

# News bulletin

WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



October 2020 Edition

## WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN THE WAKE OF COVID-19

The implementation of the planned Technical Assistance (TA) activities of the World Trade Organization (WTO) for 2020 started as usual in January and by mid-March 2020, 20 activities, two of which were eight-week long courses had been implemented. Yet, these two eight-week long courses had to be cut short by about a week due to rising number of COVID-19 cases and the implementation of measures to limit the spread of the pandemic. The Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) therefore had to make swiftly modifications and arrangements in order to enable participants to urgently return to their respective home countries before things got worse.

From mid-March 2020 onward, all face-to-face TA activities were progressively postponed, as the pandemic led to an unprecedented situation, with respect to measures adopted by countries to address the immediate health aspects of COVID-19, these actions have far reaching consequences for their economies. In this context, trade-related technical assistance and capacity building have a role to play in supporting efforts to gradually recover from the impact of COVID-19.

To ensure that Technical Assistance (TA) continues to be provided to beneficiaries, a number of challenges connected to travel restrictions and measures implemented by governments to control the pandemic have to be overcome. This means, in particular, exploring other ways to deliver face-to-face activities to execute the 2020 planned TA activities and have the desired impact to assist countries emerge from the COVID-19 impact.



Advanced Trade Policy Course, Geneva, January-March 2020, Trade Negotiation Simulation Exercise

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## What is the way forward?

ITTC has thus been working on alternative ways to deliver face-to-face activities in a cost-effective manner. Two options have been identified: virtual delivery for those that can be effectively delivered immediately, and in those cases where it is not feasible to deliver by virtual means, postponement to 2021.

Moving forward on the virtual delivery option, ITTC has reviewed TA requests received and contacted recipients to identify those programmed activities that can be implemented virtually. At the same

time, the ITTC has assessed the Secretariat's preparedness and skillsets to deliver courses virtually in order to determine what needed to be done to implement virtual training solutions.

The main highlighted obstacles identified in the review were related to the need to, *first*, enhance the existing E-Learning tools to deploy virtual training activities on a large scale, and, *second*, to develop capacities inside the Secretariat to deliver technical assistance activities virtually.

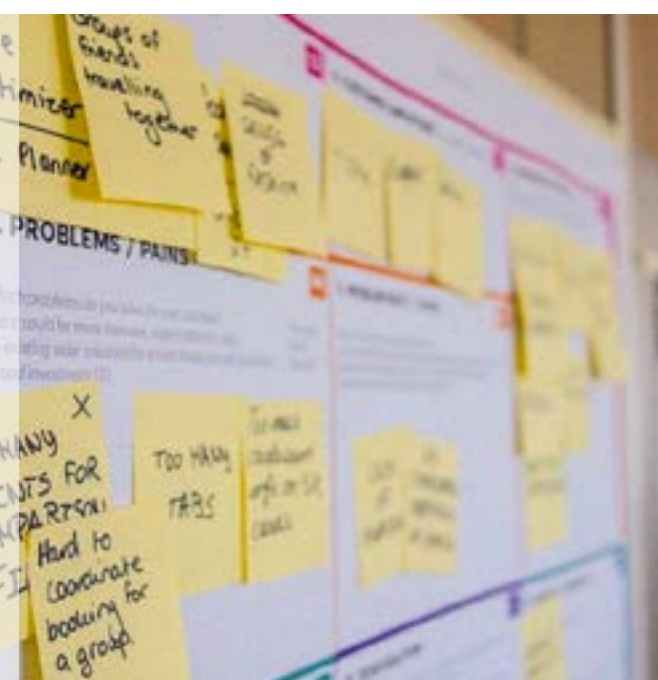


## Responding to challenges and implementing virtual training activities:

As a result of this diagnosis, a specific learning programme was thus organised in the Secretariat to train WTO staff/experts on delivering effective virtual activities using web conferencing/webinar tool. This has enabled staff to adapt current in-person training material and curricula the new virtual delivery mode, while also tailoring content to best respond to beneficiaries' needs and new priorities.

