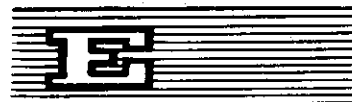




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Second African Regional Seminar on the
Multilateral Trade Negotiations

Addis Ababa, 12 - 16 December 1977

REPORT OF THE SECOND ECA/UNCTAD AFRICAN REGIONAL SEMINAR ON THE
MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS

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LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

A. INTRODUCTION

1. This Second African Regional Seminar on the Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN), jointly organized by the Economic Commission for Africa and the UNCTAD MTN Project, was held in Addis Ababa from 12 to 16 December 1977. The purpose of the Seminar was to review current issues in MTN and their implications for African countries, to discuss subjects of special interest to African countries, and to assist African developing countries to harmonize their policies and strategies with regard to the negotiations.
2. In the discussions, emphasis was placed on the objectives of MTN as laid down in the Tokyo Declaration of 1973 and the possibility of attaining those objectives from the standpoint of developing countries, particularly African countries. It was noted that, as the negotiations were about to enter their final, crucial phase, the Seminar was particularly timely, and that its conclusions would be highly useful to Governments in formulating their **standson** the various aspects of the negotiations. It was understood, however, that no governmental commitments were involved, even though the discussions did lead to certain conclusions, which are reproduced for reference purposes in Section H below.
3. The Seminar was attended by officials of 28 countries. Their names, as well as those of international officials and experts contributing to the discussions, are listed in annex I. The Seminar elected Mr. Georges Mboma (Congo) as its Chairman, Mr. Thami Ariah (Morocco) as Vice-Chairman and Mr. Abdool Sattar Aboobakar (Mauritius) as Vice-Chairman-cum-Rapporteur.
4. The Seminar was opened by Mr. Abebe Worku, Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Commerce and Tourism of Ethiopia. In his opening statement, he welcomed the participants and expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the international organizations concerned in organizing the seminar. He outlined the purpose of the Seminar as well as the aims that should be borne in mind by African countries in their participation in MTN, calling attention to the objectives laid down in Tokyo and the sluggish progress made so far in their attainment. He also referred to the unhealthy situation in world trade and economic relations manifested in the existence of a small group of creditor countries and a vast number of impoverished debtor nations. The third world countries should indefatigably fight to put an end to that iniquitous state of affairs, which was not in the interest of any group of countries. Developing countries should seek to obtain additional trade benefits and to improve the preferential treatment received in MTN, apart from making parallel efforts in other fields, such as the monetary field.

5. The Acting Chief of the ECA International Trade and Finance Division welcomed the participants on behalf of the Executive Secretary, who was away on official mission, and commented on the timeliness of the Seminar, which was being held almost on the eve of the opening of the final phase of MTN. It would offer an opportunity to take stock of the situation in the various sectors of the negotiations and to exchange views on the strategy to be adopted by African countries on the various issues of interest to them during that decisive stage. Among other things, special attention should be given to such subjects as the principle of non-reciprocity, special and differentiated treatment for developing countries, the special requirements of the least developed countries, the interrelationship between market access problems and those relating to commodity price stabilization, and the reform of the legal framework for international trade. He concluded by urging African countries to formulate and follow a common strategy during the forthcoming stage of the negotiations.

6. The Seminar was intended to concentrate on those subjects which were considered to be of immediate interest to African Governments and of direct relevance to the forthcoming phase of the negotiations, even though, as a matter of background, all aspects of MTN had to be reviewed, albeit cursorily and briefly. For the purpose of orderly discussion, the Seminar adopted the following programme:

1. Opening and briefing
2. Background to and general review of the multilateral trade negotiations
3. Assessment of progress made in the negotiations with respect to non-tariff measures, tropical products, tariffs, etc.
4. Special preferences accorded by the European Economic Community to African countries and implications of the negotiations in this regard
5. Relationships between the multilateral trade negotiations and international commodity policy, and implications for African countries
6. Special and differentiated treatment for least developed, land-locked and developing island countries in the negotiations; status of negotiations and implications for African countries
7. Reform of the legal framework for the conduct of world trade: issues and status of negotiations, and interests of African countries in this regard
8. African approach to and arrangements for participation in the negotiations.

