

COMMUNICATION UNDER AGENDA ITEM 3.1

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All Members recognise WTO's critical role in ensuring sustainable economic growth and development and remain committed to an open rules-based multilateral trading system. Since the last Ministerial Conference, and despite wide-ranging divergences and sensitivities, Members are firmly re-engaged in pursuing the reform process to "establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system". They are also engaged in negotiations to limit harmful subsidies to the fisheries sector and also conducting reviews of regional trade agreements to ensure their consistency with WTO rules and complementarity with the multilateral trading system.

As far as the agriculture negotiations are concerned, the Chairman of the WTO Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (CoA-SS), Ambassador J. Ford, is looking forward to sharing his thoughts with CCP Members on the state-of-play of negotiations tomorrow. This communication therefore focusses on two cross-cutting themes covered by the background note (CCP 18/4): the importance of transparency and capacity-building.

Transparency

Enhanced transparency, information exchange and inclusiveness remain crucial features in all WTO negotiation areas.

- In the fisheries negotiations, informal "incubator groups" were initiated by the Chairman as part of an intensified work program (September-December). The objective is to encourage constructive participation and foster understanding of the issues at stake on specific themes, thus providing a pragmatic way for Members to contribute inputs during brainstorming sessions.
- In agriculture, a Symposium on Agricultural Policy Landscapes was organised in June, with participation from a wide range of experts, including our FAO colleagues. The objective was to enhance Members' understanding of the challenges facing commodity trade and shedding light on the complex linkages between domestic and trade policy responses. Without anticipating on tomorrow's detailed presentation to be made by the CoA-SS Chair, last week delegations diligently tabled technical papers and analyses, starting with domestic support. On that occasion, the timely compliance of regular notification obligations was consistently stressed as crucial to inform the debate on trade-distorting support, public stockholding for food security purposes and cotton.
- The Transparency Mechanism for RTAs allows Members to review collectively all notified RTAs. For example, on 18 September, Seychelles' accession to the South African Development Community in 2015 and the EU-CARIFORUM economic partnership agreement were both reviewed. As regards the submission of notifications, some 80 RTAs are yet to be notified to the WTO. The WTO RTA Database provides analytical tools to access related information.
- In the areas identified in paragraph 7 of CCP 18/4, in MC11 there was wide recognition that, while the WTO has underpinned trade growth for decades, the rule-book should be adapted to a modern trading environment. Specific Member-led initiatives were thus tabled in so-called "new" or "contemporary" areas, i.e. on e-commerce; investment facilitation; improved participation of micro- small and medium enterprises in regional and global markets, notably through enhanced access to timely and reliable information; and the empowerment of women in trade. The proponents of each initiative have started exploring these new areas through workshops and seminars, as well as informal exchanges of experience and best practices. Participation in these discussions remains of course open to all interested Members, the objective being to explore how appropriate responses to emerging challenges could be devised and accommodated to strengthen global trade policy making in a transparent and inclusive manner, but above all, in a way that supports the multilateral trading system.

Capacity-building and technical assistance (TA)

WTO capacity-building assists developing country delegates and policy makers to strengthen human and institutional capacity. This helps TA recipients to comprehend the complex web of WTO disciplines, notification requirements, negotiations, as well as understand and prepare for the accession process. An increased awareness of the multilateral trading system and the policy space available to cope with implementation challenges contributes to enhance developing countries' confidence to participate effectively in all WTO bodies, including negotiation bodies. Overall, the WTO gives priority to LDCs in its TA delivery. In 2017, LDCs were associated with 60% of all TA activities. In addition to participation in long term WTO internships, some 3,247 participants from LDCs enrolled in e-learning courses.

Alongside the regular trade-related technical assistance and the Trade Facilitation Agreement Facility, I would like to mention at least three other major mechanisms:

- The Aid-for-Trade Initiative (A4T): Since 2006, the Initiative assists developing countries to connect to global markets, lower trade costs, expand trade, and foster economic development. The bulk of funding is channeled to 4 sectors that are crucial to commodity trade: transport and storage; energy generation and supply; agriculture; and banking and financial services.
 - the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF), which provides financial and technical support to help LDCs identify and elaborate trade-related priorities and develop sustainable trade strategies.
 - the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF) is the leading coordination and knowledge platform on SPS capacity building. STDF projects assist developing countries meet the international food safety, animal and plant health standards they face in their export markets.
 - Current projects focus on strengthening SPS planning and decision-making (capacity to prioritize investments, project design and fundraising, public-private dialogue, awareness-raising, resources efficiency); reducing SPS-related trade costs (improve transparency, implement risk-based approaches, improve SPS procedures in the context of implementing the WTO TFA); as well as digitalization and paperless trade.
 - FAO collaborates with WTO and a wide range of other partners (including OIE, WBG, WHO) in the STDF. The STDF has funded 180+ innovative projects globally and FAO has been actively involved in many of them, identifying good practice, providing technical advice and implementation services.
 - Close to 60% of STDF project funds are provided to LDCs.
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