

**CONCLUSIONS OF THE “REGIONAL MEETING  
ON RESEARCH AND TRAINING NEEDS  
IN INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN  
ASIA-PACIFIC COUNTRIES”**

**BY**

**UNCTAD/UNDP/ESCAP/IIFT, NEW DELHI  
13 - 15 NOVEMBER 2000.**

1. The Meeting had four main objectives:
  - to identify in concrete terms, the research and training deficits in international trade in the National Governments and concerned institutions of the region, especially in the context of multilateral trade negotiations;
  - to establish institutional mechanisms for the development of research and training programmes for trade negotiators;
  - to facilitate the establishment of a network of institutions in the Asia Pacific region to enhance cooperation among them;
  - to present the preliminary findings of a pilot programme covering five trade-related training institutions with the objective of developing a training programme in the integrated area of trade policy and trade promotion.
2. The participants in the New Delhi meeting strongly endorsed the positive agenda as formulated by the UNCTAD, in view of their

continued relevance for the developing and the least developed countries in the Asia-Pacific region.

3. A summary of the important points deliberated in the meeting is presented in the following sections.

## **GENERAL OBSERVATIONS**

There is a strong threat perception in most participating countries as to the implications of the increased globalisation in general and the ability of the respective countries to get more integrated with a positive outcome, in particular. The threat perception is due to the inadequate understanding of the globalisation process, of the implications of the commitments made by the respective countries in the Uruguay Round as well as those which might be required to be made under the mandated negotiations. The countries are also worried about the enormity of the tasks that are involved in implementing the WTO commitments including those associated with amending and developing the national legal systems with a view to conforming them with international obligations. The threat perception is also conditioned by the intrinsic uncertainty involved in making adjustments in economic policies, consequent to agreements arrived at in multilateral negotiations.

There is inadequate appreciation of the benefits arising out of the increased market access now available to the developing and least developed countries through the Uruguay Round Agreements. The mercantilist approach to trade negotiations which emphasises on quid-pro-quo, continues

to dominate the ongoing negotiations even though its economic justification is of doubtful validity. This approach tends to discriminate against the developing and least developed countries as it may involve accepting unfair level of market access and other commitments.

## **DEFICITS IN RESEARCH**

There is a paucity of research with specific country focus on what the country has gained or lost in terms of the commitments made in the Uruguay Round since 1995.

For the countries seeking accession in the WTO, analytical research required for preparing country positions and negotiating strategy is highly inadequate in most countries in the region. The inadequacy of the current research in respect of impact analysis and competitiveness studies was highlighted.

There is a need for greater interaction among trade researchers to discuss the appropriate methodology for conducting such studies. This is especially important in view of the inadequate database in most countries.

The most glaring deficit was identified in the national trade data base in terms of quality, coverage, timeliness as well as the institutional mechanism for trade data compilation.

Institutional weaknesses, in terms of the capacity of the research institutions to provide governments with on-time, appropriate research inputs needed for taking decisions on trade policy and negotiating positions are visible. The only exception is the IIFT which provides almost on-line support to the Government of India on WTO negotiations. In the majority of the institutions, the "transmission belts" between: (a) the trade negotiators and the researchers, and (b) the trade practitioners and the institutions providing training on trade promotion and export development, are extremely weak. The confusion on the impact of the WTO disciplines and on what "WTO knowledge" is needed to offer training on export promotion adds to the weak institutional capacity.

## **DEFICITS IN TRAINING**

The most visible deficits were observed in the area of international trade law. Most countries do not have access to expertise required for international trade negotiations. The national higher education system is not currently geared for this task.

Commercial diplomacy is another area where national training institutions are mostly unprepared for effective delivery of high quality training. The deficit is most visible in training facility involving simulation exercises for trade negotiators.

Training deficits are also evident in the field of developing programmes in trade promotion in some developing and least developed countries in the region.

The training deficits are visible across the target audience which includes Government officials, parliamentarians, trade practitioners, academicians, public advocacy groups and the media.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **RESEARCH**

The meeting has identified a large number of researchable issues. These can be divided into two major categories:

- i) short-term policy-oriented studies
- ii) long-term substantive research.

The more important research issues identified in the meeting are listed in Annex-I. There are three broad classifications of researchable areas:

- i) How to manage the political impact of trade policy negotiations at the national level?

- ii) How to prepare the industries/sectors to face international competition which might get adversely affected by the Uruguay Round commitments?
- iii) How to maximize gains from the increased market access negotiated in the Uruguay Round?

## **TRAINING**

In view of the very large deficits in the training area, the meeting strongly recommended the approach of training the trainers. This was considered to be the most effective, in terms of both cost and time, to develop a critical mass of trainers in this field.

For effective delivery of training across the country, information technology has to be harnessed.

The future training portfolio must address all segments of the target audience.

## **MODALITY**

The meeting strongly endorsed the networking mechanism at various levels to maximise the gains from national level efforts as well as international support and collaborative programmes in the field of research and training. Networking was advised both within a country if more than

one training and research institution exists, across countries in the region, with regional bodies such as ESCAP and international organisation such as UNCTAD. It was felt that the networking might be launched with clearly laid down and preferably a narrow objective to make it more workable. It was felt that the research and HRD activity on WTO issues might be taken up initially for networking purpose. Specific proposal for resource sharing within the formal members of the network as well as those outside need to be worked out.

IIFT(India), Centre for Policy Dialogue(Bangladesh), East West University(Bangladesh) and Institute for Trade Studies and Research(Iran) have already agreed to start the networking process.

The meeting recommended developing one or two institutions in the region as Centres of Excellence. These Centres are obviously those which have already developed a high level of in-house capability in terms of training and research in international trade. IIFT was identified as one institution which can be further supported by regional and international bodies to be developed institutions as a Centre of Excellence. IIFT in turn will extend support to other regional institutions under a mentorship-cum-partnership framework. Foreign Service Institute of Philippines has expressed interest to work as a sub-regional centre.

The Meeting emphasized the need for associating the participating institutions under the ESCAP Pilot programme at each stage of developing

the integrated programme. Specific suggestions were made regarding the Centres and the delivery mechanism of the proposed programme.

The deliberations also raised an important issue: to what extent can a private, market-oriented institution provide the research and training inputs that the government requires for its trade policy and negotiating strategies? This question is, however, less relevant in the case of training on marketing and trade promotion for trade practitioners . In this context, the example of the IIFT - a governmental institution - deserves further reflection as a model of integration of research/training in all trade areas for all audiences, with differentiated curricula and modalities.