July 2013, Afghanistan is currently undergoing intensified market access negotiations and continued Government legislative reforms to meet WTO rules and regulations. Throughout the negotiation process, enhanced technical capacity of public and private stakeholders will be needed to foster communication and develop balanced negotiation positions.

In recognition of such capacity building needs, UNESCAP South and South-West Asia Office (ESCAP-SSWA) in New Delhi and Geneva-based International Trade Centre (ITC) have initiated a joint programme to strengthen the negotiating capacity of Afghanistan's officials by deepening their understanding of highly technical multilateral trade discipline under the WTO. The feedback received from the participants of two previous workshops has been positive on the value of these workshops and has advocated continuation of this programme focusing on specific areas of WTO rules.

II OBJECTIVE AND AGENDA

This two day program jointly offered by ITC and UNESCAP-SSWA is intended to foster a dialogue between the Afghan government officials and private sector stakeholders, building

upon the two previous workshops, with a view to supporting the negotiation process. The topics covered will include WTO agreements in Agriculture, Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) measures, Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and trade remedies with focus, thus, given to import regulations and internal policies affecting the trade in goods. Special attention will be afforded to the LDC perspective mapping the effect of the Agreements. Likewise, commitments and policies including the more favourable terms and transitional periods for LDCs will be discussed. The examined policies will be illustrated with examples from other recently acceded countries.

The first day of the workshop will include a presentation and discussion focusing on the objectives of the WTO Agreements on Agriculture, SPS and TBT. Discussion on the Agriculture Agreement will examine related subsidies and domestic support with a view of mapping the market access implications of membership for LDCs.

The session on SPS is designed to generate an in depth discussion on the key provisions of the Agreement including risk assessment, harmonization, transparency, equivalence, and regionalization and examine the technical capacity required for SPS notification and Information Management Systems by looking at experiences of other acceded countries. The need to comply with different foreign technical regulations and standards has a great bearing on the country's competitiveness and effective participating in international trade. Accordingly, the session on TBT will set out to explain how regulations, standards, testing and certification procedures should be used to facilitate exports. Capacity-constrained LDCs have experienced major difficulties to meet complex SPS and technical requirements in importing countries. A profound understanding of rules governing the food quality and safety issues in international trade will strengthen the ability of concerned national authorities to manage regulatory regime effectively in conformity with the requirements SPS and TBT agreements including addressing domestic legislative gaps which are crucially important for the conclusion of accession negotiation.

The second day of the workshop will concentrate on trade remedies including subsidies and countervailing measures, safeguards, and anti-dumping as internal policies affecting the international trade in goods. The first session will outline the different categories of subsidies according to the WTO agreement and look towards examples on how subsidies have been phased out after WTO accession as well as the special circumstances the LDCs afforded to pursue industrial development policies

The session on the WTO's Anti-dumping Agreement will look at the circumstances where the use of a specific duties on imports from a particular source in cases where dumping threatens injury to a domestic industry. Safeguards are intended to target situations where imports threaten to cause serious injury to the importing Member's domestic industry. The WTO Agreement on safeguards will be discussed in a session examining the temporary, non-selective actions to manage exceptional circumstances of unforeseen surges in imports.

III Target audience

The program targets (a) senior officials from relevant ministries and offices of the government involved in WTO accession negotiation (b) policy makers from national authorities that deal with food quality and safety issues (c) major food industry associations, companies and senior representative from trade chambers.

IV Dates and Venue

The programme will be held at the premises of the UNESCAP- SSWA Office in New Delhi on 28 and 29 October 2013.

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