

IDEAS Centre Presentation of WTO accession-related assistance activities

Our philosophy

IDEAS Centre helps countries gain accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and participate effectively in trade negotiation rounds.

The high-level policy and negotiating advice we provide is aimed at enhancing acceding countries trade policy making capacity by strengthening the knowledge of national officials of multilateral trade negotiations techniques, strategies and tactics in order to improve their negotiating capacity.

IDEAS Centre provides developing countries timely and tailored advice in trade negotiations across all stages of the accession process. The assistance provided is demand driven in the sense that its design, implementation, and objectives respond to and address the development priorities of country beneficiaries rather than to the agenda of the donors.

This means that the beneficiary fully enjoys the “ownership” of the assistance. The objective of the Centre is to advise the Governments so as to enable them to join the WTO on terms consistent with their respective development needs. IDEAS Centre assumes the role of a pro-active advisor which understands the dynamics and challenges of the process at hand and works together with its clients in addressing them. The centre does not do the work for the client Government as it believes that only the nationals have the knowledge and the responsibility for developing the country.

Partners and results achieved

IDEAS Centre has the expertise and accumulated knowledge to offer high quality and independent assistance to acceding countries. The strength of IDEAS is that it has wide-ranging and multi-disciplinary expertise in the area of trade negotiations supported by an extensive experience in providing technical assistance to developing countries and countries with economies in transition in the context of their GATT/WTO accession and their participation in multilateral trade negotiations. IDEAS Centre currently provides accession-related assistance to Laos (since 2006), Lebanon (since 2002), Montenegro (since 2005), Serbia (since 2005) and Tajikistan (since 2005). With all those countries the Centre has managed to develop a strong partnership relationship based on mutual trust.

The list of references of officials from beneficiary countries and the list of donors IDEAS cooperates with are attached in Annex I of this document.

Defining the project: steps

Key input in selecting the activities which are going to be executed under the project is made during the project preparation mission. During the mission IDEAS Centre and beneficiary Government elaborate together the elements of assistance based on the requirements within the country. Many elements are being considered and discussed with the Government during the mission¹, which helps IDEAS Centre proposing the right instrument to address constraints in the accession process. Upon return from the mission a project proposal is elaborated by IDEAS Centre and submitted to the beneficiary Government for approval before it is submitted to the donor Government. The donor Government, of course, has the right to make the decision regarding the process of assistance and may influence the process and delivery of the assistance as well as propose changes in content to be submitted to the beneficiary country so as to ensure that the final content of the project document, its objectives, outputs and activities achieve the objectives of the donor country and therefore is credible. Once a donor government approves and signs the project with the beneficiary government and signs the corresponding agreement with IDEAS Centre² the implementation of the assistance under the project can begin. The donor will be informed about the process, the advances made, the inputs delivered, etc... IDEAS Centre, however, maintains strict confidentiality about the content of the advise given and only the beneficiary country is entitled to share with the donor the content of the advise given, if it so desires.

Monitoring

Six-Months Approach

Given the demand-driven nature of the services provided and the 'fluidity' of the accession process, the beneficiary government and IDEAS Centre agree to plan on a six-monthly basis. This allows IDEAS Centre sufficient time to address agreed priority needs within a clear framework, while also providing flexibility to meet urgent ad hoc requests, such as advice on unexpected questions from Members ahead of Working Party meetings or other requests by the beneficiary based on their needs assessment.

The *Project Steering Committee*, comprising representatives of the beneficiary and donor government and IDEAS Centre meet annually to:

1. Review activities undertaken in the previous year.
2. Discuss and approve the working plan of the following six months.
3. Refine as necessary the execution of the project.

The steering committee serves also as the decision mechanism to undertake any changes in the project document, if deemed necessary.

¹ Stage of negotiations, timeframe envisaged by the beneficiary Government for the completion of the process, capacity constraints in different sectors of the government, preferences of beneficiary country regarding the types of assistance, etc.

² Donor government and IDEAS Centre sign agreement stipulating that IDEAS Centre will be an executing agency in charge of implementation of the contract

Typical activities in accession-related projects

As explained above, the nature of assistance and the activities executed under accession related projects varies strongly from project to project. IDEAS Centre is able to perform all kinds of assistance related to accession process, either independently or with the help of outside experts. Major activities displayed below are broad and involve numerous sub-activities. Depending on the needs and priorities of the beneficiary and their individual position in the negotiating process activities are selected and executed. Therefore, the final list of activities actually implemented within a given project could be either broader or more limited than the ones represented below.