B. BACKGROUND TO, REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF MTN

7. Substantive discussion began with a general review of the current state of the negotiations, followed by an assessment of the achievements made so far from the point of view of developing countries in general and African countries in particular. The subject was introduced by one of the consultants, who briefly outlined the post-war institutional set-up governing international trade relations and the successive tariff or trade negotiations which had taken place within that framework. Following the limited success of the Kennedy Round of trade negotiations concluded in mid-1967, proposals had been made for the holding of the present round which, after years of preparation, had been inaugurated with the adoption of the Tokyo Declaration in September 1973. At the instigation and insistence of developing countries, the Tokyo Declaration contained fairly adequate provisions aimed at securing trade benefits for developing countries. By general consensus, attainment of the various objectives, and implementation of the various principles, laid down in the Declaration would go a long way towards resolving the market access problems faced by developing countries; the basic aim of the negotiations, as stated in the Declaration, was to secure additional trade benefits for such countries, a substantial increase in their foreign exchange earnings and the diversification of their exports. Progress in the negotiations, however, had been extremely slow and no concrete achievements had been seen, except for offers tabled by certain developed countries with regard to tropical products. The major areas of interest to developing countries, notably the reform of the framework for international trade, had hardly been taken up in earnest by the developed countries, even though concrete proposals had long since been put forward by developing countries.

8. In its review of the current status of the negotiations, the Seminar had before it a paper entitled "Summary of the situation on the main issues in the Multilateral Trade Negotiations" provided by the GATT secretariat, which described in some detail the state of work in the various negotiating groups and subgroups and the positions of developed and developing countries on various major issues. Further clarifications and comments were offered by the representative of GATT which supplemented the contents of the paper; it was noted that the slow progress in the negotiations might be attributed to the extremely unfavourable economic environment which had emerged almost immediately after the Tokyo meeting in the summer of 1973. The adverse factors inhibiting positive action by Governments included the abrupt change in the price of oil, the severe recession and the attendant phenomena of unemployment and lower growth rates. While few positive achievements had been made in terms of reduction or liberalization of trade barriers, the negotiations could be said to have contributed to lessening the deterioration of the world economy through their limiting effects on protectionist tendencies; had it not been for the stabilizing effects of the negotiations, international trade relations would surely have been much worse than they actually were.

9. The Seminar participants felt that the lack of progress in the negotiations was attributable not so much to the factors generally invoked by developed countries to excuse their inertia as to a lack of political will reflecting an inadequate appreciation of the dire needs of developing countries. The developed countries were unduly absorbed in the problems of their own mutual trade and were insufficiently attentive to the pleas and urgings of the poorer countries, whose needs for improvement were many times more

urgent and acute than theirs. In contrast to the stipulations of the Tokyo Declaration the negotiations had so far been mainly concerned with trade barriers affecting developed countries' exports rather than those of the developing countries. The "special and differential treatment" aspect of each area of the negotiations had so far - four years after the opening of the negotiations - not received significant attention.

10. Discussion of the principle of non-reciprocity led to a general consensus in the Seminar that paragraph 5 of the Tokyo Declaration was insufficiently precise and that developed countries seemed to be taking advantage of the vagueness of that provision to exact benefits which were not in line with the spirit of the Declaration. The withholding of concessions in a "priority sector" by a developed country pending receipt of "contributions" from developing countries fully demonstrated the insincerity, if not lack of realism, of the former. The claim that constitutional procedures precluded forthright action and required gestures of goodwill from the developing countries was a lame excuse in the face of the solemn undertaking enshrined in the Tokyo Declaration.

11. The Seminar took note of the unsatisfactory state of the negotiations and the procedural arrangements and time schedule for the current and next phases of the negotiations. Although the present tendency towards bilateralism and away from true multilateralism was unlikely to advance the interests of the economically weaker countries, developing countries in general and African countries in particular should nevertheless endeavour to make use of the opportunity of presenting their demands and proposals, which should relate primarily to the securing of additional benefits for them and the laying of a foundation for special and differential treatment for their exports. A particular objective for African countries in the negotiations was to safeguard the preferential benefits accorded them under the Lomé Convention and their co-operation agreements with BEC with a view to ensuring that, if they could not derive maximum benefit from the negotiations, they would at least not incur losses therefrom.

12. The participants concluded the discussion by noting that, important as they were, market access and trade barriers were only one of a multitude of areas in which developing countries faced serious problems in their efforts to expand their trade. The exports of many developing countries were hampered not so much by commercial policy measures as by other obstacles, such as high transport costs caused either by their distant location from markets or by discriminatory practices on the part of shipping interests. In this connexion the Seminar was gratified to learn that very constructive international action was being undertaken by UNCTAD and ECA; African Governments should take the necessary steps in support of such action.

