

# AID-FOR-TRADE CASE STORY

## SINGAPORE

### The Regional Trade Policy Course

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<b>Region:</b>	Asia-Pacific
<b>Economy:</b>	Singapore
<b>Type:</b>	Regional Trade Policy Course to equip developing countries with skills to participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system and to harness trade as an engine for growth
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#### I. Issues Addressed

- 1 Singapore successfully partnered the WTO to deliver four annual Regional Trade Policy Courses (RTPCs) for the Asia-Pacific region from 2007-2010. The four courses have equipped more than 100 participants from over 25 economies in the Asia-Pacific region with a solid foundation of knowledge about the WTO and its functions, with specific reference to the Asia-Pacific region.
- 2 The partnership between the National University of Singapore (NUS) Faculty of Law and the WTO in running the RTPCs was supported by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The course was extended to an unprecedented fourth year in 2010.
- 3 The three-month RTPC was largely modelled after WTO's Trade Policy Course held annually in Geneva. However, being a regional course for the Asia-Pacific region, it provided additional regional perspectives on trade issues.
- 4 The participants of the course were mainly senior trade policy officials from least-developed countries (LDCs), economies in transition, and acceding economies in the Asia-Pacific region who have responsibility on trade, WTO-related matters and the multilateral trading system. Participants gained much exposure to the theory and practice of WTO rules and regulations and had the opportunity to exchange information and share experiences with participants from other countries.

#### II. Objectives Pursued

- 5 The inter-linking elements in the RTPC project were: training government officials; building institutional capacities at the regional level; creating networks among academics in institutions of higher learning in the region; and providing regional perspectives to the course by establishing joint lecturing arrangements with regional academics and specialists.
- 6 Firstly, the objective of the RTPC was to widen officials' understanding of trade policy matters, the multilateral trading system, international trade law and the functioning of the WTO, including in the context

of negotiations. The course focused on trade theory, the formulation and implementation of trade policy and the provisions of WTO legal instruments and agreements. The knowledge acquired during the course served to strengthen the analytical and negotiating skills of the participants and increase their capacity to articulate and defend their national trade interests, so that they might better promote and contribute to the active participation by their economies in the work of the WTO.

7 Secondly, the RTPC aimed to build institutional partnerships at the regional level for capacity-building activities, and foster networks among institutions of higher learning and their academics. Since the introduction of the RTPC in 2002, WTO conducted RTPCs with universities in different regions, with the aim of grooming them to become regional centres for WTO-related capacity building activities. The institutional partnerships by definition can only be forged with a single institution within a region at any one time, but the co-lecturers are drawn from institutions of higher learning and other sources from throughout the region. Thus, linkages are established and/or reinforced with the academic community as part of an integrated approach for sustainable capacity building. NUS worked closely with the WTO Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation (ITTC) in the planning stages of each RTPC and was responsible for the day-to-day delivery of the course.

8 Thirdly, special emphasis was placed on the development of the regional dimensions through the joint delivery of the course by trade policy specialists from NUS and institutions of higher learning, policy think-tanks in the region and officials from the WTO Secretariat. The collaboration provided authoritative explanations of WTO provisions and the workings of the institution from WTO lecturers, which were complemented by focused views and inputs offered by specialists from the region. The latter was an important part of capacity building at the regional level as it highlighted what was happening on the ground, allowing participants to have comprehensive training adapted to local needs. The special emphasis placed on the regional dimensions aimed to enhance participants' understanding of their regional environment and how it relates to trade policy-making.

### **III. Design and Implementation**

9 During the intensive twelve weeks of the RTPC, participants became acquainted with WTO work through lectures, debates and simulation exercises on virtually all issues dealt within the framework of the organisation.

10 Participants were introduced to a wide range of WTO agreements, documents, issues and activities. They covered many aspects of the WTO, including the basics of international trade theory, the basic principles of the WTO, trade in goods and services, intellectual property as well as developmental issues and regional trade agreements. Sessions focused on the formulation and implementation of trade policy, the provisions of WTO legal instruments and agreements, and the structure, scope and functioning of the WTO. To build capacity for trade negotiations and dispute settlement, simulation exercises and communication skills workshops were incorporated into the programme.

11 Besides classroom lessons, the RTPC also included study visits to institutions that deal with Singapore's trade and economic matters and policies. There were visits to CrimsonLogic to learn how trade tools such as TradeNet help to facilitate trade in Singapore, PSA Singapore Terminals, the petrochemical industry on Jurong Island, ICA Ports Command and Ascendas Private Limited to see how these organisations have contributed to Singapore's economic development.

