

LDC Services Project: Geneva Practitioners' Seminar Series on "Making Sense of GATS and Applying Good Practices in Services Negotiations"

Purpose and Objective

The overall objective is to assist the least developed countries' (LDCs) integration into the global services economy. The target beneficiaries of the series are LDC Geneva-based delegates to the WTO, especially those responsible for services. There are a series of specific objectives:

1. Improve awareness of the challenges facing LDC services negotiators and how to deal with them.
2. Increase LDC delegates knowledge of technical negotiating issues.
3. Set out good negotiating practices in the services context.
4. Raise understanding of the important contribution of services to LDC economic and social development and the contribution of GATS to services development and trade.

The project is specifically designed to help LDC delegates become more effective services negotiators by improving their understanding of the GATS (its negotiating history and terminology and its relevance for services sector development and trade) and good practices in services negotiations (analysis, consultation, coordination, strategic planning, alliance building etc.) The main desired outcome is that LDC delegates become more confident and effective services negotiators thanks to a better understanding of the GATS and how it can contribute to services sector development and trade, and to exposure to good negotiating practices. LDC services SMEs will be invited to present their perspectives.

Rationale

LDC delegates in Geneva have frequently raised lack of expertise in the GATS and in services trade issues as one of the reasons for their less-than-optimal participation in services negotiations. They cite difficulties understanding the complexities and technicalities of the agreement, schedules of commitments, and negotiating issues. They note that limited mission resources mean that each delegate must cover several sets of negotiations, leaving little time to study issues in depth. The complexity of the GATS and its negotiations dissuades many from delving into the negotiating issues. Nevertheless, a considerable number of LDC delegates have expressed interest in improving their understanding of the GATS and its role in services trade and development, in order to enhance their negotiating capabilities. This seminar series will address the key needs identified to date, as well as in the process of unrolling the programme.

Outputs

Outputs are expected to include:

1. Documentation of the challenges facing LDC negotiators.
2. Documentation of services issues potentially meriting attention by the WTO.
3. Suggestions for capacity-building programmes to address specific needs.
4. A replicable seminar series for future use in other locations and for other developing country audiences.

Development Benefits

Better informed and more effective LDC trade negotiating skills in the area of services trade and investment can be expected to improve the prospects for negotiating outcomes with greater developmental impact on the ground in the LDCs.

In addition, the skills developed in the programme will contribute to improved understanding of the importance of regulatory efficiency in the services sectors and indirectly therefore, through diffusion back to capitals, to enhancement of regulatory governance in the LDCs.

Greater awareness of the importance of the services sector in the LDCs can be expected to help galvanise support for priority to be given to services sector competitiveness issues and redirection of capacity building interests and efforts in beneficiary countries. This is important given the relatively prospective opportunities for LDC development, employment generation and poverty reduction associated with the services industries.

LDC services SMEs and national and regional business associations in the LDCs will also benefit from their inclusion in the programme, not only in terms of the training provided but also the opportunity the programme offers for closer stakeholder engagement and public/private dialogue.

Activities

The programme consists of a series of six 3-hour seminars (in WTO Room F) with a proposed starting date of Monday 8 December 2014 and continuing on a monthly basis through May 2015.

ITC will include private sector representatives, preferably from LDC services firms or business associations as presenters (and also as training opportunities), in order to familiarise delegates with relevant local business issues.

A summary description of the full seminar series is attached.