

# ADDRESSING DEVELOPMENT CHALLENGES THROUGH PUBLIC-PRIVATE DIALOGUE FOR WTO ACCESSION OF AFGHANISTAN

*'Afghanistan has great potential. And WTO accession is a critical step on the path that we need to take if we are to realise this enormous potential.'*

*(Statement made by H.E. Dr. Anwarulhaq Ahady, Afghanistan Minister of Commerce and Industry, Eighth WTO Ministerial Conference, Geneva, 17 December 2011)*

## INTRODUCTION

The accession to the WTO can facilitate integration of a country into the world economy by enabling it to take advantage of the framework of the multilateral trading system including predictable access to foreign markets and attracting foreign direct investments. The least developed countries may also take advantage of some special and differential treatment provisions and other flexibilities provided in the WTO rules. The Istanbul Programme of Action (IPA) recognises and underlines the importance of supporting and facilitating the accession of LDCs to the WTO. However, it is important that developing countries and LDCs that are acceding to the WTO engage in the negotiation process on terms consistent with their level of development. This necessitates extensive preparation and well-coordinated approach among all the stakeholders including private sector for WTO accession.

Experience from WTO-acceded countries reveals that collaboration between government and private sector has proven critically important to successfully conduct and conclude negotiations for WTO membership. First, it is important to facilitate the intensive process of developing and implementing negotiation strategies in an inclusive manner. And, second, to ensure stakeholder confidence for Government negotiated positions and outcomes.

Acknowledging the important role of the private sector, public-private dialogue is increasingly recognized by policy-makers as an essential ingredient to improve strategizing and decision-making for WTO accession, especially in developing and LDC countries. Yet in the majority of least developed, countries, WTO Accession –and other trade- negotiations are conducted against the backdrop of limited information-sharing. Sometimes, information-exchange and dialogue between Government and private sector is barely existing.

## BACKGROUND: WTO ACCESSION OF AFGHANISTAN

Since applying for WTO Membership in 2004, the Government of Afghanistan has worked actively to accelerate the WTO accession process. Led by the Ministry of Commerce & Industry, the Government has identified reforms to be brought into compliance with WTO, and started to develop initial offers for market access negotiations in goods and services. A second Working Party is foreseen to take place in 2012.

WTO Members, during the Eighth WTO Ministerial Conference (December 2011), applauded the Government of Afghanistan for its liberal and export-led strategy as a basis for negotiating WTO

membership. However, Afghanistan's strong Government commitment alone will not be sufficient to conclude the negotiations; technical capacity and dialogue will need to be stepped-up in order to ensure the backing of all players.

In Afghanistan, as in most acceding countries, enhanced technical capacity of all stakeholders, public and private sector, will be required to establish and nurture meaningful dialogue throughout the negotiation process. In specific, a wider and deeper awareness of not only the benefits of openness, competition and the role of the WTO but also the importance of preserving the policy space for development is needed to bring about a national consensus for WTO Membership.

A pro-active and constructive dialogue among key stakeholders in particular with the private sector, is needed in informing and consulting their member-base, as well as advocating their business interests in the negotiation process. This can only exist upon enhancing their understanding of the pro's and con's of WTO Accession for their country.

## A CUSTOMIZED APPROACH

Supporting Afghanistan's bid for WTO Membership, the International Trade Centre (ITC) in collaboration with recently established UNESCAP Subregional Office in New Delhi will fund a unique and customized public-private conference, spread over 3 days, and involving both public and private stakeholders in Afghanistan's accession process (see annex- tentative programme).

Recognizing that each accession process is unique, the approach of this programme is customized, and reflects the specific issues pertaining to the Afghanistan's WTO Accession process. The targeted assistance is designed in close collaboration with the Government and private sector stakeholders, in an evolutionary and consultative manner and in line with national trade and development priorities.

<b>OBJECTIVES:</b>	<p>To nurture a structured and well informed policy dialogue between public and private sector representatives on Afghanistan's WTO Accession, by addressing knowledge-gaps amongst main stakeholders about WTO-accession and related trade policy and development issues (including market opening and reforms); and</p> <p>To share experience with the recently acceded LDCs from the South Asia; and to assist national officials in developing a road map for WTO accession</p>
<b>PROPOSED ACTIVITY:</b>	A 3-day training / public-private conference
<b>PARTICIPANTS:</b>	Maximum 20 selected participants, both public and private sector representatives from Afghanistan's main players in the Accession process
<b>LOCAL PARTNERS:</b>	Afghanistan Ministry of Commerce and Industry, International Trade Department (public sector), and Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce & Industry (private sector)
<b>INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS:</b>	ITC, Geneva and UN-ESCAP Subregional Office, New Delhi
<b>LOCATION:</b>	Delhi, India (conference location)
<b>PROPOSED TIMING:</b>	22-24 August 2012

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT



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