The E-Learning environment has also been expanded to host new virtual training curricula and offer distance-learning services in virtual classrooms. In addition, the available video-conferencing tools have been enhanced to deliver virtual courses through video-conferencing during this period as there is evidence that available technology can be effective for training participants in the current situation.

the existing Reference centres, particularly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), can play to alleviate some challenges relating to accessibility and software, is in this regard also being assessed. Secretariat still needs to find out more, once there is participation in virtual training by some LDCs, as this experience would provide the Secretariat with precise information on the specific challenges.



The Institute is now in the process of piloting a few activities in order to have a better understanding on what can be done and is accessible to the TA recipients knowing that countries are at different stages of lockdowns and experiences of COVID-19.

At the same time, ITTC is studying the best modes for delivering to the different regions, bearing in mind the technological and logistical challenges involved. The role that

Alongside with 44 chat sessions that were organised in the E-Learning Platform with WTO experts on trade-related issues such as: rules of origin; customs valuation; notification obligations or women and trade; fourteen virtual training activities were delivered from March to August 2020. In addition to the new virtual activities, an online Regional Trade Policy Course (eRTPC) was launched in August 2020 to explore how to deliver eRTPCs virtually.

## Virtual training activities coordinated by the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) From 1 March 2020 to 15 October 2020

Virtual Seminar on Trade and Environment and Climate Change, academic support to WTO Chair holder institutions (FLACSO, Argentina)  
**29 May-5 June 2020**

Virtual exchanges as a follow-up to the 2019 Advanced Course on the WTO Agreement on the Application of the Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS)  
**16 June 2020**

WTO Virtual Regional Seminar on National Regulations on Trade and Services for Central American government officials  
**25-30 June 2020**

WTO Virtual National Capacity Building Workshop on Notifications for Saint Kitts and Nevis  
**8-9 July 2020**

WTO Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) Transparency Webinars, global  
**16 July 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on TRIPS for Vanuatu  
**16 July 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop for officials of competent authorities on SPS, with the participation of the private sector in Mexico  
**27-31 July 2020**

WTO Online Regional Trade Policy Course (eRTPC) for Caribbean countries  
**10 August-13 November 2020**

Training for ECOWAS Members States on the renegotiations of concessions under Article XXVIII of the GATT  
**24-25 August 2020**

Virtual Sub-regional Seminar on the WTO General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for ECOWAS Members States  
**27 August-3 September 2020**

Virtual Sub-regional Seminar on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in West Africa for ECOWAS Members States (English)  
**15-16 September 2020**

Global E-Seminar on Competition Policy, Trade and Development  
**17, 24 September and 1 October 2020**

Virtual National Workshop on WTO Agriculture Notifications for government officials in Mongolia  
**28-29 September 2020**

Virtual Sub-regional Seminar on the implementation of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement in West Africa for ECOWAS Members States (French)  
**5-6 October 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on the WTO Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) for government officials in Zimbabwe  
**7-8 October 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on the WTO Agreement on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) for government officials in the Dominican Republic  
**8 September 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on tariff analysis and databases for government officials in Ecuador  
**9, 14 and 16 September 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Standards (SPS/TBT) for government officials in Guatemala  
**18 September 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on SPS/TBT, Transparency and Notification for government officials in El Salvador  
**7 October 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Agriculture Notifications for government officials in Jamaica  
**13 October 2020**

## THE REGIONAL TRADE POLICY COURSE ( RTPC) CONTINUES AS E-RTPC



### Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs)

RTPCs aim primarily at deepening participants' knowledge of the WTO Agreements and the functioning of the WTO, its rules and procedures as well as their understanding of relevant trade policy issues in their regional context. Other objectives include increasing participant's autonomy to work on WTO issues by enhancing their ability to access WTO resources and strengthening participants' networks of professional contacts. This is achieved through intensive eight-weeks long face-to-face training courses in seven global regions, in partnership with universities in the regions and involving regional trade experts as co-lecturers with WTO officials.

### Challenges related to switching to distance learning

The objectives and results of an RTPC cannot be fully replicated in an E-Learning course due to limitations. Challenges include the fact that live webinars are limited to a two-hour duration and to two sessions per day at most to be effective. In addition, access to fast and reliable internet connectivity and to a laptop/desktop are required for virtual training but are not guaranteed, especially in situations where government officials may be required to work from home. Furthermore, time-zone differences between the geographical location of trainers and participants may also contract the time window available for virtual training.

