

TALKING NOTES ON ZAMBIA'S EXPERIENCES FROM TRALAC

TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME.

PRESENTED DURING THE FIRST TRALAC ALUMNI WORKSHOP HELD

AT UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN,

8-10 SEPTEMBER 2011

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide an illustration of my work experiences after attending the TRALAC Trade Capacity Building Programme at the University of Cape Town from 2009 to 2010. These experiences relate to the management of trade policy negotiations and stakeholders consultation in Zambia. I will also attempt to highlight some of the gaps (and emerging priorities) in the current TRALAC training programme with a view to enriching its future design and strategic focus.

PRIOR TO THE TRALAC TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME, 2006-2007

Prior to joining the TRALAC trade capacity building programme, I was working as a Regional Trade Economist in the Department of Foreign Trade at the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry in Zambia. My job involved preparing trade policy briefs, and initiating draft position papers for use in regional trade negotiations (such as SADC and COMESA). In fact I was only two years old in the ministry and was appointed as desk officer for both SADC and COMESA- in view of Zambia's dual membership in the two organisations. This was a huge responsibility for someone without any postgraduate training in trade law and policy management. The situation was compounded by the fact that the two organisations (SADC and COMESA) were involved in intense trade negotiations towards their deeper levels of integration. SADC was preparing to launch its Free Trade Area and Customs Union in 2008 and 2010 respectively. COMESA had just launched its Customs Union in 2007, and was now engaged in intense work of consolidating elements of the Customs Union after the launch. All these regional negotiations required that I facilitate a robust consultative process at the national level in order to develop the country's trade negotiating position. This was a tall order for me especially that I had no experience in management of trade negotiations at both national and international levels. I had no capacity to lead a delegation of trade negotiators during the SADC and COMESA meetings.

I received my TRALAC scholarship in 2008 while attending the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) trade negotiating forum meetings in Johannesburg, South Africa. The TRALAC scholarship enabled me to embark on the postgraduate training in trade law and policy management, while at the same time attending the intense regional trade negotiations in both SADC and COMESA, an impeccable timing!

EXPERIENCES FROM THE TRALAC TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING PROGRAMME

The TRALAC trade capacity building programme was a timely response to the capacity building needs that I needed as a desk officer for both SADC and COMESA in the Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry in Zambia. The programme taught me about managing trade negotiations at the time when both SADC and COMESA were negotiating their various elements of regional trade integration agenda. This was learning in real time!

As a result of this training, I improved in a number of areas including the following, among others:

- Confidence in addressing stakeholders during trade policy consultations
- Knowledge of the key provisions of international trade law that govern regional trade agreements such as COMESA and SADC
- Management of stakeholder consultative meetings

- Improved communication skills , and public speaking

Because of my improved trade negotiating capabilities, my superiors developed confidence in me to the extent that I started leading the Zambian delegation of officials to attend trade negotiations meetings in both SADC and COMESA. For example, I have led the Zambian delegation of officials to attend SADC Trade Negotiating Forum meetings for a number of times. The same is true with the COMESA trade and customs committee meetings. During Zambia's trade policy review by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) members in Geneva, in 2009, I provided technical backup at capital in close consultation with Zambian stakeholders. At the regional level, I was actively involved in Rules of Origin negotiations in both SADC and COMESA.

Further, I was part of the team that developed the 'Commerce Chapter' of Zambia's Sixth National Development Plan that was launched this year (2011) in January by the Head of State.

EMERGING PRIORITIES IN TRADE CAPACITY BUILDING

Despite the above mentioned successes of the TRALAC trade capacity building programme, there is still room for improvement. Specifically, the improvements to the TRALAC trade capacity building programme are in terms level, and content.

Currently, the TRALAC training programme is at a Postgraduate Diploma level. A postgraduate Diploma is necessary but NOT sufficient especially when most trade negotiators from developed countries have Masters Degrees in trade related disciplines such as Commerce, and Economics. In this regard, I am of the view that the TRALAC board should consider elevating the postgraduate diploma to Masters Degree Level in order to adequately equip trainees with the necessary competencies comparable to those from developed countries.

The content of the programme should also change to reflect changing needs and priorities. A typical example of the current challenges is the issue of climate change, and how trade policy can be used to respond to climate change mitigation. COMESA has already established a Climate Change Unit, and trade policy is one of the potential instruments to be used in implementing emissions trading schemes.

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that TRALAC trade capacity building programme enhanced my capabilities in my work as regional trade economist at the Ministry of Commerce Trade and Industry in Zambia. My communication skills, confidence, and public speaking were greatly improved. However, there is still room to improve the training programme in order to ensure that it responds to changing needs and priorities at both national and regional levels.