



Report on Trade Policy Tools/ Data analysis training Workshops Cape Town and Namibia (Feb and March 2008).

Trade liberalization has gained increasing attention both at the bilateral and multilateral level in the past two decades. We have witnessed the formation of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to promote trade liberalization amongst member countries at the multilateral level. More recently there has been a proliferation of bilateral trade negotiations aimed at creating Free Trade Areas amongst trading partners. Closer to home, in Africa, after the expiry of the WTO waiver to the Cotonou Agreement between the European Union (EU) and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, the parties have been engaged in negotiations to develop a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (EPA) that is WTO compatible.

All these developments have created serious challenges for African countries in terms of capacity to (a) identify our offensive and defensive interests; and (b) to negotiate effectively with trading partners. These challenges have created a demand for capacity building to ensure that African countries are better able to formulate trade policies and trade negotiating positions that are informed and based on each country's specific priorities. Tralac endeavours to build the capacity to trade better, for countries in the region and hence from 26 February to 7 March, tralac held a series of training workshops in Cape Town (26-29 Feb) and Namibia (3 – 7 Mar) aimed at enhancing the capacity of government officials and non-state actors to effectively engage and contribute to the trade policy formulating process, both at the national and regional level.

In general, trade policy making requires as an initial step strategic assessment of national and regional trade policy interests and priorities. International trade negotiations and the conclusion of trade agreements are often complicated by the diversity and asymmetry in levels of development and hence trade interests among the countries themselves (this is an important lesson for the SADC member states as they consider the establishment of a customs union). Thus the aim of the training workshops is to ensure that participants understand and appreciate the five components of good trade policy formulation, namely;

- Economic analysis;
- Information and data (Policy analysis is empty without a supporting information base);
- Recognition of Political Economy;
- Operationalisation of Policy Advice; and
- Market for policy research is open and contestable.

Below are some of the comments by participants in our recent workshops.

“The training was very good and insightful. It introduced me to new trade data navigation tools/packages. However, more time is needed during training so that students are allowed to practically try out what they are learning and in that way, facilitate the skills acquisition process.”

Letsiwe Dlamini (Policy Development Coordinator – SACU)

“Thank you so much for all your time and help last week. I found the course very helpful with practical tools and learnt a lot of insight just from the presentations and discussion. It was also a great group of people and I thoroughly enjoyed my time amongst the lot.”

Pierre Heisten (Economics Student – University of Cape Town)