

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

August 18-21, 2008, Jaipur, India

A Report of the Participants' Feedback



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Introduction

CUTS International organised a training programme on “Strengthening Skills on Commercial and Economic Diplomacy” for middle-level civil servants and business executives from August 18-21, 2008 at Jaipur. It was a sequel to the one organised from July 16-19, 2008 at Jaipur for junior-level civil servants and executives. 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 this programme, which seeks to fill the vacuum that exists in terms of an absence of institutional base on commercial and economic diplomacy.

Over a period of four days the participants sharpened their skills 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.

Some Comments on the Programme

“Need based training programme on commercial and economic diplomacy should be replicated in different parts of India as a part of an evolving plan for India’s integration with the global economy.”

S K Singh (Hon’ble Governor of Rajasthan)

“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 Commerce Secretary of India)

“Compared to many other programmes I think this one had a very good combination of faculty and participations. The important issue is how to improve what we are doing versus what could be done differently.”

Raymond Saner (Director, Diplomacy Dialogue, Geneva)

“I discovered new areas of learning through these sessions and knowledge never goes waste. A broad review of India’s current international relations with various countries would be relevant for similar initiatives in future.”

R K Mitra (Director, Department of Commerce)

“Now I understand how difficult it is for negotiators, as they have to carry forward the interest of all stakeholders, who are often having different aspirations.”

Satyan Sharda (Joint Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Directorate General of Foreign Trade)

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:

- India in the Global Economy in 2020 – Opportunities and Challenges
- Trade Promotion Activities: A Field Perspective
- A Practical Approach to Negotiations
- India and the Multilateral Trading System – From Uruguay Round to Doha Round
- Simulation Exercise on Investment Negotiations
- Simulation Exercise on Trade Negotiations

Participants

Participants were from various territorial divisions of Department of Commerce, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Environment and Forests, Directorate General of Foreign Trade, Government of India and Confederation of Indian Industry (CII).

They are handling work related to promotion of trade and investment, and negotiations on various bilateral, regional and multilateral issues.

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
- S N Menon, Former Commerce Secretary of India
- Raymond Saner, Director, Diplomacy Dialogue, Geneva
- Siddhartha Mitra, Director (Research), CUTS

Inaugural Session

Bipul Chatterjee, Deputy Executive Director of CUTS welcomed the participants and presented a brief background of the organisation, including its progression and activities, which range from grassroots to international level.

Kishan S Rana acquainted them with the resource persons. He emphasised the practice of commercial and economic diplomacy and mention why training and assessment is important for government officials and business executives.

B K Zutshi, Former Indian Ambassador to GATT shared his perceptions on international development *vis-à-vis* India's position in the world. He mentioned that earlier India was not considered as a great competitor but time has changed. He expressed the importance of the art and science of diplomacy and negotiations and added that "greater togetherness of different agencies is required to further India's interests". He said that this programme will provide different flavours of commercial and economic diplomacy which will be useful for the government officials in their day-to-day work.

Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General CUTS International, mentioned the basic idea behind the inception of this programme. He informed that CUTS ventured into the field of international trade in the year 1991 when the Uruguay Round negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was at its peak, with a realisation that there is hardly any non-governmental organisation working on such important issues. CUTS has done intensive work in the field of international trade. Later, CUTS realised that developing world lacks understanding and scientific knowledge on commercial and economic diplomacy, particularly in the area of negotiations. It is very important to get exposed to various tools, techniques and approaches of negotiations and how to achieve best results for the country. He expressed that this programme is a part of a broader educational exercise that CUTS has undertaken in order to increase economic literacy in India.

S K Singh, Hon'ble Governor of Rajasthan commended CUTS and Department of Commerce for organising such programmes. He emphasised on the need based training programmes on commercial and economic diplomacy that should be replicated in different parts of India as a part of an evolving plan for India's integration with the global economy. He mentioned that many personnel handling trade policy matters and negotiations tend not to have the requisite skills to the extent needed. Such dealings require understanding of other partners, seeing the future beyond figures and numbers as well as a good understanding of human psychology. He suggested for the establishment of an institute like the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) for the benefit of emerging Asian countries.

Participants were requested to express their expectations from this programme. Their responses are summarised below:

- art and skills of negotiations;
- coalition building and economic diplomacy as such;
- diplomatic practices around the world;
- techniques, tools and finer negotiation skills;
- bilateral and multilateral agreements and diplomacy involved therein; and
- preparatory process and essentials of requisite homework before entering into negotiations.