Activities:

1. Assistance in providing answers to questions of the working party members
2. Assistance in producing services and goods offers.
3. Assistance in preparing the documentation required by the working party on various sectors (agriculture- domestic support, customs valuation, TRIPS, SPS, TBT, subsidies, STEs, etc.)
4. Providing policy and negotiating advice on economic and trade reforms needed in the country to achieve compliance with WTO agreements.
5. Producing analytical papers on the issues which block negotiations aimed at presenting the government the background behind requests of the members.
6. Comparing offers as well as commitment language with the negotiated results achieved by similar recently acceded countries;
7. Organizing seminars to address key issues which block the negotiating process. Seminars are used as an input in the coaching of officials and providing the policy advice on how to address the issues.
8. Providing comments to draft submissions to the WTO and on WTO related legislation. Explaining the comments and reactions of WTO members to the documents.
9. Preparing the participation at the working party meetings: gathering views of members of the working party before and after the meeting, assistance in preparing the bilateral negotiations and the multilateral meeting. Strategy sessions are being held with clients before and after each important meeting.
10. Assisting the permanent mission in Geneva to execute its work in liaising between the capitol and WTO (members and the secretariat). Assistance in establishing the mission (if required).
11. Organizing six-month internship program at IDEAS Centre for more advanced trade officials. The training program consists of attending the WTO meetings and coaching component. The trainee is able to continue performing duties performed at the ministry. Internship is often planned to coincide with the working party meetings, so that intern can be fully involved into planning and organizing the meeting from the Geneva perspective.
12. Providing opportunity to the officials from the negotiating team to take part in English courses in order to increase their understanding of WTO meetings and questions posed by members.
13. Involving the private sector, academia, media and parliamentarians as separate project components into the accession related assistance. Involvement and support of key stakeholders in the accession country is essential ingredient for making sure that the

process receives enough backing and that negotiators could claim ownership over the process. Depending on the need different components are elaborated and executed with local partners (parliament, chamber of commerce, sectoral industry associations, media, academia, etc.).

14. Awareness raising seminars with key stakeholders are executed to prepare them for the effects of liberalization.
15. Specific high level seminars for politicians and media are being developed to explain the meaning and impact of WTO membership

Implementation stage related activities:

Projects extending into implementation stage are aimed at facilitating the transition between the pre-membership and post-membership stage and making sure that implementation runs smoothly. Usually, some sectors of concerns identified in the accession process are being closely monitored and assisted to meet the challenges of the implementation stage. SPS, TBT and services inquiry points are being established and maintained. Notification obligations to the WTO are being monitored, and explained, and assistance is provided in composing the documents. Dialogue with private sector is strengthened in order to highlight how to take advantage of WTO membership, and how to minimize the negative effects (opening previously protected sectors to competition). Similar to pre- accession assistance separate components could be developed to strengthen the dialogue with other key stakeholders. Also, training component started in the pre-accession stage could extend into implementation stage. Work of the Permanent mission in Geneva and the representation of the country within the WTO is being one of the centerpieces of assistance within this stage. Training of diplomats, assistance to developing statements, negotiating proposals, coordination with different negotiating groups and the strategic policy decisions regarding DDA negotiations are being discussed and considered.

Staff

The key element which enables IDEAS to enjoy privileged position with its clients is the competence of its staff. IDEAS has been able to recruit staff who have first-hand exposure to the WTO as an institution and negotiations. IDEAS Centre policy advisors all have experience in trade negotiations. The experience with accession in more than 7 countries allows IDEAS centre to transfer knowledge gained by other countries and to mobilize experts from acceding members who have similar background or level of development as the client. Moreover, because IDEAS is based in Geneva, its staff remains abreast of WTO business including negotiating issues, and maintains its contact network at the WTO.

CVs of experts working on accession projects can be found under our website.

Conclusion

IDEAS Centre provides a unique service with a unique approach to promote trade and development issues. Feedback from our clients indicates that we are the only outfit providing this critically-needed service. IDEAS has been able to establish this identity in part because its projects provide the flexibility needed to be different from others. This flexibility depends on a relationship

of trust between IDEAS and its donor partners. IDEAS Centre follows strict international accounting procedures, has each project audited by independent auditors, provides timesheets for the activities undertaken by the project staff and has a single structure of fees which have been negotiated and are accepted by all major donors. This relationship allows IDEAS to deliver a superior product in a cost-effective way and promotes development-friendly integration of beneficiary countries into a world trade mainstream.

**ANNEX I: CONTACT DETAILS OF OFFICERS IN CHARGE OF WTO ACCESSION IN LAOS, LEBANON,
MONTENEGRO, SERBIA AND TAJIKISTAN**

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Donors IDEAS Centre worked with in the past and / or is still working with

- 1) Switzerland's State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) – WTO accession related projects
- 2) Denmark's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 3) The Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 4) Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 5) UK (DFID)
- 6) Germany – Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), InWent
- 7) Canadian International development Agency (CIDA)
- 8) French Agency for Development (AFD) and French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- 9) Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie
- 10) World Bank
- 11) Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- 12) Hewlett Foundation
- 13) Syngenta Foundation

Contact details of relevant officials are available upon request.