

Cambodia's Accession to WTO

Lessons Learned

I. History

1. Cambodia submitted to WTO its Memorandum on the Foreign Trade Regime in June 1999. This marked the beginning of the accession process.
2. Cambodia and its WTO Working Party reached agreement on Cambodia's terms of accession in July 2003. Cambodia was the first LDC to complete accession negotiations.
3. Cambodia was invited to become a WTO Member at the Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, in September 2003.
4. Cambodia became a Member of WTO on 13 October 2004. It was the second LDC to accede to WTO.

II. Early Steps

Cambodia took the following steps very early in the accession process, before any serious discussions or negotiations had begun.

1. Securing the necessary technical assistance. There are two types of assistance that are required.
 - a) Assistance with the accession process itself. Cambodia was fortunate in having secured the assistance of UNCTAD in guiding us through this complicated process.
 - b) Assistance with the legal reform required to bring laws and regulations in line with WTO requirements. Cambodia received assistance from a number of development partners in this regard, but additional assistance during the accession process itself would have allowed us to accomplish more before accession, and would have resulted in a smaller post-accession work program.
2. Putting in place internal coordination mechanisms
WTO accession requires a government-wide effort. An acceding country's chief negotiator needs to be able to mobilize and coordinate a number of line ministries in order to formulate the necessary negotiating positions. In Cambodia we established the "Inter-ministerial Coordinating Committee on Cambodia's WTO Accession" which was made up of senior officials from about 18 line ministries and agencies.

3. Formulating an accession strategy

5. TRIPs and public health

This is obviously a very important issue. Some muddy language regarding the use of test data slipped into our Working Party Report, and had to be clarified after the adoption of the Report. It is important to vet carefully the language in the TRIPs section of a Working Party Report to ensure that it is fully compatible with the Doha Decision of TRIPs and Public Health.

2. LDC flexibilities

Many Members take the view that the various flexibilities for LDC and/or developing countries do not automatically apply to acceding LDCs, but need to be negotiated. There are two different approaches that an acceding country may take in the face of this position. The first is to insist on securing through negotiation every flexibility available to LDC Members. Cambodia did not follow this approach. Rather, we examined the actual

