

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

January 19-21, 2009, Jaipur, India

A Report on Feedback from Participants



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Introduction

CUTS organised a training programme on “Strengthening Skills on Commercial and Economic Diplomacy” for senior level government officials from January 19-21, 2009 at Jaipur. The training programme was a sequel to the earlier training programme organised on August 18-21, 2008 at Jaipur for middle level civil servants and executives. In 2007, CUTS had organised three such programmes for junior, middle and senior level 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 seek to address the existing vacuum in institutional bases on Commercial and Economic Diplomacy. The programme was attended by 8 officials working in Department of Commerce, Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) and Department of Science and Technology in the Government of India. These officials have been handling work related to promotion of trade and investment and various bilateral, regional and multilateral negotiations

The training programme brought experts/resource persons together to explore and deliberate various aspects of commercial and economic diplomacy. During the programme the participants sharpened their skills on commercial and economic diplomacy through lectures, real life experiences of resource persons, simulation exercises, group discussions, etc. Participants acknowledged that the learning they derived from the training programme was extremely valuable. 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.

Some Comments on the Training Programme

“The basic framework, the basic approach to be adopted, the preparatory work including stakeholders concerns and action points etc. have become clearer and hence would add to my skills to use the same when I get on opportunity to actually negotiate”.

Nirmal Singh (Economic Adviser, Department of Commerce)

“Expectations have been met to a very large extent. Subjects covered were quite extensive and comprehensive”.

Anil Mukim (Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce)

“The experience sharing by those who have conducted trade negotiations and have practiced commercial diplomacy helped in improving my understanding of this subject”.

Dinesh Sharma (Joint Secretary Department of Commerce)

“If I had this experience, I could have negotiated differently. Negotiations require a balance between experience and technical skills. Exposure to programme like this is important for our future negotiators”.

S N Menon (Former Secretary, Department of Commerce)

Objectives

The objectives of the training programme were to:

- to meet the imperative of having trained government officials at various levels who are involved in commercial and economic diplomacy;
- to ensure coherence between India's domestic policy on trade and investment related issues with international commitments; and
- to 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:

- International Diplomatic Environment
- A practical approach to negotiations
- Trade Promotion Activities: A Field Perspective
- India and the Multilateral Trading System – From Uruguay Round to Doha Round
- Simulation Exercise on Trade Negotiations

Participants

Participants were from various territorial divisions of Department of Commerce, Ministry of Science and Technology, DGFT, 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 included:

- Kishan S Rana, Former Indian Ambassador to Germany and Course Director, CUTS Commercial Diplomacy Programme
- B K Zutshi, Former Indian Ambassador to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)
- Geza Feketekuty, President The International Commercial Diplomacy Project, US

Opening Session

In the inaugural session, Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS warmly welcomed all the participants and introduced the resource persons. He provided an overview of CUTS International, including its evolution to an organisation where activities range from the grassroots to the international level.

Kishan S Rana extended a warm welcome to the participants and presented a brief on the various resource persons. He mentioned that this was the sixth training programme in the ongoing three year cycle of three courses per year for junior, middle and senior levels and also the last one for the year 2008-09. He added that this is the first time that the Commerce Ministry has initiated this type of capacity building training programme on Commercial Diplomacy. He went on to say that each programme had been a great learning experience and emphasised the need for training and assessment of government officials engaged in Commercial and Economic Diplomacy. He referred to the demonstrated expertise of the

public sector in the UK and commended their mock training programmes (similar to this programme) by citing the example of Wilton Park in UK, which conducts approximately 50 conferences every year. Lastly, he highlighted the challenges faced in multi-disciplinary external work through Commercial Diplomacy, which is a specialised tool for developing external connections.

B K Zutshi, while sharing his perceptions on international development *vis-à-vis* India's position in the world, pointed out that commercial work and trade negotiations take place in the domestic context of the bilateral and multilateral trading and investment environment. In the case of the multilateral system, trade negotiations are often dominated by major trading blocks and entities such as US and EU. He narrated experiences associated with Indian negotiations, which initially dealt only with the textile sector. He mentioned that the Indian negotiators would have done their job much better had they been given an opportunity of the kind provided by this programme. He stressed the importance of the art and science of diplomacy and negotiation and added that "greater togetherness of different agencies is required to further India's interests". According to him the training programme would provide a flavour of Commercial and Economic Diplomacy, which would be useful for the government officials in their day-to-day work.

