



The Art of Trade Negotiations



Trade negotiations lie at the heart of the multilateral trading system. Parties and governments are exercising the art of negotiation skills to protect and advance their interests and benefits in various forms, particularly at a critical stage in the process of the ongoing Doha trade talks. Despite the current impediments that face the World Trade Organization (WTO) in achieving a successful round of negotiations, more and more key players are insisting to conclude the Doha round.

Some UN-ESCWA member countries have taken part in the negotiation process since its inception. They have exerted effort to address their national interests and concerns within the negotiation process, but there is still a need for them to have better knowledge and skills in strategies and tactics of different negotiation

scenarios. This is especially relevant for the means to consolidate a common position on the regional level as well as to coordinate positions with other negotiating groups. In this context, UN-ESCWA, in collaboration with the WTO, held an intensive regional seminar on "Increasing the Participation of UN-ESCWA Member Countries in the WTO Negotiations" on 24-26 February 2009 at the UN House, Beirut. The meeting was designed to provide the participants from Arab countries with the skills and knowledge needed for trade negotiations. According to UN-ESCWA Economic Development and Globalization (EDGD) Officer in Charge, Nabil Safwat, the meeting took on special importance because it focused on the needs of member countries, namely on non-agricultural market access (NAMA) and agriculture. It

also provided participants with updates on the latest developments in the Doha round.

For his part, WTO representative Head of the Arab Regional Desk at the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation Samer Seif Al Yazal, noted that "the Doha development agenda is the most comprehensive and ambitious of trade rounds", through which member States hope to develop and facilitate the organization's rules. The Doha agenda has placed development goals at the heart of the round. What is on the negotiations table today, concerning agriculture, NAMA and services is twice or three times more than what was agreed upon in the Uruguay round. "Even more crucial than the debate subjects is creating a unique chance for poor countries to stop being so", Seif Al Yazal added.

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Attended by representatives from concerned ministries in the Arab countries members and non-members of UN-ESCWA, in addition to representatives of relevant regional organizations, the training worked on building national capacities of member countries in pre-negotiation planning, effective negotiation strategies, tactics and skills.



The Doha multilateral trade negotiations were launched in 2001. The negotiations include those on agriculture and services, which began in early 2000. The original mandate has now been refined by work at Cancún (2003), Geneva (2004), and Hong Kong (2005). Related negotiations took place in Geneva (2004, 2006, 2008); Paris (2005); and Potsdam (2007).

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Participants were introduced to the techniques and skills of interest-based negotiation on practical and theoretical levels. They also had an opportunity to learn how to analyze the given subject matter of a

negotiation, identify national priorities, build an overall consensus, consolidate decisions and formulate a comprehensive negotiation package.

This activity was carried

out as part of UN-ESCWA's long-term work programme to assist member countries in increasing their participation in the multilateral trading system and integration in the global economy at large. ■



Facts and Figures:

Ratio of Intraregional Trade to Overall Foreign Trade (including and excluding oil, 1999-2006)

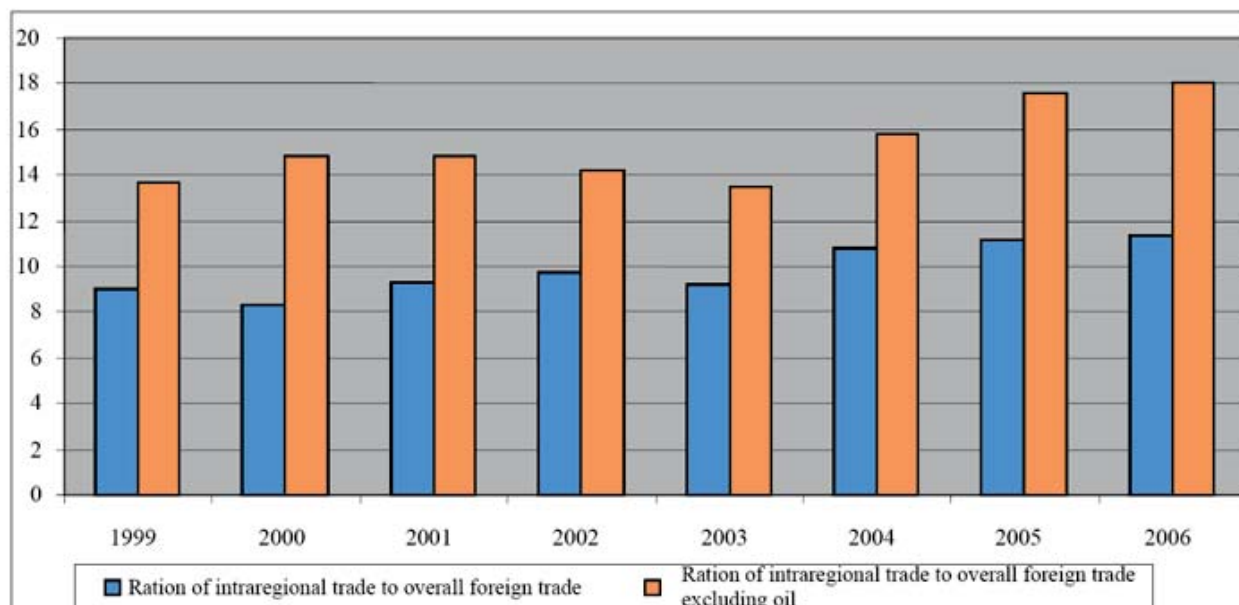
Arab intraregional trade continues to be low as a percentage of total Arab foreign trade, yet that percentage is high in some Arab countries: almost 47 per cent in the Syrian Arab Republic, 35.2 per cent in Jordan, 30.4 per cent in Lebanon, and nearly 21 per cent in Bahrain. In other words, the foreign trade of some Arab countries depends considerably on trading with other Arab countries, but the volume of that

trade as a percentage of Arab foreign trade is small because the countries concerned are not major oil-exporting countries. Therefore, their share of Arab trade is so small in absolute terms that it does not significantly affect Arab intraregional trade as a percentage of total Arab foreign trade.

It may be noted the Arab intraregional trade as a percentage of foreign trade for

the major oil-exporting countries did not exceed 8.9 per cent in the United Arab Emirates, 9.8 per cent in Saudi Arabia, 7 per cent in Qatar and 7.7 per cent in Kuwait. It is clear that Arab intraregional trade as a percentage of Arab foreign trade is small in the countries considerably involved in foreign trade, but it is high in the countries not considerably involved in that trade. ■

Ratio of intraregional trade to overall foreign trade, including and excluding oil, 1999-2006



Source: Annual Review of Developments in Globalization and Regional Integration in the Arab Countries, UN-ESCWA, 2007.

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