

**Training Programme on
Strengthening Skills on Commercial
and Economic Diplomacy**

July 16-19, 2008, Jaipur, India

A Report of Participants' Feedback



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Introduction

CUTS International organised a training programme on “Strengthening Skills on Commercial and Economic Diplomacy” for Junior-level Civil Servants and Executives from July 16-19, 2008 at Jaipur. It was a sequel to the earlier training programmes organised during the year 2007-08 for Indian Government officials and business executives¹. In 2007, CUTS had organised three such programmes targeted towards government officials and representatives from business and international organisations handling international affairs and negotiations.

The Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India is supporting these training programmes, which seeks to fill the vacuum that exists in terms of an absence of institutional base on commercial and economic diplomacy. The said training programme was well attended by 21 officials from Department of Commerce, Government of India. These officials have been handling work related to trade, investment and negotiations on various bilateral, regional and multilateral issues in their respective territorial divisions.

The training programme brought experts/resource persons together to explore and deliberate various aspects of commercial and economic diplomacy. Over the period of four days the participants sharpened their skills on commercial and economic diplomacy through lectures, real life experiences of resource persons, simulation exercises, group discussions, etc. Based on the feedback received from the participants and resource persons, the programme was successful in terms of:

- quality of participation;
- resource persons;
- resource materials; and
- administrative and logistical arrangements.

Participants acknowledged that learnings they derived from the training programme proved to be extremely valuable. Approximately 95 percent of the participants expressed their desire to attend similar training programmes in the future.

“Administrative structure of the government still has the colonial work culture of confining junior officers to desk work. Due to this, opportunities to learn the nuances of commercial and trade-related activities and to develop professional skills are lost”.

Kishan S Rana (Former Indian Ambassador to Germany and Course Director)

“This training programme has proved beneficial in understanding WTO issues and the current impasse on agriculture, non-agriculture market access and services negotiations”.

N K Bhatia (Assistant Director, Department of Commerce)

“I have gained basic knowledge about the WTO and the various tools and techniques that one should keep in mind while participating in bilateral/multilateral deliberations”.

Vijay Kapoor, (Under Secretary, Department of Commerce)

“I am going back with informative and useful knowledge about the subject of commercial and economic diplomacy. This course has made me inquisitive and interested in knowing and understanding the issues related with the WTO and the position of India while negotiating these issues”.

Hemant Kumar (Section Officer, Department of Commerce)

¹ The details of this programme are available at www.cuts-citee.org/CDS/index.htm.

Objectives

The objectives were to:

- meet the imperative of having trained government officials at various levels who are involved in commercial and economic diplomacy;
- ensure coherence between India's domestic policy on trade and investment-related issues with international commitments; and
- enhance skills by developing/strengthening capacity for taking effective part in trade and investment negotiations and implementation aspects of related international agreements.

Scope

The programme covered the following areas related to commercial and economic diplomacy:

- Effective commercial and economic diplomacy: an analytical framework
- A practical approach to negotiations
- Effective communication in commercial and economic diplomacy and writing effective resolutions
- Multilateral trading system
- An overview of Indian agriculture sector
- An overview of Indian manufacturing sector
- WTO negotiations on agriculture
- WTO negotiations on non-agriculture market access (NAMA)
- An overview of Indian services sector
- WTO negotiations on services

Participants

Participants were from various territorial division of Department of Commerce, Government of India.

Resource Persons

Resource persons were comprised of eminent experts, practitioners and academicians in the field of commercial and economic diplomacy and related matters. They are:

- Kishan S Rana, Former Indian Ambassador to Germany and Course Director of CUTS Commercial Diplomacy programme
- B K Zutshi, Former Indian Ambassador to the GATT
- Ahmed F Ghoneim, Associate Professor, Faculty of Economics and Political Sciences, Cairo University, Egypt
- Ramesh Chand, Director and Principal Scientist, National Centre for Agriculture Economics and Policy Research, New Delhi
- R S Ratna, Professor, Centre for WTO Studies, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi
- Arpita Mukherjee, Senior Fellow, Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations, New Delhi
- Pranav Kumar, Policy Analyst, CUTS, Jaipur

Opening Session

In the inaugural session Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive Director, CUTS Centre for International Trade, Economics & Environment (CUTS CITEE) Jaipur warmly welcomed all the participants of the training programme. He pointed out that the purpose of the training programme is to impart basic knowledge and understanding on commercial and economic diplomacy. He further provided an overview of CUTS' progression as an organisation where activities range from grassroots to international level.

Kishan S Rana commended CUTS International for taking the initiative of organising training programmes on commercial and economic diplomacy for various levels of Indian government officials, namely: junior, middle and senior level. He lamented that the administrative structure of government still has the colonial work culture of confining junior officers to desk work. Due to this, opportunities to learn the nuances of commercial and trade-related activities and to develop professional skills are lost.