Pradeep S Mehta articulated that civil servants are usually engaged in negotiations at every possible level whether it is international trade agreements or international environmental agreement or international science and technology agreement. He mentioned that the Department of Science and Technology had also requested CUTS to organise similar training programmes in the field of scientific diplomacy. The ongoing programme, he mentioned, also involved the running of debriefing sessions at the Department of Commerce which provide good insight into the effectiveness of programmes and enable the taking on board of the various responses of officers who had undergone this training. These facets of the programme help to carry out course corrections wherever necessary and add to the value of the programme.

Expectations of the Participants

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

- knowledge on the skills and art of negotiation techniques, tools and finer negotiation skills;
- understanding of the concept of commercial and economic diplomacy;
- knowledge on the role of economic and commercial diplomats, more specifically in the current difficult global economic environment;
- inputs from experts for diplomatic practices around the world;
- understanding of underlying historical perspectives, current scenario as well as prospects of ongoing trade bilateral and multilateral agreements and diplomacy involved therein;
- understanding of preparatory processes and essentials of homework in the pre-negotiation stage;
- understanding of the role of civil servants working in an economic ministry in diverse areas such as trade policy formulation, trade negotiations and trade promotion.

Closing and Evaluation

In the closing session, Pradeep S Mehta expressed his sincere gratitude and mentioned that the participants had found this workshop enlightening and educative. He opined that the training programme would prove to be beneficial to all the participants. He pointed out that regular debriefing sessions are held after each training programme so as to facilitate modifications, if required in future training programme. He also informed the participants that CUTS recently celebrated its 25th anniversary with an event titled ‘Global Partnership for Development where Pascal Lamy, Director General, WTO; Supachai Panitchpakdi, Director General, UNCTAD and; Kamal Nath, Commerce Minister of India, were present. The conference was on the progress in the attainment of Millennium Development Goal-8.

Geza Feketekuty suggested that these programmes should have multiplier effects in the sense that transfer of skills could add value to investment made by the Commerce Ministry

B K Zutshi mentioned that it had been challenging to formulate course structures for each of the training programmes and the feedback forms in this context had proved to be very useful, thereby underlining the importance of candid feedback on the programme.

Pradeep Kumar Chaudhery, Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce, Government of India, expressed gratitude on behalf of all participants and said that the training programme was extremely well organised and useful and that participants had benefited tremendously not only on the academic front but also from the rich experience of the faculty.

“It was highly interactive and practical to what we seek to do for greater finish and for better results in negotiations”, he said. He also expressed his gratitude to CUTS for organising the programme so well. In addition, the participants 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 logistical arrangements were very good and they had a comfortable stay at the venue.

Approximately 75 percent of the participants expressed their desire to attend similar training programmes in the future. However, they were of the view that topics could be covered in more detail and with a narrower but more intense focus. They also felt that the training programme could have been for at least a week as the existing time frame was too small. Some also felt that the existing time frame was adequate only if some customised topics were taught /discussed.

Participants provided a few recommendations, which are summarised below:

- More case studies and simulation exercises could be circulated before the training programme, for participants to go through beforehand.
- Invitations could be sent to more specialised resource persons from outside the government (working or retired), say for example, from banking, financial, trade and industry sectors.
- It should cover officials from other departments like the Planning Commission, Ministry of Finance, and Ministry of Agriculture etc.
- Practical exercises could be introduced if length of the programme was increased.
- Persons currently working in this field should also be used as resource person. The resource persons should include practising as well as retired commercial diplomats and expert academicians.

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 felt that resource persons had successfully connected theoretical aspects with practical experiences, and the training programme was a great learning experience.
- They felt that the organisers had managed the training programme efficiently; it was well structured and the arrangements were good.
- They found that persons involved adequately represented the matrix of relevant people. Being a small group, interaction & discussion were intense and informative.
- The discussions among participants during simulation exercises and case studies were very fruitful and cohesive. It had encouraged the participants to generate new ideas and develop skills in the field of commercial and economic diplomacy.
- Participants found the resource material very informative and useful in terms of knowledge transfer relating to various aspects of Commercial and Economic Diplomacy.