C. SPECIAL PREFERENCES ACCORDED BY EEC TO AFRICAN COUNTRIES AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS IN THIS REGARD

13. In considering this item, the Seminar had before it a document entitled "Possible impact of the multilateral trade negotiations on preferential trade between African countries and the European Economic Community" (ECA/MTN/6). An introductory statement was made by a representative of the ECA secretariat, in which he dwelt on the possible impact of the tariff reductions now contemplated within the framework of the Tokyo multilateral trade negotiations on the tariff preferences at present enjoyed by African countries under the various co-operation agreements signed with the European Economic Community, namely, preferences accorded to the African countries under the Lomé Convention and the Co-operation Agreements between the Community on the one hand and the Maghreb States and Egypt on the other hand. In the discussion that ensued participants referred to the possible erosion that might result from the application of the general tariff-cutting formula. It was mentioned that there were two ways to offset possible erosions, namely to include the commodities covered by such agreements in the lists of exceptions or to secure adequate compensation from EEC. It was recalled, however, that since the general tariff-cutting formulae currently under consideration did not apply to agricultural products, there was less risk of erosion in the agricultural sector than in the industrial sector. In that connexion it was emphasized that the protection of the special preferences for African countries, or the seeking of compensation for losses resulting from possible erosions, should not prejudice the solidarity between African countries and the other members of the Group of 77.

14. Finally, it was stressed that African countries should generally be aware of the need to maximize their gains elsewhere, that is to say outside the EEC framework, and to that end efforts should be made to diversify their trade patterns by promoting intra-African trade as well as exploring trade opportunities with non-traditional partners such as the other developing regions and socialist countries.

D. RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MULTILATERAL TRADE NEGOTIATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL COMMODITY POLICY, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR AFRICAN COUNTRIES

15. The discussion on the above topic was introduced by a representative of UNCTAD, who outlined the aims and objectives of the Integrated Programme for Commodities and explained the interrelationships between the issues of IPC and the multilateral trade negotiations, emphasizing in particular activities which could be undertaken through the "second window" of a Common Fund under IPC being negotiated in UNCTAD. He stressed that international trade was imperative for growth, particularly in developing countries, which were the weak and poor members of the international community. Development in developing countries depended to a large extent on earnings from their export products, the prices of which were subject to fluctuations intensified by growing world inflation and recession.

16. He pointed out that by 1978 debt servicing alone would absorb an estimated 25 per cent of the export earnings of the developing countries: such a situation would not only frustrate their development programmes but would also lead to an accumulation of further heavy external debt, which already totalled \$180 billion for the non-oil-producing developing countries. In conclusion he stressed that the basic and fundamental objective of IPC was price stabilization within a dynamic framework - stabilization in real terms which was essential to growth, to maintaining the purchasing power of developing countries, and to helping them diversify their exports both horizontally and vertically.

17. The Director of the Interregional MTN Project added that, while IPC was mostly concerned with price stabilization and market access, the multilateral trade negotiations were concerned with the reduction and elimination of trade and non-trade barriers; the two issues were interrelated.

18. In the discussion various issues were raised with regard to horizontal and vertical diversification, the bargaining power of the developing countries, the setting up of processing industries in developing countries, trade promotion and market research, stabilization of revenues and various obstacles and barriers to exports from African countries.

19. In his concluding remarks, the Chairman stated that it was not the intention of developing countries to attempt to paralyse the economies of developed countries, but rather to explore ways and means by which the exports of developing countries could gain better access to world markets at stable, equitable and remunerative prices.

E. SPECIAL AND DIFFERENTIATED TREATMENT FOR THE LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES IN MTN

20. Introducing the topic, a member of the interregional MTN project referred to a provision of the Tokyo Declaration under which commitments were made to ensure that the least developed countries would receive special treatment in the negotiations. Although the multilateral trade negotiations had dragged on for over four years, the commitments in respect of the least developed countries had still not been taken up for serious examination. Since 18 of the 28 least developed countries in the world were found in Africa, the subject should be given serious attention in the seminar. In the negotiations, the least developed countries must take the initiative themselves, and particularly the African least developed countries, lest they content themselves merely with enjoying the benefits of concessions made in the normal course of negotiations to other countries. He then referred to a paper prepared in connexion with the interregional project (UNCTAD/MTN/CB.10) and drew attention to the various concrete suggestions made for the consideration of the least developed countries.

21. In recognition of the acute and urgent nature of the problems of the least developed countries, further introductory statements were made by representatives of GATT and ECA.

22. In the general discussion, issues related to the definition of "least developed" and the basis of such categories were examined, after which problems specifically affecting the least developed, island and land-locked countries were dealt with at length. Stress was laid on the need to ensure the application of the Tokyo Declaration as far as special and differential treatment in the multilateral trade negotiations for least developed, island and land-locked countries was concerned.