B K Zutshi shared his perceptions on international development *vis-à-vis* India's defensive approach towards international agreement until 1991-92. He informed that India introduced the economic reform process, which liberated the economy in a big way. These reforms have created a profound impact on all facets of the nation. Today, India has become an economic power to reckon with and plays a crucial role in the international arena along-with US, EU and Brazil. He argued that before entering into an agreement it is required to formulate policies and procedures at domestic as well as international level to carry forward these agreements. Thus, international trading system has generated the need for skilled officials at various levels in the government department to execute these agreements effectively and efficiently. Hence, capacity building programmes such as the one organised by CUTS have assumed great importance, he added.

At the close of the inaugural session participants were requested to express their expectations from the training programme. Their responses are summarised below:

- skills and art of negotiations;
- knowledge and understanding of diplomatic practices around the world;
- WTO issues and on-going negotiations on agriculture, NAMA and services;
- India's position in the WTO and strategy towards various issues;
- various tools and techniques of international trade;
- trade agreements such as bilateral, regional and multilateral; and
- preparations and the required homework before entering into negotiations.

Closing and Evaluation

In the closing session, Kishan S Rana hoped that this training programme would certainly prove beneficial in enriching participants' knowledge on issues related to economic and commercial diplomacy that would help professionals while trying to make use of it. However, B K Zutshi emphasised that India is aspiring to become world power and hence engaging in various international engagement, both multilaterally and bilaterally. Therefore, it will be imperative for a government official to develop skill and knowledge, which will help him in participating effectively during the negotiations.

Participants were of the opinion that the training programme provided them with better understanding and exposure on various aspects of commercial and economic diplomacy. They appreciated and acknowledged the rich experience and expertise of resource persons, quality of resource material and overall administration of the training programme. According to them the logistics arrangements were very good and they had a comfortable stay at the venue.

The training programme was successful in combining the knowledge and understanding of commercial and economic diplomacy along with the ongoing negotiations in WTO. Approximately 66 percent (i.e. 14 out of 21) of the participants expressed that the training programme could have been for at least a week or 10 days as the existing time frame was too less while approximately 33 percent (i.e. 7 out of 21) felt that the sessions were too lengthy and that it may have been designed for about 60-75 minutes with 5-10 minutes break.

Approximately 95% of the participants desired to attend the similar training programme in future, however, they suggested of including sessions on non-trade barriers, negotiating a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) agreement, regional and bilateral trade agreements, dispute settlement mechanism, drafting a joint declaration, etc. Participants expressed that organisers could also consider engaging some current negotiator as guest faculty during the future training programmes. This would help them to understand the intricacies (i.e. do's and don'ts) involved in the current/recently concluded negotiations.

Participants provided a few recommendations, which are summarised below:

- It would have been an added advantage if the training programme covered some more issues related to WTO such as, Trade Related Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), Kyoto protocol, foreign trade policy, trade promotion, dispute settlement in the WTO, antidumping, non-trade barriers (NTBs), trade defence mechanism, trade facilitation measures, etc.
- Participants expressed that there could have been a session focusing on the tools and techniques of negotiating a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) agreement for a country. It could have also discussed the role and responsibility of officials posted in Indian Missions abroad, particularly WTO mission in Geneva.
- A few participants expressed the desire to include a session on 'drafting a joint declaration' between two countries and few others suggested that there could have been a session on the economic success of China and Singapore, including an insight of the measures and reforms they have undertaken.
- Participants expressed that organisers/resource persons could also design a small toolkit, explaining the basic terminology of commercial and economic diplomacy. This will be helpful and beneficial for a layman who had never dealt with the various tools and techniques of commercial and economic diplomacy.
- A separate session on trade agreements (bilateral and regional) could have been included wherein one would have learnt how North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), South Asia Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), Indo-Sri Lanka Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) have been negotiated or concluded.
- A few participants expressed that a Joint Secretary/Additional Secretary from Department of Commerce handling WTO issues could have been invited as a guest faculty. A serving resource person might have elaborated on ground realities of current negotiations in a much better way.

- A few participants expressed their desire to attend a refresher or advance course after one year. The refresher course may be designed for short duration (i.e. 2-3 days) and focuses on a few issues namely, services, agriculture, NAMA, negotiation skills, etc.

Conclusions

To conclude, following are some of the highlights of the training programme:

- Participants opined unanimously that the sessions were very interesting and enriching. They acknowledged that resource persons were experts in their subject, having wide experience, and who taught such a technical subject with ease and related it to day-to-day life experiences. Resource persons successfully connected theoretical aspects with practical experiences, and hence, such an exercise made the training programme a great learning experience for the participants.
- Participants were of the view that the organisers managed the training programme efficiently. A few of them were of the view that it was outstanding and beyond their expectations.
- Approximately 95 percent of the participants wanted to attend similar training programmes in future. However, a few of them were of the view that it would be better if topics pertaining to their area of work are incorporated – in other words, there is scope for offering customised training.
- Participants found the resource material very informative and useful in terms of imparting knowledge on various aspects of commercial and economic diplomacy and ongoing negotiations in WTO.