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 future training programmes, the suggestions of participants were invited and are summarised below:

- Officials from Ministry of Agriculture, Department of Revenue, Department of Economic Affairs, Ministry of External Affairs etc., who were reasonably related to the subject area, could participate in the future.
- Preparatory training material may be provided in advance. More interactive sessions could be held, especially in advanced courses.
- Indian and foreign officials who had been associated with negotiations in the recent past, as well as scholars from research organisations/bodies should be engaged as resource persons. Besides, resource persons from trade and industry may prove useful.
- Resource persons could have covered more topics like *Cost and Benefit Analysis of Trade Negotiation*, which were analytical tools for aiding negotiations. Some topics suggested were: tools for analysing benefits of trade in the context of bilateral trade, simulation models for arriving at estimates of the benefits of trade at different levels of commitment, and analysis of costs of trade negotiations.
- It may be worthwhile to invite industry representatives and NGOs, political groups to provide divergent views. Topics such as Foreign Trade Policy, Trade and Tariff (Direct Indirect Taxes), Trade Logistics, Trade Infrastructure need to be included.
- The training programme can cover topics like international experiences from competing countries. Evaluation of country positions in negotiation, trade benefit analysis, sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) measures, technical barriers to trade (TBT), standards issues, and non-tariff barriers (NTBs) are possible topics.
- We need to train scientists and technologists to understand the nitty gritty of negotiation in the international environment and for that certain modifications in the content may be included.
- The training programme could add case studies of successful play in commercial diplomacy, including more material on current negotiations. Unwritten rules of commercial negotiations (what is done, not done, can be done), more on economics and the economic environment (which makes commercial or economic diplomacy desirable or undesirable) can also be included.

- Participation from other functional ministries/departments should be encouraged, such as, Department of Customs and Excise, Agriculture, Chambers of Commerce, Industrial Associations, Academia, etc. It was felt that it was important to invite participation from a diverse group in order to generate varied ideas on issues related to Commercial and Economic Diplomacy at one platform.
- The training programmes could also invite participation from private sector since they are involved in cross border investment, mergers and acquisitions. Participation from the private sector would help government officials understand the barriers/hurdles faced by Indian firms in the foreign market.
- The organisers must consider increasing the number of participants to 20-25, which may include other functional ministries/departments.
- The training programme could have been of a longer duration, say 4 -5 days, so that more topics could have been covered.
- There is a need for computers with Internet facilities, and also some arrangement for sight seeing/cultural participation.

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 the feedback analysis report (as recommendations, highlights and suggestions), while the analysis for close-ended questions are given in Table 1. Responses on specific aspects of this training programme are analysed by deriving an average mean. The model is described 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>)	1	5
6 (<i>Good</i>)	None	0
7 (<i>V Good</i>)	2	14
8 (<i>V Good</i>)	2	16
9 (<i>Excellent</i>)	3	27
10 (<i>Excellent</i>)	None	0
Sum	8	62
Mean	$62/8 = 7.75$	

Figure 1 provides average scores (means) for indices capturing the “overall management” of this training programme.

Figure 1: Overall Management of the Training Programme

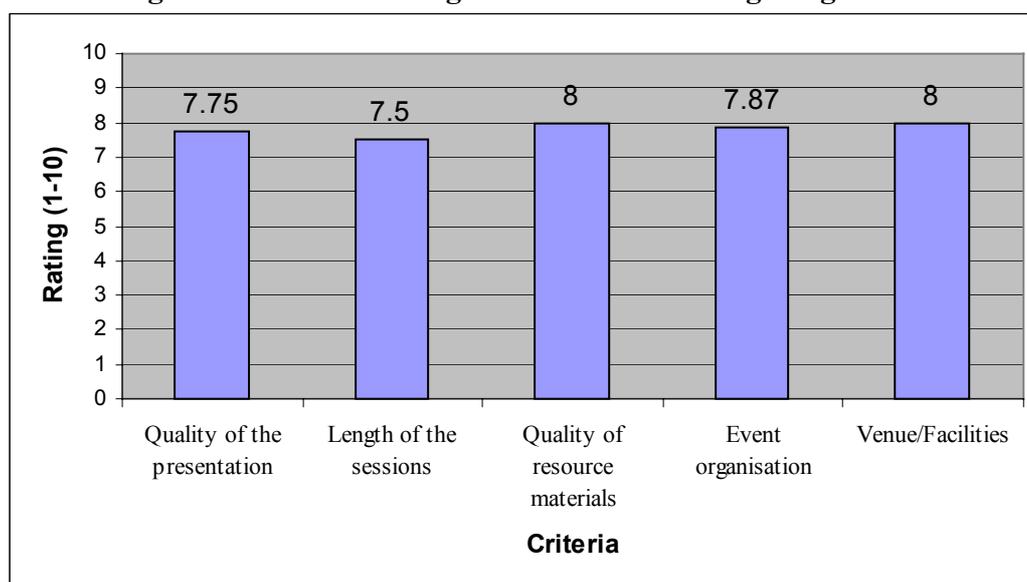


Figure 2 presents average scores for different sessions.

Figure 2: Average Score of Different Sessions