Closing and Evaluation

In the Closing Session, Kishan S Rana explained the theory of knowledge, which is to be considered at three different levels, namely level 1 (birth of an idea), level 2 (development of skills) and level 3 (internalisation of knowledge and skills). He mentioned that this programme was about learning to internalise ideas and knowledge through the development of specific skills on negotiations. While evaluating the programme he expressed that the most difficult part of this process is internalisation of knowledge and skills and it can be termed as success, as the participants have reached the third level of the knowledge.

B K Zutshi mentioned that in today's hurly burly world of work one tends to bypass/forget the reasoning behind a particular task. He mentioned that in day-to-day work one does things without much thought on why s/he is doing them. Thus, a conceptual basis for action is most important and this programme is stimulating and will certainly benefit the participants in their future work.

Raymond Saner applauded the role of the participants and said that compared to many other programmes, this one had a very good combination of faculty and participants. He expressed that it was an enriching experience to have a better understanding of the Indian perspectives on commercial and economic diplomacy, and underlined that one of the important issues in negotiations is how to improve what we are doing versus what could be done differently. He further suggested of considering a simulation exercise, which is close to actual trade negotiations. Though it might take more time but will allow people to have the feel of stress by working overnight, he added.

S N Menon said that if he had an opportunity to undergo such programmes he would have negotiated differently and probably in a better manner. He mentioned that negotiation requires a balance between experience and technical skills. Exposure to programmes like this will be important for our future negotiators. He acknowledged that the civil society's involvement in the process of trade negotiations has helped India a lot in formulating and taking forward its negotiating positions during the Doha Round. It is a must and therefore, the Government should also engage more with the Indian civil society organisations to reach out to diverse stakeholders, particularly labour unions, consumer groups and environmental organisations in other countries.

Bipul Chatterjee, on behalf of CUTS, expressed his gratitude towards the Department of Commerce for its support in conducting such a useful programme. He informed the participants and resource persons that a comprehensive assessment of these programmes by an external agency will be done to evaluate their success and more importantly, to have a better design and execution of future activities in this regard. Moreover, as a part of this programme, a book will be published, which will elucidate the experience of a set of eminent Indian diplomats and other experts on trade negotiations, trade and investment promotions, etc.

Participants were of the opinion that this programme provided them with better understanding and has helped in discovering new areas of learning. They appreciated and acknowledged the rich experience and expertise of resource persons, quality of resource materials and overall administration of the programme. According to them, the logistics arrangements were very good.

One of the participants said that it was quite unique and novel to get such a training organised by a civil society organisation; this has helped in providing a much broader exposure to and perspective on various issues. Approximately 31 percent (5 out of 16) of the participants expressed that this programme could have been for at least a week, while approximately 6 percent (1 out of 16) felt that it could have been done in three days with some customised topics.

Approximately 75 percent of the participants desired to attend similar programmes in future. A few of them were of the view that it would be better if specific subjects pertaining to their areas of work are included – in other words, there is scope for offering customised and intensive training on specific issues related to various WTO agreements. Few participants observed that the design of this programme was a kind of experience sharing. For future programmes CUTS may consider drawing a line whether it is intended as “experience sharing” or by way of providing inputs from professional experts or a mixture of both with a right kind of balance.

Participants made a few recommendations, which are summarised below:

- It would have been good if this programme covers various social and environmental problems and issues related to international trade; this is because as tariffs are reducing, non-tariff barriers becoming important policy variables determining international trade.
- It would have been more cohesive if the relevant work and topics of other functional ministries/departments are included in the agenda.
- There could be a more intensive programme on specific issues relating to various agreements of the WTO, including the art and science of coalition building in the WTO.
- There should be a session on the role, participation and functioning of civil society organisations in the process of trade negotiations.
- Participants expressed the desire of including more case studies and simulation exercises; the same could be circulated before a programme.
- Participants recommended for engaging some academics economics, international trade and international relations; this would help them to have a more holistic understanding on commercial and economic diplomacy

Conclusion

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

- Participants opined unanimously that the sessions were very interesting and enriching. Resource persons successfully connected theoretical aspects with practical experiences, and hence, such an exercise made the programme a great learning experience.
- All were of the view that the organisers managed the programme efficiently. A few of them said that it was outstanding and beyond their expectations.
- The simulation exercises on trade and investment negotiations proved to be quite beneficial. This has helped them in understanding how to consider perceptions and demands of various stakeholders while negotiating a multilateral and/or bilateral/regional agreement.

- Discussions among the participants during simulation exercises and case studies were very fruitful and cohesive. It has encouraged the participants in generating new ideas and skills in the field of commercial and economic diplomacy. Moreover, interaction within the groups facilitated a better understanding of the work areas among various territorial divisions of ministries, departments and business associations.
- Participants found the resource materials very informative and useful in terms of getting knowledge on diverse aspects of commercial and economic diplomacy.