23. Reference was made to the Manila Declaration of the Group of 77, which urged solidarity among all developing countries with regard to the needs of the least developed, land-locked and island developing countries. It was pointed out that the provision in the Tokyo Declaration concerning the least developed countries had been made within the broader context of special and differential treatment for developing countries as a whole.

F. INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

24. Representatives of the interregional MTN project and GATT emphasized that work on the improvement of the framework for the conduct of world trade being conducted in the negotiations was being complemented by work in other forums, particularly in the field of commodities. It was also pointed out that the whole of the multilateral trade negotiations, and not just the Framework Group, was designed to improve the international framework. The work on non-tariff codes, such as those on standards and government procurement, and on safeguards, was particularly relevant in that respect. It was emphasized that the subjects of interest to developing countries in the Framework Group must be dealt with in a package which would contain the results of the negotiations, and must not be regarded as representing long-term objectives which could be dealt with only at a later stage.

25. The representatives of the interregional project and GATT then described the five-point programme of work before the Framework Group and the proposals and suggestions made in the Group, particularly by Brazil and the United States. Attention was paid in particular to questions relating to preferences and non-reciprocity, on which many developing countries had made suggestions. It was pointed out that the Tokyo Declaration represented an important step forward in the area of special and differential treatment that should be incorporated in the General Agreement. Developing countries also had an important interest in the strengthening of the dispute settlement procedures. With regard to other points, in particular export restrictions, it was noted that there was a risk that the freedom of action of developing countries to dispose of their natural resources might be impaired.

26. The Seminar was informed by a member of the interregional project that the subject of institutional reform would figure prominently in the project's work programme during the coming year, in view of the far-reaching and profound effects the outcome of the deliberations would have on the economic future of developing countries. The speaker briefly outlined the historical background to and evolution of the international framework for trade, and commented on its basic short-comings and deficiencies from the standpoint of developing countries. The view was expressed that, while some of the proposals for amending GATT evidently went against the interest of developing countries, other proposals and tentative suggestions, notably those put forward by developing countries themselves,

should be strongly supported by developing countries, including those in Africa. Their adoption would undoubtedly lead to some improvement in the positions of the economically weaker countries, and might conceivably lead to better market access for their exports. However, the political realities, notably the fact that most developed countries had neither the will nor the legal authority to accept changes in the international rules which touched upon what they regarded as their own essential interests, and without which no substantial improvement could be expected in relation to the long-term basic foreign trade needs of developing countries, cautioned against undue optimism. Developing countries should, however, not ignore the important opportunity provided by the multilateral trade negotiations for making some improvements, nor overlook the need to be on their guard against amendments detrimental to their interests. At the same time they should not lose sight of plans and proposals for more fundamental reform that might eventually come up in other international bodies.

27. In the ensuing discussion, the participants generally shared the view that a vigilant watch should be kept on the work of the Framework Group by developing countries. They should bring to the fore the economic realities in their own countries, and endeavour to maximize their negotiating strength in that field through the formulation and support of a common position of all developing countries on all issues.

28. The need for intensification of technical assistance activities by both the interregional and African regional projects and GATT was strongly emphasized. Some participants wondered whether it would be possible to achieve fundamental improvements in the international framework for the conduct of world trade in the context of the multilateral trade negotiations. The representative of GATT pointed out that, whatever forum was used, countries would be faced with the same economic realities, and that each country had its own economic problems and its own perception of the way in which they might be solved. It was stressed that, however limited the opportunities presented in the negotiations, developing African countries should endeavour to secure such improvements in the legal framework for the conduct of world trade as appeared to be feasible.

G. APPRAISAL OF THE SEMINAR

29. At the end of the Seminar the participants expressed their satisfaction at the practical and fruitful way in which the discussions had proceeded. The Seminar had proved very useful in informing African countries of developments in the multilateral trade negotiations, and helping them to formulate their strategy for the final phase of the negotiations.

30. The participants commented most favourably on the performance of the regional MTN project, and considered that the contribution which it had made in co-operation with the interregional project had been invaluable to African countries participating in the negotiations. They expressed their thanks to UNCTAD, GATT and UNDP for helping ECA to organize the Seminar. It was pointed out that, as the negotiations were entering what was likely to be their final phase, there would be a need to strengthen the project further.

