

Workshop Report

tralac/COMSEC Africa Regional Workshop on WTO Negotiations

Cape Town, 31 August – 2 September 2005

The Africa Regional Workshop on WTO Negotiations was convened by **tralac** and the Commonwealth Secretariat (COMSEC), to coincide with the end of the summer break for Geneva-based delegations, and hence to take place just before the resumption of business in Geneva, in the final run-up to the 6th Ministerial Conference, to be held 13-18 December 2005, in Hong Kong.

The Workshop drew high-level participation, with ambassadors to the WTO and senior government officials from sub-Saharan African countries, as well as experts from the WTO, other international as well as regional organisations, contributing to the programme and deliberations. Approximately ninety participants attended the Workshop.

Presenters included the Hon. Minister of Trade and Industry of South Africa, Mandisi Mpahlwa, who delivered the key note address and opening statement to the conference, Hon. Amina Mohamed, Chair of the General Council of the WTO, Mr. Xavier Carim, from South Africa's Department of Trade and Industry (the dti), officials from the WTO and ambassadors to the WTO, as well as experts from international and regional organisations. **tralac** and COMSEC also provided background briefing papers on key substantive issues, and progress in the negotiations.

Ambassador Mohamed, emphasized that time is a decisive factor in WTO negotiations, as the last meeting of the General Council, which will set the Agenda and draft the Resolutions for the Hong Kong Ministerial Meeting, is scheduled for the end of November. She noted that the current snarl-up in the negotiations could be released by progress in the negotiations on agriculture, as tariff reductions formulas and modalities will have a great influence on Non-Agricultural Market Access negotiations (NAMA). Substantive progress has been made in a general understanding of the urgency of drafting modalities that are more decisive than the approximations that have been submitted to the General Council for its end of July meeting.

The following issues were discussed:

- Agriculture
- NAMA
- Development Dimension of the DDA
- The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS)
- Trade Facilitation and
- The effect of trade preferences on WTO negotiations from an African perspective.

In the closing session of the conference, the following issues were identified as priority issues for African members in the WTO negotiations:

Priority Issues

- Special and Differential Treatment issues are seen as a cross-cutting element but have to be strategised and clear objectives have to be set. The development aspect of the DDA must be a clear objective of the Africa Group. Development and its definitions to be set by developing and least developed countries and not by developed countries. Pro-active and not reactive negotiations by the Africa Group.
- Agriculture: Development of binding modalities for the three pillars of negotiation: Market access, domestic support and export subsidies. Issues coupled to the three pillars such as Special and Sensitive Products and their definitions, Tariff Rate Quotas in connection with special products and quota fills and administration thereof should be addressed.
- NAMA: the same issues as for agriculture with special reference to band numbers; tariff phase down by an agreed upon formula and tariff caps.
- GATS: Offers from African countries still outstanding; stronger disciplines requested.
- Trade facilitation: Co-operation between WCO and WTO to speed up customs co-operation and implementation of technical proposals between developed and developing countries.

Preparation for Hong Kong and beyond (at national level and at Africa level)

- Special inputs by Ambassador Mohamed: African countries must strengthen their negotiation capacities at the WTO.
- Concrete positions have to be developed by the Africa Group.
- Progress in agriculture is the key to the negotiations.
- A co-ordinated approach by African member countries will show results if African members are committed to key issues. Difficulties between countries should be removed and commonalities to be consolidated in the Africa Group.
- Negotiations are driven by a few developed countries – make use of them.
- Stronger coherence by the African group is requested to achieve the required fast track results. Possible liaison with more structured groupings such as the G20 should be explored.
- Offensive and defensive positions have to be developed and accepted by the Africa Group.
- The Africa Group should insist on the implementation and adherence to WTO rules especially regarding late notifications by member countries.
- The political will to implement the DDA must be developed at the capital level.
- Adjustment measures for least developed countries have to be incorporated into negotiating positions.
- Engagement of stakeholders on national and regional level.

- Continuous feed back to capital and stakeholders.
- The Africa Group should insist on the finalisation of the review of article XXIV of the GATT

Follow up required by various institutions (tralac, COMSEC and other organisations)

1. National level

- Analytical research of negotiation positions.
- Study on the value of preferences vs. reciprocity.
- Identification of sensitive and special products on a country by country basis.
- Detailed study on country level of the EPA's and long term economic and social effect to members of the different EPA's (SADC EPA; ESA EPA; ECOWAS EPA).

2. Regional level

- Study on the possibility of the SACU as a regional building bloc for African Group negotiations.
- Study on the simplification and harmonization of Rules of Origin on a regional and Africa level.
- Study on the promotion of South - South Trade with special consideration of tariffs and rules of origin.
- Workshop on EPA's as instruments of regional integration.

3. Follow up after Hong Kong Ministerial Conference

Regional workshop organized by **tralac** and COMSEC to evaluate the outcome of the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference and to deliberate on the way forward.

4. General observations by delegates

Negotiations should be coordinated across all African role players. The political dimension is very important. In group negotiations, the aim should be to remove problems and to find commonalities. General Positions on the Africa level should be developed.