Summary of the 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 this section (as recommendations, highlights and suggestions), while the analysis for close-ended questions are given below. Responses on specific aspects of this programme are analysed by deriving an average mean. The model is described below by taking the example of responses received on “quality of the presentations”. In the feedback form, participants were asked to rate each session on a scale of 1-10, where 9/10 represents Excellent and 1 represents Bad.

Table 1: Average Mean Value of “Quality of the Presentations”

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>)	4	24
7 (<i>V Good</i>)	1	7
8 (<i>V Good</i>)	6	48
9 (<i>Excellent</i>)	2	18
10 (<i>Excellent</i>)	3	30
Sum	16	127
Mean	127/16 = 7.9	

Figure 1 represents average score of different sessions.

Figure 1: Average Score of Different Sessions

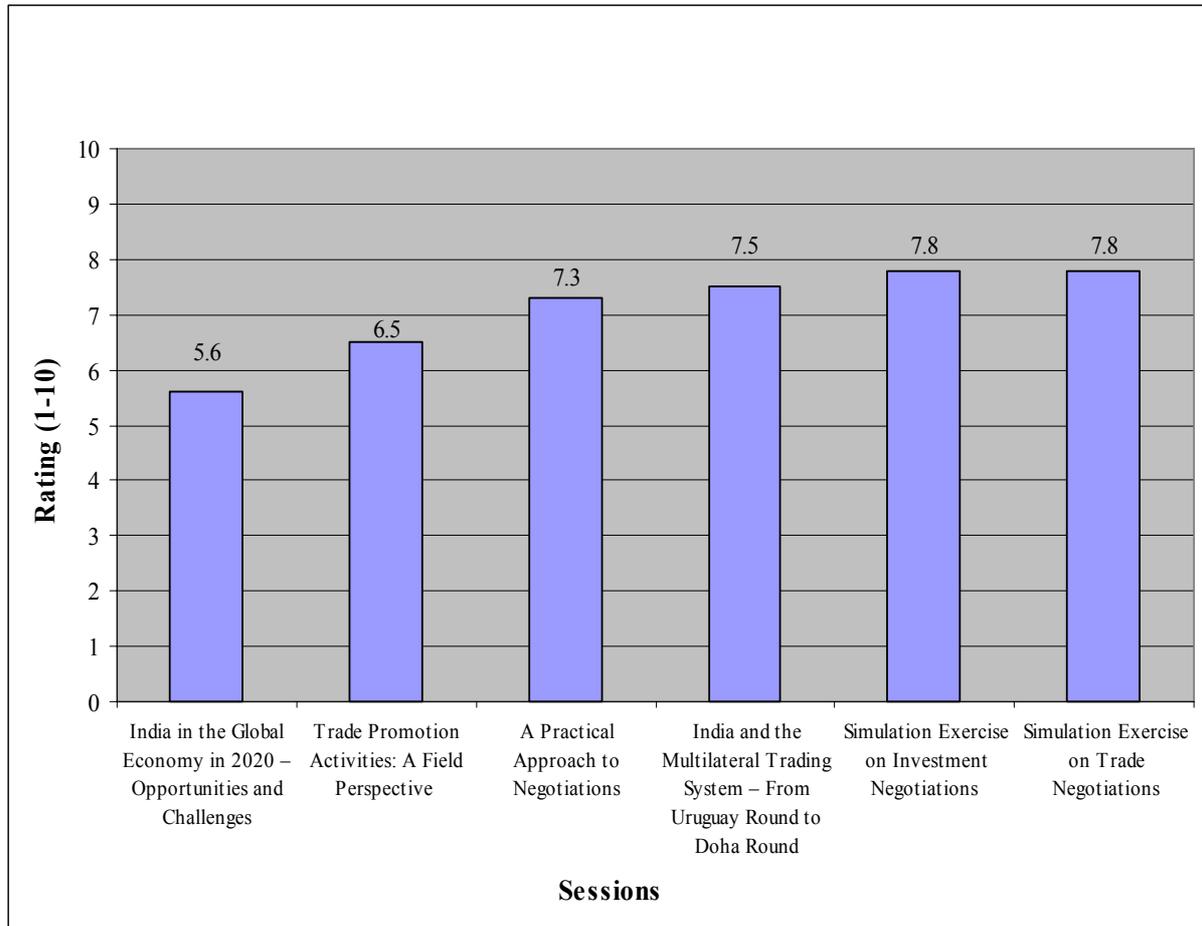


Figure 2 represents the average score (mean) on “overall management” of this programme.

Figure 2: Overall Management of the Programme