H. CONCLUSIONS

31. The participants reviewed developments in the multilateral trade negotiations since the first African seminar on the multilateral trade negotiations, held in Addis Ababa in January 1975, and expressed their disappointment at the slow progress of the negotiations. They noted that so far the only concrete result reached had been in the field of tropical products, and that even in that area the results were below African expectations. They recalled in that connexion the African Declaration on Co-operation, Development and Economic Independence adopted by the OAU Assembly of Heads of State and Government in May 1973, the joint statement of the African delegations at the GATT ministerial meeting held in Tokyo in September 1973, the Tokyo Declaration, the Manila Declaration and Programme of Action and UNCTAD resolutions 89 (IV) and 93 (IV). Noting that the multilateral trade negotiations were entering their final and decisive phase, and realizing the need to gain maximum advantage within the time remaining, the participants examined a possible strategy for African countries and reached the following conclusions.

1. Objectives

32. The participants agreed that the objectives of African countries in the multilateral trade negotiations should be:

- (a) Maximum possible expansion of both their exports and their earnings therefrom to accelerate their economic development;
- (b) The strict preservation of all the special advantages of a preferential character in trade with the developed countries already achieved, and an improvement of the GSP schemes in the interest of African countries;
- (c) Additional trade benefits for African countries;
- (d) Agreement on special and differential treatment, non-reciprocity and special procedures in favour of developing countries;
- (e) Special treatment for the least developed, land-locked and island countries.

2. Strategy

33. To achieve the above objectives the participants recommended the following:

- (a) More African countries should participate actively in the final phase of the multilateral trade negotiations. They should take part in all negotiations within the various groups and subgroups, as well as the formal and informal consultations;
- (b) African countries should ensure that their agricultural requests were submitted without further delay and that they included both tariff and non-tariff measures. They should ensure that the tropical products requests which had not been adequately met in the offers of the developed countries were resubmitted to the agricultural group;

(c) African countries should submit their non-tariff barriers requests with the same sense of urgency. They should participate actively in the subgroups dealing with different codes, and especially with safeguards, to ensure that their interests were fully protected and that their preferences were not **eroded** by the application of provisions under those codes;

(d) African countries should take all necessary measures within the group to ensure improvements in the international framework for the conduct of world trade, particularly the legal framework for differential treatment, balance-of-payments and economic development safeguards; consultation; dispute settlement and surveillance procedures; and non-reciprocity and developing country participation in an improved trade framework;

(e) In view of the close relationship between the problems of access to markets and those of pricing policy, African countries should participate actively in negotiations in progress both in UNCTAD and GATT. In order to maximize the advantages from those negotiations, African countries should maintain effective and continuous liaison among themselves;

(f) African countries should ensure, in all areas of the negotiations, that special measures were provided for to secure special treatment for the African least developed, land-locked and island countries in accordance with the provisions of the above-mentioned declarations and resolutions;

(g) Representatives of African countries in the multilateral trade negotiations in Geneva should meet regularly, particularly during the actual negotiations, to co-ordinate and harmonize their positions;

(h) ECA, GATT and UNCTAD should endeavour to provide African countries with necessary services and facilities to help them participate meaningfully in the multilateral trade negotiations.

3. Future action

34. The participants recognized that there was a possibility of erosion of some of the advantages that African countries currently derived from existing preferential schemes in their favour. Accordingly, African countries should ensure that whatever losses they sustained as a result of the negotiations were compensated for by equivalent advantages in the renegotiation of the schemes. In particular, provision should be made for such measures as:

- (a) Research and development for implementation of projects of regional interest;
- (b) Market research and promotion;
- (c) Diversification, both horizontal and vertical.

35. African countries should seek additional marketing outlets for their products, particularly in developed countries outside EEC.

36. The participants recognized that basic responsibility for African development rested with African countries themselves, and that measures being taken at the international level, however important, would not resolve African development problems. African countries should therefore take appropriate steps to expand trade among themselves and, where feasible, to promote economic integration at the subregional, regional and interregional levels.

37. The participants reviewed negotiations in progress in UNCTAD, in particular for the establishment of a Common Fund under the Integrated Programme for Commodities. They expressed disappointment that neither the first nor the resumed session of the Negotiating Conference on the Common Fund had led to any concrete results. They stressed the importance of the Common Fund's financing measures other than stocking arrangements, particularly diversification, research and development and market promotion. To that end they recommended that African countries should participate actively in the negotiations in order to ensure that the results of the Conference met the needs and aspirations of African countries.

38. The participants reaffirmed the need for African countries to participate effectively in the process of decision-making in all forums dealing with trade and development problems.

ANNEX / ANNEXE

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