



Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries

**WTO WORK PROGRAMME FOR THE LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES (LDCS)
ADOPTED BY THE SUB-COMMITTEE ON LEAST-DEVELOPED COUNTRIES ON 28 JUNE 2013¹**

1. Paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration² instructs the Sub-Committee for Least-Developed Countries (hereafter the Sub-Committee) to report on an agreed Work Programme to the General Council at its first meeting in 2002.

2. The Doha Ministerial Declaration reaffirmed the commitments undertaken at the Third United Nations Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC-III) and agreed that the WTO should take account, in designing this Work Programme, the trade-related elements of the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action, consistent with the WTO's mandate. Accordingly, the Work Programme below was agreed to by the Sub-Committee on 12 February 2002.

3. In the spirit of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, the Work Programme should take into account the trade-related elements of the Istanbul Declaration and the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2011-2020, consistent with the WTO's mandate.

4. It is most important that the results of the Sub-Committee's work continue to reflect and promote the interests of the LDCs. Their broad and effective participation in the Sub-Committee's deliberations is particularly necessary in the design, update and accomplishment of the Work Programme. To allow for the maximum possible participation of Non-Resident LDC Members and Observers, particularly when items of direct concern to them – such as accession – are on the agenda, meetings of the Sub-Committee will, where possible, be scheduled to coincide with Geneva Week. In view of the limited capacity of LDC delegations, the Work Programme will focus on areas where it can add value, and shall avoid duplication with the Work Programmes of other WTO Bodies.

5. The Doha Ministerial Declaration explicitly recognized the particular needs, interests and concerns of LDCs in 21 different paragraphs.³ These references fall into two broad categories. They touch on broad, systemic issues and they form part of the negotiating mandate of particular WTO Bodies.

6. Taking into account the above commitments, the WTO Work Programme for LDCs shall focus on the following systemic issues:

- a. Market Access for LDCs;
- b. Trade-Related Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Initiatives for LDCs;
- c. Providing, as appropriate, support to agencies assisting with the diversification of LDCs' production and export base;

¹ This document is a revision of the Work Programme adopted by the Sub-Committee on LDCs on 12 February 2002, contained in document WT/COMTD/LDC/11.

² WT/MIN(01)/DEC/1, 20 November 2001. The Ministerial Declaration was adopted on 14 November 2001.

³ These are paragraphs 2, 3, 9, 15, 16, 21-22, 24-25, 26, 27, 28, 32-33, 36, 38-39, 42-43, 44 and 50.

- d. Mainstreaming, as appropriate, into the WTO's work the trade-related elements of the Istanbul Programme of Action adopted by the UN LDC-IV Conference, as relevant to the WTO's mandate;
- e. Participation of LDCs in the Multilateral Trading System;
- f. Accession of LDCs to the WTO; and
- g. Follow-up to WTO Ministerial Decisions/Declarations.

a. Market Access for LDCs

7. In paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, WTO Members committed themselves "to the objective of duty-free, quota-free market access for products originating from LDCs" and "to consider additional measures for progressive improvements in market access for LDCs".

8. The Work Programme shall therefore include:

- i. identification and examination of market access barriers, including tariff and non-tariff barriers for the entry of LDCs' products into markets of interest to them;
- ii. annual reviews in the Sub-Committee⁴, of market access improvements, of any market access measures undertaken by Members, and including the identification of reported market access barriers to LDCs' products in markets of interest to them. These reports will be on the basis of factual annual studies by the WTO Secretariat; and
- iii. examination of possible additional measures for progressive and predictable improvements in market access, in particular the elimination of tariff and non-tariff barriers to export products from LDCs and further improvement of preferential access schemes such as the GSP schemes.