The training programme proved to be extremely valuable and successful in all aspects (i.e. resource persons, resource material, administration and logistics, etc). However, to improve the future training programmes, participants' suggestions were invited which are summarised as below:

- It was observed by the participants that there was no participation from the Ministry of Finance, Agriculture, External Affairs, Chambers of Commerce, NGOs, academia and the corporate sector. It was felt important to invite participation from such a diverse group in order to bring varied ideas on the issues related with commercial and economic diplomacy.
- Participants expressed that the involvement of some current negotiators from government could have been an added value to the training programme.
- Participants felt that more case studies and mock negotiations would have been an added advantage.
- Some of the participants felt that the schedule was too tight. According to them, there could have been some flexibility during the training programme so that it would have given them an opportunity for local sight seeing.

Summary of Participants' Feedback

The feedback form was designed with two types of questions: open-ended and close-ended. The analysis of open-ended questions has been described in the first part of feedback analysis report (as recommendations, highlights and suggestions), while the analysis for close-ended questions are given below. Responses on specific aspects of this training programme are analysed by deriving an average mean. The model is described below by taking the example of responses received on “quality of presentation”. In the feedback form we asked participants to rate each of the sessions on a scale of 1-10, where 9/10 represents Excellent and 1 represents Bad.

Table 1: Average Mean Value of the Participants' Response

Data Value	Frequency (Responses received from participants on the scale of 1-10)	Frequency X Data Value
1 (<i>Bad</i>)	None	0
2 (<i>Poor</i>)	None	0
3 (<i>Poor</i>)	None	0
4 (<i>All right</i>)	None	0
5 (<i>Good</i>)	None	0
6 (<i>Good</i>)	1	6
7 (<i>V Good</i>)	5	35
8 (<i>V Good</i>)	6	48
9 (<i>Excellent</i>)	1	9
10 (<i>Excellent</i>)	8	80
Sum	21	178
Mean	178/21 = 8.4	

Figure 1 represents the average score (mean) on “overall management” of this training programme.

Figure 1: Overall Management of the Training Programme

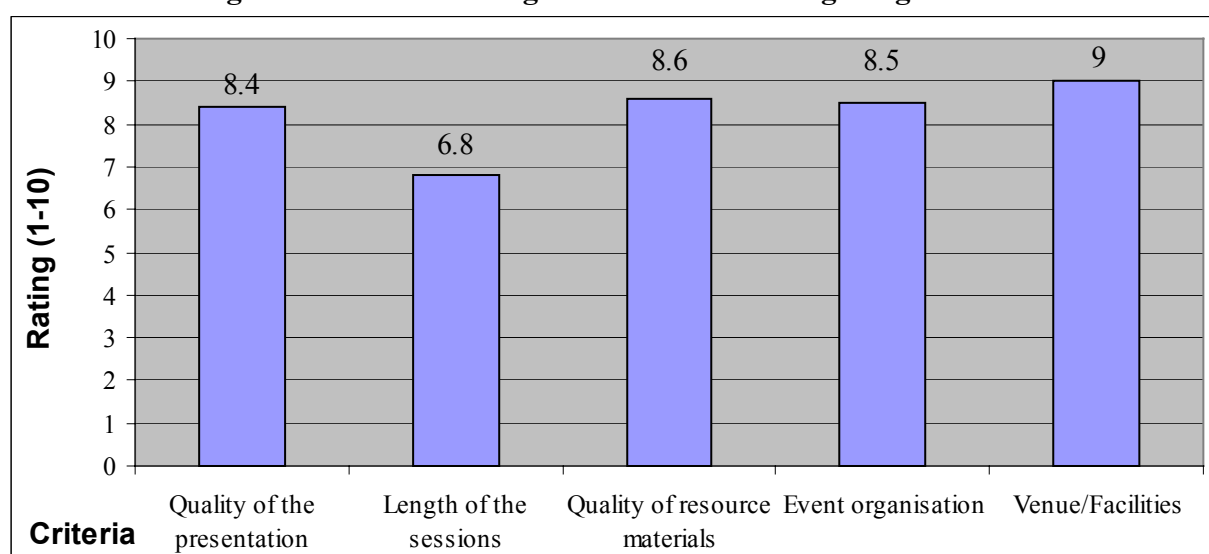


Figure 2 represents average score on different sessions.

Figure 2: Average Score of Different Sessions

