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EFFECTIVE PARTICIPATION BY DEVELOPING COUNTRIES IN
INTERNATIONAL GOVERNANCE INSTITUTIONS AND
NEGOTIATIONS:
ZIMBABWE CASE STUDY ON TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

LESSONS LEARNED

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The analysis of Zimbabwe's experience of participating in international trade negotiations gives rise to a number of lessons that can be learned. Zimbabwe's experience is by no means unique. Thus the lessons have implications for other developing countries that are trying to participate in international trade negotiation fora, be it under the WTO, the Cotonou Agreement or under regional trade arrangements. Some lessons are symptomatic of policy development in general whilst some are specific to the area of trade policy negotiations.

The following emerge as common lessons:

- ? Negotiators must have adequate training in negotiating skills, as well as being knowledgeable in the subject areas. There is often a complete lack of people in a developing country who have been trained as negotiators.
- ? An effective communication strategy with all stakeholders in the country must be developed and implemented. This would apply to communications both before and during the negotiations process. Little communication normally takes place with civil society and the private sector, both of which will be affected to greater or lesser extents by the outcome of the negotiations.
- ? Better preparation is needed in the country to feed the negotiators with "what if" scenarios. Negotiators need a better understanding of the implications of the issues being considered, especially on a sectoral basis. There is a need to identify the various issues and potential outcomes in advance so as to study the potential impact of the various outcomes on development in general (including poverty reduction) and on the specific economic sectors. This would help the negotiators to prepare their positions and know the areas in which they can give and in which they need to stand firm.
- ? Allied to the above is the need to identify specific objectives for the negotiations in advance, rather than having just a loose idea. There is a need to formulate clear plans, strategies and targets well in advance of the negotiations.

- ? A strategy must be developed for adequate and effective consultation with the key stakeholders in the country. For trade negotiations, this must include the private sector and the broader civil society, who should be invited to become members of or advisors to the negotiating team.
- ? Adequate research must be undertaken in advance to understand the concerns and identify the positions of the other parties involved in the negotiating process. Better-prepared countries can often steer negotiations in their direction and interest.
- ? Greater attention should be given to seeking partners and developing alliances with other like-minded countries on an issues-led basis. This can be very helpful in not only pursuing and achieving the country's objectives but also in terms of reducing costs – by sharing resources with other like-minded countries.
- ? Adequate resources must be budgeted and provided to allow satisfactory participation in negotiations. This includes both financial and human resources.
- ? The donor community can play an important role in helping to provide resources – both financial and human, especially in the area of capacity building. However there is the potential for conflict of interests and this must be avoided at all costs. The donors therefore must take a “hands-off” approach to provision of this type of assistance.

In addition to the above, there are some specific lessons related to the development of trade policy:

- ? The country must have an adequate database and the skills to enable satisfactory quantitative analysis of trade data to be undertaken. Too often the negotiating positions are of a general, “sweeping” or political nature where others advanced economic arguments backed up with solid evidence. Impact assessments are essential – not only on the sectors likely to be affected, but on broader society and on the key objective of poverty reduction.

- ? With respect to WTO negotiations, the resident mission in Geneva must have a certain minimum level of staffing with requisite skills.

- ? The Government must demonstrate the political will and appreciation of the importance of trade issues. The relevant government Minister(s) and lead negotiators must be adequately trained in the issues.

- ? Given the scarcity of resources for adequately attending to all sets of trade negotiations, the country must decide on priorities – which set of negotiations are more important than others – be it in terms of promoting its exports, protecting its domestic supply capacity or otherwise protecting its interests.

The summary conclusion is that the country needs to build capacity throughout the whole stakeholder spectrum, i.e. government, private sector, academia, non-government and civil society organisations in such areas as analytical and policy-making skills as well as negotiations. There must also be a more efficient targeting of resources.