9. Reports on this work will be submitted annually to the Committee on Trade and Development. These reports will be designed to highlight LDC concerns in the context of negotiations taking place in other bodies of the WTO, but in full recognition of the integrity of the mandates of those bodies.

b. Trade-Related Technical Assistance and Capacity-Building Initiatives for LDCs

10. WTO Members established a firm understanding on the important role of technical cooperation and capacity building in paragraph 2 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration. They undertook specific commitments on technical cooperation and capacity building in 11 operative paragraphs of the Declaration.⁵ In the 11 different operative paragraphs as well as in the *New Strategy for WTO Technical Cooperation: Technical Cooperation for Capacity Building, Growth and Integration*⁶, it is agreed that priority shall be accorded, in particular, to the LDCs. Paragraph 43 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration endorsed the Integrated Framework for Trade-Related Technical Assistance as a viable model for LDCs' trade development and urged development partners to significantly increase their contributions to the IF Trust Fund. Ministers also urged core IF agencies, in coordination with development partners, to explore IF enhancement, with the objective of addressing LDCs' supply-side constraints, and extending the IF to all LDCs. A review of the IF was undertaken by a Task Force in 2006, and based on the recommendations of the Task Force to enhance the IF, the Enhanced Integrated Framework (EIF) became operational in July 2009.

11. In accordance with this mandate, the Sub-Committee, shall monitor and make recommendations, as appropriate, on:

⁴ See paragraph 34 of WT/COMTD/LDC/M/25 for the reporting procedures of notifications of market access measures specifically in favour of LDCs.

⁵ Paragraphs 16, 21, 24, 26, 27, 33, 38-40, 42 and 43.

⁶ Endorsed by Ministers in paragraph 38 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration.

- i. the implementation of the EIF⁷;
- ii. trade-related technical assistance and capacity building for LDCs undertaken by Geneva-based organizations, other organizations and bilateral donors, to promote information flow and coordination, consistency of approach, and prioritising/sequencing in support of LDCs' development strategies. This will include support provided for the diversification of LDCs' production and export base; and
- iii. technical assistance support to LDCs, including in areas of agreed negotiations at Doha.

12. The results of the monitoring and review process by the Sub-Committee shall be reported each year, to the Committee on Trade and Development, and shall constitute an integral part of this Work Programme.

c. Providing, as appropriate, support to agencies assisting with the diversification of LDCs' production and export base

13. In paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, Ministers recognize that the integration of the LDCs into the multilateral trading system requires support for the diversification of their production and export base. Accordingly, the Sub-Committee shall consider proposals within the mandate of WTO for technical assistance and capacity-building programmes relevant to the diversification of their production and export base, and shall support the work of other Agencies in this regard.

d. Mainstreaming, as appropriate, into WTO's work the trade-related elements of the Istanbul Programme of Action adopted by the UN LDC-IV Conference, as relevant to the WTO's mandate

14. Paragraph 42 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration calls upon the WTO, in designing its Work Programme for LDCs, to take into account the trade-related elements of the Brussels Declaration and Programme of Action, consistent with the WTO's mandate. At the Eighth WTO Ministerial Conference, Ministers welcomed the Istanbul Programme of Action for the LDCs for the Decade 2011-2020. Paragraph 153 of the Istanbul Programme of Action calls on multilateral institutions to contribute to the implementation of the Programme of Action and to integrate it into their Work Programmes, as appropriate and in accordance with their respective mandates. The Sub-Committee shall accordingly consider possible means of implementing these elements and monitor, review and report annually to the Committee on Trade and Development.

e. Participation of LDCs in the Multilateral Trading System

15. In paragraph 3 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, WTO Ministers recognized the particular vulnerability and structural difficulties of LDCs in the global economy. They committed themselves to address "the marginalization of least-developed countries in international trade and to improve their effective participation in the multilateral trading system". Ministers also agreed at Doha that "the meaningful integration of LDCs into the trading system and the global economy will involve efforts by *all* WTO Members". In paragraph 47 of the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration, Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to effectively and meaningfully integrate LDCs into the multilateral trading system.

16. In accordance with this mandate to enhance the participation of the LDCs in the multilateral trading system and the global economy, the Sub-Committee shall:

annually review and consider recommendations, as appropriate, on the item entitled: *Enhancing the Participation of LDCs in the Multilateral Trading System and the Global Economy*. The basis for this review shall include:

- i. the negotiating agenda of the LDCs in the context of the Doha Ministerial Declarations and Decisions;

⁷ The governing bodies of the EIF are the EIF Board and the EIF Steering Committee.