12 The course involved about forty WTO staff and regional experts in face-to-face interaction with the participants. This ensured an effective and direct transfer of knowledge.

### **IV. Problems Encountered**

13 No major problems were encountered. Challenges included dealing with issues related to the course programme, selection of WTO and regional trainers, and selection of the appropriate participants. Improvements were introduced at every RTPC to address the challenges. For example the WTO introduced a new approach in 2009 to address trade theories and economics, so as to provide a better understanding of

the rationale behind trade policy implementation. To ensure better quality of participants, completion of an eTraining course on an introduction to the WTO was made a requirement for candidates to be considered for selection to the RTPC.

## **V. Factors for Success/Failure**

14 Participants returned to their countries with a comprehensive understanding of WTO's laws and policies, which would enable them to contribute positively to their government's trade policy-related decision-making processes. They became better equipped to understand the necessary processes required to accede to the WTO. The successful learning of the participants was aided by a progressive learning continuum, where the RTPC offered a comprehensive curriculum that covered all the aspects of the work of the WTO while being corroborated by practical exercises and simulations.

15 The good facilities and services provided by the NUS Faculty of Law were instrumental to the successful learning experience of the participants. These encompassed ensuring the availability of training rooms with tiered seating arrangements, wireless internet access, leasing of laptops to participants, and state-of-the-art IT equipment which included video-conference and taping services, and a virtual depository of trainers' presentations and WTO documents.

16 Also contributing to the success of the course were dedicated staff from the NUS Law Faculty such as the academic and administrative coordinators and their teams who worked closely with the WTO counterparts from the preparatory to the implementation stages.

17 An academic coordinator was tasked to look after all logistical, financial and administrative work critical for the smooth functioning of the RTPC. Besides having the overall responsibility of running the RTPC, the academic coordinator also provided academic support and supervision, monitored and evaluated the progress of participants and the presentations by trainers, as well as looked after the welfare of the participants.

## **VI. Results Achieved**

18 Through four runs of the RTPC, Singapore has trained up to 100 senior trade policy officials from the Asia-Pacific region. The Singapore RTPC experience has been very positive; the participants were thoroughly exposed to all WTO-related issues and developed practical skills as well as an extensive network of contacts. The knowledge they received helped them to develop a good understanding of all aspects of the WTO. The RTPC also served as a general introduction for those who might become specialists at a later stage. In addition, it provided a regional focus through joint lecturing arrangements with academics and specialists from the region. Through team projects, the course helped to strengthen the participants' capacity to work in teams and in an international environment. They also encouraged greater interaction among the participants and with the trainers, facilitating the establishment of a network of contacts among them.

19 Running the RTPC is a demonstration of Singapore's commitment to provide training and outreach to countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This partnership with the WTO on the RTPC has enabled Singapore to play a key role in imparting knowledge about the WTO to Asia-Pacific government officials. Singapore will continue to explore with the WTO further possibilities to collaborate on for future programmes.

## **VII. Lessons Learned**

20 Developing economies have gained much from the strengthening of the WTO system, which is inclusive and allows all members to participate in the creation of global trade policy and formulate the rules governing international trade. As a small and developing economy that has benefitted from the WTO system, Singapore is committed to helping other developing countries maximise their benefits from participating effectively in the multilateral trading system.

21 There are various lessons to be learnt based on the successful conclusion of the four RTPCs. Firstly, the RTPC organisers must possess the right set of skills, domain expertise and chemistry to work together in

running the RTPC. Secondly, the commitment, knowledge and management skills of the academic coordinator are crucial to the outcome of the RTPC. Thirdly, good training and IT facilities help to contribute to a conducive learning environment. Fourthly, suitable accommodation such as service apartments and the provision of daily transport to and from the training venue will maximise the convenience and welfare of the participants. Fifthly, it is paramount that participants have a high level of English competency to follow the presentations and interact with the trainers and fellow participants.

#### **VIII. Conclusion (applicability to other programs)**

22 The four RTPCs conducted in Singapore have trained up a pool of officials with the skills and knowledge on WTO-related matters. These officials are now equipped to be of greater service to their governments, particularly in areas like multilateral trade negotiations, improving institutional capacities and enhancing links with the WTO and their regional counterparts.

23 The success factors in running the RTPC programme in Singapore can be applied to the conduct of other similar programmes and in other locations.