### How the e-RTPC addresses these challenges

The pilot Online Regional Trade Policy Course (e-RTPC) for the Caribbean region seeks to address those challenges by adapting the course objectives to a distance-learning delivery and developing synergies with the existing framework of the E-Learning course on Multilateral Trade Agreements (MTA course) as the foundation for the e-RTPC while also adding a focus on the regional trade policy context through webinars and virtual coaching with guest speakers offering regional perspectives (available live and as recorded sessions).

The activity uses the E-Learning platform's environment for monitoring and evaluation and offers a virtual classroom to actively support participants' learning.

## WHAT ABOUT E-LEARNING?

### Undisrupted services but not without challenges

Contrary to face-to-face activities, the online course offer has continued undisrupted. Yet there are challenges. Given that distance learning serves both as a training tool and selection tool for more advanced TA activities (with online courses used as prerequisite for face-to-face courses), the cancellation or postponement of the face-to-face has had an impact on the number of participants who register and take online courses to advance to another learning level. Normally such participants represent around 45% of the total number of participants. In addition, some participants are reporting difficulties to access a computer or internet with the lockdown situations in their respective countries. During normal times, participants generally do the online courses at the office.

### Strategic response to challenges

In view of these challenging situation, the E-Learning programme has adapted its strategy and offer to better respond to needs connected with the COVID-19 situation.



**First, on the virtual environment:** the homepage of the platform will need to display the E-Learning catalogue, provide detailed information of the E-Learning courses on offer without a login requirement to facilitate access to the catalogue.

In addition, the E-Learning environment is being enhanced to adapt to mobile learning (e.g. a mobile app) as well as efficiently support the virtual training activities in ITTC (e.g. synchronous learning, video-conferencing, virtual classrooms, interactive tools, etc.). E-Learning material developed on various trade-related topics for the online courses are also adapted to be used in ITTC's virtual training.

**Second, on the E-Learning offer:** interactive activities on E-Learning and trade-related topics will continue to be organised, while the course catalogue is enhanced to offer courses that respond to beneficiaries' evolving needs (e.g. shorter, focused, multimedia-rich and mobile-friendly courses).

**Third, on strengthening and supporting participation in the programme:** participation and results are closely monitored to ensure participation is sustained and balanced despite current challenges experienced by beneficiaries. Communication with stakeholders on how to register in the platform and do an online course has also been strengthened in various formats (including through multimedia) to facilitate learners' access to the courses.

## INTERVIEW OF MS BRIDGET CHILALA, DIRECTOR OF THE INSTITUTE FOR TRAINING AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION (ITTC) OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION ON TRAINING WTO STAFF ON DELIVERING VIRTUALLY



Ms Bridget Chilala, Director of the Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) in the WTO

Ms Bridget Chilala knows well the value of trade policy courses. In 1987, the current Director of the WTO Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) was a young officer in the government of her country, Zambia. At the time, she travelled to Geneva to participate in the sixty-fourth edition of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) Trade Policy Course.

"I attended the GATT trade policy course in 1987, just a few years after joining Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry. Participating in this course provided me with the basic knowledge I needed to carry out my work dealing with GATT, United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and other trade related issues. Whenever there were trade challenges that required the attention of the Ministry, I was asked for my advice. Having attended the GATT course, I had the necessary skills and confidence to address such issues.

The Organization was different then. Instead of the 164 Members the WTO has now, the GATT had 94 Contracting Parties. The Secretariat was considerably smaller. There were no multilateral trade agreements on intellectual property or trade in services. Contracting Parties were only bound by the basic disciplines in the GATT and they could each choose whether to subscribe to any additional side codes. The Uruguay Round of multilateral trade negotiations had been launched the year before in Punta del Este, Uruguay. It was anybody's guess whether this ambitious round would be successful."

**Were you able to keep in touch with any of your fellow attendees or instructors from the trade policy course you attended?**

For some time, most of us managed to keep in touch. As many of my fellow participants retired, we progressively lost contact. Keep in mind that this was before the time of Facebook or WhatsApp. I recently went on a mission to Trinidad and Tobago to identify a host for the Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) for Caribbean countries. During my visit, I asked the hosts about a colleague who attended the GATT trade policy course with me. Surprisingly they knew her!

Unfortunately, we were unable to meet during that trip. I wish now that I had had more time. On successive trips to Geneva, before I joined the WTO as Director of the ITTC, I had the opportunity to meet with some of the trainers, including the person who was Director of the Training Division at the time.