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- ii. Initiatives in favour of Non-Residents;
 - iii. Information Technology support;
 - iv. implementation of the EIF;
 - v. participation of developing countries, especially LDCs, in international standard setting bodies; and
 - vi. LDCs' Trade Policy Reviews.

17. The results of the review process by the Sub-Committee shall be reported each year to the Committee on Trade and Development to ensure that the Committee can take full account of the conclusions reached in the Sub-Committee.

f. Accession of LDCs to the WTO

18. In paragraph 9 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, Ministers stated the importance they attached to concluding accession proceedings, particularly those of LDCs, "as quickly as possible". In paragraph 42, Ministers agreed to work to facilitate and accelerate accession negotiations with acceding LDCs and instructed the WTO Secretariat to reflect the priority attached by Members to LDCs' accessions in the WTO Secretariat-Wide Biennial Plans for Technical Assistance. Members underline the need for enhanced technical assistance and capacity building to help acceding LDCs to complete their accession process, implement their commitments and to integrate them into the multilateral trading system.

19. The importance of LDCs' accessions was recognized in the LDC-III as well as the LDC-IV Programmes of Action. The LDC Accession Guidelines adopted by the General Council in 2002 and 2012, contained in WT/L/508 and WT/L/508/Add.1, respectively, continue to provide a useful basis for LDCs' accessions. Progress on the issue of the accession of LDCs is important for the preservation of confidence in the WTO and in the multilateral trading system.

20. In the implementation of these Ministerial mandates:

- i. accession shall be an item on the agenda of the Sub-Committee, ideally to coincide with Geneva Week so as to benefit from the contributions of acceding LDCs which are not resident in Geneva;
- ii. the Chairpersons of LDCs' Accession Working Parties and the acceding LDCs shall be invited to brief the Sub-Committee on progress made by the Working Parties in fulfilment of the Ministerial mandate;
- iii. the Chairman of the Sub-Committee shall report to the General Council with concrete recommendations, as appropriate, and as agreed in the Sub-Committee, on the implementation of the commitment by Ministers to "facilitate and accelerate negotiations with acceding LDCs";
- iv. the WTO Secretariat shall prepare a report on the outcome of technical assistance activities in support of LDCs' accession, including the implementation of accession commitments by LDCs, which are to be accorded priority in the Biennial WTO Secretariat-Wide Plan for Technical Assistance. The Report shall be examined by the Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries; and
- v. in line with paragraph 15 of the 2012 LDC Accession Guidelines, the Director General's annual reports on the state of play of accessions to the WTO shall continue to give particular attention to LDC accessions.

g. Follow-up to WTO Ministerial Decisions/Declarations

21. In paragraph 3 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration, WTO Ministers recalled the commitments made to help LDCs secure beneficial and meaningful integration into the multilateral trading

system at the Ministerial meetings in Marrakesh, Singapore and Geneva, and by the international community at the Third UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC-III) in Brussels. Ministers expressed their determination that the WTO will play its part in building effectively on these commitments under the Work Programme being established.

22. In October 1997, the WTO organized the High-Level Meeting on Integrated Initiatives for LDCs.

23. The Sub-Committee shall:

- i. establish an item on its agenda entitled: "Follow-up to Ministerial Decisions/Declarations" where Members will be invited to report on measures taken in fulfilment of these Decisions and Declarations (High-Level Meeting; Brussels Conference; Istanbul Conference; WTO Ministerial Declarations and Decisions);
- ii. put all due emphasis on the priority areas for LDCs in WTO negotiations throughout its work; and
- iii. report on technical assistance in support of LDCs as outlined in paragraph 10 above.

24. All the above items shall be standing items on the agenda of the Sub-Committee on Least-Developed Countries.

25. The Work Programme shall be reviewed periodically with a view to keeping it up to date. In this regard, due account shall be taken of proposals from LDCs.