**What are some major differences between trade policy courses when you attended and now?**

One thing that has not changed is the dedication by GATT and now WTO staff. When I attended, the course was four months long. It has now been reduced to two months and has become more intensive. In the GATT days, we were able to visit some countries and learn from their experiences. During my course, we visited Canada as part of the training and travelled from the East to the West Coast. All expenses were paid for by the Canadian Government. We also had interesting professional visits in Switzerland.

Apart from these trips, the content of trade policy courses has also changed over time. When I attended, there was no strategy on progressive learning. Many participants were accepted into trade policy courses with little prior exposure to multilateral trade rules. Each of the courses at the time would cover material that is now addressed in three different levels of learning: basic, intermediate, and advanced. We also did not have the option of attending online training activities. That partly explains why the duration of these courses was four months.

The WTO Secretariat started the year 2020 on a very ambitious note with respect to training. A Biennial Technical Assistance and Training Plan (TA Plan) for 2020 and 2021 was adopted by WTO Members in late 2019, and then COVID-19 struck.

**At what point in the year did training activities start being affected by COVID-19?**

WTO training activities were affected as soon as lockdowns and border closures kicked in around mid-March. By that time, we had rolled out our first quarter training activities. When that happened, we had a couple of long trade policy courses taking place, one

in Geneva, Switzerland and one in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire. Our first priority at that point became ensuring the health and safety of participants and their safe return back home, as well as the health and safety of our staff and trainers. Unfortunately, this meant we had to cut short these trade policy courses. Fortunately, this happened almost at the end of the courses. This meant we were able to cover most of the substantive content. After that, we have had to cancel or postpone several other training activities, even some where things were at an advanced stage.

**What has ITTC done to ensure the continuing delivery of technical assistance?**

We have taken several steps.

First, we have been in contact with TA beneficiaries to ask whether their training needs have changed as a result of the COVID-19 situation. Our current biennial TA Plan was prepared on needs and preferences expressed by beneficiaries well before the global pandemic was declared. We want to make sure that our offer of training activities continues to be relevant to beneficiaries' needs. From the responses we have received, it seems that there has not been so far a change in terms of areas of interest. The focus in those areas however may change as we go forward.

Second, we have redesigned many of our training activities, originally conceived as face-to-face, to be delivered electronically or remotely. An immediate effect of COVID-19 on our training activities is that we have had to postpone many of our face-to-face courses. At this time, it is still uncertain when the COVID-19 situation will allow us to resume these activities. The situation may also evolve differently in different regions.

In delivering these TA activities by virtual means, we have built on our considerable experience with E-Learning over recent years. We are currently running an entire trade policy course online, the first of its kind, for government officials in the Caribbean region. This was the region that suffered the first postponement of a face-to-face trade policy course. We have also delivered a number of shorter, specialized activities,

most of them requested by Latin American officials. A few other activities are currently being organized, including for the ECOWAS group of countries. A lot more can be done for the African region.

Reconverting many of our training activities to remote delivery has required some effort. Aside from a small E-Learning unit, most trainers in the WTO Secretariat were mainly familiar with face-to-face training. We have been working in identifying our training skills gaps with respect to remote training. With the support of the Human Resources Division we are providing training to WTO staff to improve their skills for delivering training remotely. We are also reviewing the challenges faced by participants to access remote training with a view to finding solutions to address those challenges.

**"With decline to the voluntary contributions, a blend of face-to-face and virtual content is indispensable if we are to maintain a similar level of TA delivery as in the past few years"**

Ms Bridget Chilala

**What are the greatest challenges for WTO trade-related technical assistance?**

I would say the following. First, we have a limited mandate in an environment where needs have evolved. Second, even with respect to our current mandate, we have limited resources and particularly limited financial resources. Third, the fact that the WTO has only three working languages is a challenge for those countries where none of those three languages are commonly used by their government officials. Finally, we struggle to ensure that trained government officials remain in positions where they can contribute effectively to the trade debate at a national level.

*Do you foresee the WTO delivering more training activities in virtual format in the future, even after COVID-19?*

Yes, I do. In the near future, more and more activities will be delivered remotely until such a time that travel restrictions are reduced or removed completely. That said, going by how the 2008 financial impact affected some Members' economies and hence their financial voluntary contribution, it's clear already that the impact of COVID 19 will lead to some Members struggling to maintain the same level of voluntary contributions that they have made to the WTO to facilitate the implementation of

WTO Technical Assistance. This would have a direct impact on how much technical assistance we can offer or deliver. At present, voluntary contribution to WTO TA budget stand around 76.8%. Therefore, with decline to the voluntary contributions, a blend of face-to-face and virtual content is indispensable if we are to maintain a similar level of TA delivery as in the past few years. At the same time, some of our activities cannot be completely delivered remotely, and remote delivery cannot entirely replace our face-to-face activities.

## THE REGIONAL TRADE POLICY COURSE (RTPC) FOR FRENCH-SPEAKING AFRICAN MEMBERS AND OBSERVERS OF THE WTO

The RTPC opened with an address to the participants by Côte d'Ivoire's Minister of Planning and Development, Ms Niale Kaba, Mr Albert Kouatelay, Deputy Director of Cabinet, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Mr Kouadio Hugues, Director of the École Nationale

Supérieure de Statistique et d'Économie Appliquée (ENSEA) which is hosting the event for the fourth year in a row, and Mr Roberto Fiorentino, Head of the RTPC Unit in ITTC in the WTO.



## RESULTS OF WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE IN 2019

### Highlights in the upcoming 2019 TA Annual Report



As in previous years, the WTO released its Annual Performance Report on Technical Assistance and Training to Members in May 2020. The report analysed the delivery and results of TA activities implemented in 2019 and recorded the main evolutions observed as compared to 2018.

While WTO TA in 2019 produced contrasted results in sheer numerical targets, the Secretariat confirmed its commitment towards continuous improvement of its systems, processes, and learning approaches to achieve the highest TA outcomes.

After three years of sustained efforts, the Secretariat has completed, during the year, the implementation of the 28 recommendations formulated in the external evaluation of the WTO TA conducted in 2016, which had confirmed that the WTO TA was relevant to beneficiary countries, effective, efficient and sustainable, and was having a real impact.

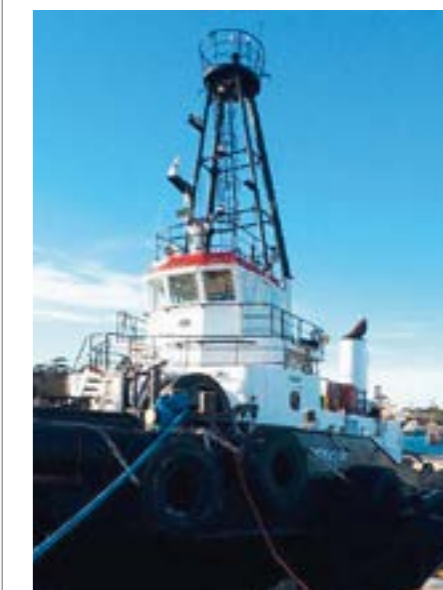
Strengthening Result-Based Management (RBM) of WTO TA has continued to be at the forefront of Secretariat's focus. The deployment of the new TA management system progressed well during the year with the introduction of new functionalities

that promote shared responsibility and accountability among all TA stakeholders, trainers and beneficiaries alike, including a streamlined module for the evaluation of TA activities' immediate results in a Back-To-Office Report (BTOR). The management system should soon become the single window through which Members will interact with the Secretariat on TA, whether to present their TA needs, register for a TA activity and assess it, or access TA-related data. The systematic reporting on TA activities continued in 2019, with nearly 100% of the activities reported upon during the year. Finally, the Secretariat consolidated its monitoring and evaluation work in 2019. Ten TA internal evaluations were conducted during the year to assess the results of three regional and two national activities, the various long-term internship programmes; and of the TA provided to four beneficiary countries since 2014.

2019 marks the successful launch of the new E-Learning cloud-based platform that offers enhanced capabilities and security features and contributes to a better integration of the online and face-to-face trainings. In terms of substance, transparency obligations at the WTO have received particular emphasis in TA activities, several activities addressed

notification procedures when they were not entirely dedicated to them (MA for Goods, Agriculture, Standards, TRIPS, etc.).

Similarly, TA in 2019 sought to support ongoing negotiations. At Members' request, a comprehensive programme of seven regional workshops on Fisheries Subsidies Negotiations gathered fisheries and trade experts from all regions during the first part of the year to support the work of the negotiating group on Rules in this domain.



## PLANNED WTO TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE EVENTS, OCTOBER-DECEMBER 2020

WTO Virtual Workshop on Accession and Agriculture, Global

**12-22 October 2020**

WTO Webinar: An Integrated Health, Trade and Intellectual Property Approach to Address the COVID-19 Pandemic, Global

**21 October 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on TBT for government officials in Columbia

**October 2020**

WTO Virtual Thematic Workshop on SPS, Global

**3 November 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Trade in Services (French) for government officials of ECOWAS Members States

**5-10 and 12 November 2020**

WTO Advanced Global e-Workshop on Government Procurement, Promoting Trade, Good Governance and Inclusive, Sustainable Development: The Revised WTO Agreement on GP (GPA) as an Enabler

**5, 12, 19 and 26 November and 3 December 2020**

WTO/AMF Virtual Regional High-Level Regional Dialogue on WTO Accessions for the Arab Region

**8-10 November 2020**

WTO Virtual Regional Workshop on Agriculture for AMEC Countries

**14-16 November 2020**

WTO Virtual Regional Workshop on e-Commerce for AMEC Countries

**23 November-3 December 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Economic Analysis in the International Trade for government officials in Mauritius

**November 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Agriculture (English) for government officials of ECOWAS Members States

**November 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on SPS/TBT for government officials in Brazil

**November 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Trade-related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) (English) for government officials of ECOWAS Members States

**November 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for government officials in Chinese Taipei

**November/December 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) for government officials in South Africa

**November/December 2020**

WTO Virtual Symposium on Agriculture, Global

**2-3 December 2020**

WTO Virtual National Workshop on the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM) for government officials in Chinese Taipei

**date to be determined**

Virtual National Seminar on WTO Trade Remedies for government officials in Kyrgyz Republic

**date to be determined**

WTO Virtual National Seminar on GATS for government officials in Oman

**date to be determined**

WTO Virtual National Seminar on TRIPS for government officials in Uzbekistan

**date to be determined**

WTO Virtual Regional Seminar on Subsidy Notifications for government officials in the Latin American region

**date to be determined**

## E-LEARNING COURSES AVAILABLE FROM OCTOBER TO DECEMBER 2020 AT <https://wtolearning.csod.com/>

A short trip through TRIPS

Agriculture in the WTO

Agriculture Information Management System

CITES and the WTO - Enhancing Cooperation for Sustainable Development

Copyright in the WTO

Documents Online E-Subscriptions

Fast track to anti-dumping: Short course on anti-dumping in the WTO

Fast track to GATS: Short course on Trade in Services

Fast track to safeguard measures in the WTO

Fast track to Subsidies and Countervailing Measures in the WTO

Introduction to the WTO

Made in . . . Understanding Rules of Origin

Mainstreaming Trade - The Fundamentals

Mainstreaming Trade in Action

Market Access for goods and Non-Agricultural Market Access NAMA Negotiations

Patents in the WTO

Regional Trade Agreements and the WTO

Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

Technical Barriers to Trade in the WTO

The Agriculture Xpress

The Committee on Trade and Development in the WTO

The Multilateral Trade Agreements

The WTO Dispute Settlement System

The WTO and Trade Economics: Theory and Policy

Trade and Development in the WTO

Trade and Environment and the WTO

Trade Facilitation Agreement

Trade Finance and the WTO

Trade in Services in the WTO

Trade Remedies and the WTO

Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

Transparency and the WTO: Notification Obligations

What are the objectives of the WTO Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA)?

Why are copyright and related rights protected?

Why are Intellectual Property Rights (IPRs) protected?

WTO Accession

WTO in 10'

WTO Legal Underpinnings

WTO Market Access Intelligence Online



<https://www.facebook.com/WTOECampus>



<https://twitter.com/wtoecampus>



<https://www.linkedin.com/school/wtoecampus>



<https://www.youtube.com/c/WTOECAMPUS>



[https://www.instagram.com/wto\\_learning/](https://www.instagram.com/wto_learning/)

More information on the WTO TRTA activities can be found at

[www.wto.org](http://www.wto.org) Technical Assistance