

BRIEF (CLOSING CEREMONY)
THE WORLD TRADE ORGANISATION REGIONAL TRADE POLICY COURSE
RTPC (MAURITIUS) 2018

The World Trade Organisation

The World Trade Organisation, successor of the GATT 1947 and operational since 1995, is the international organisation established to promote free trade in a rules-based multilateral system where countries can negotiate trade agreements as well as settle trade disputes. The organisation is based on a set of principles like non-discrimination among member states and it also applies different mechanisms that favours technical assistance and training promoting the advancement of developing and least-developed countries.

The Regional Trade Policy Course

The WTO RTPC fits within the WTO's Trade Related Technical Assistance (TRTA) activities which aim at enhancing the human and institutional capacity of members so that they can take full advantage of their participation in the rules-based multilateral system and they can enforce their rights and obligations associated with their participation.

The WTO-RTPC is a 8-week course organised by the WTO in partnership with regional institutions. The courses are co-delivered by officials from the WTO Secretariat, trade policy specialists and academic experts from the region.

The participants, selected by the WTO upon recommendation from the governments, will be government officials from the region currently dealing with WTO issues.

The objectives of the RTPCs are to

- a. deepen the participants' understanding of the functioning of the WTO and its rules and procedures;
- b. enhance participants understanding of regional economic perspectives on trade policy and development; and
- c. develop their capacity to find relevant information and documents on WTO-related issues, including the use of the WTO legal texts.

The duration of the partnership with the academic institution is for an initial period of 1 year, with the possibility to extend for two further years.

The RTPC has recently been run in several countries around the world including Thailand, Ecuador, Kazakhstan and the last editions for the African English speaking members were held in Botswana.

Application Process

The World Trade Organisation (WTO) started the selection process to identify a partner institution for the 2017 Regional Trade Policy Course (RTPC) for English- Speaking African Countries in August 2016 by inviting expressions of interest from national academic institutions of members, accompanied by a detailed proposal based on the specifications and requirements elaborated in their Terms of Reference.

The University of Mauritius was informed of the call in 2016 by the Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade (Trade Division). The team from the Faculty of Law and Management, consisting of Professor R V Sannasee, Associate Professor B Seetanah and Mrs Varsha Mooneeram-Chadee worked out the proposal and submitted same to the WTO Secretariat.

In February 2017, the WTO informed that the proposal from the University of Mauritius has been favourably reviewed and shortlisted in the selection process. The WTO sent two representatives, namely Mr Shishir Priyadarshi (Director, Development Division, WTO) and Mrs Janet Chakarian (Head of Regional Trade Policy Courses & Technical Assistance Outreach Unit, Institute for Training and Technical Cooperation) to discuss further the proposal with the government representative, the top management and the team directly involved in the implementation of the programme. Eventually in June 2017, the University was informed of its selection as partner by the WTO to host the forthcoming RTPC. Since then, the UoM team has been working in collaboration with the WTO team to organise the RTPC (Mauritius) 2018. Recently, the WTO concluded a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Mauritius for the hosting of the RTPC.

The RTPC (Mauritius) 2018

The RTPC (Mauritius) 2018 shall run from Monday 14th May to Friday 06th July 2018, i.e. over a period of 8 consecutive weeks. Thirty one delegates of English speaking African members and observers of the WTO, nominated by their respective governments, shall participate in the first ever RTPC organised in Mauritius. Countries participating include Botswana, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mauritius, Namibia, Nigeria, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The travel, accommodation and catering costs are borne by the WTO. The WTO also provides the resource persons that shall intervene on the course. The UoM contributes by providing the logistics and academic support needed for the course.

Through the past 8 weeks, intensive training has been delivered to the participants from 08 30 to 16 15 from Monday to Friday. Several WTO staff from the different divisions have come to Mauritius to deliver lectures. There was also a regional input from Mauritian and African speakers who contributed to the RTPC. Several important topics have been covered during those eight weeks, amongst others: Agriculture, Tariffs and Customs Valuation, Accessions, Dispute Settlement, Sanitary and Phytosanitary measures, Technical Barriers to Trade, Trade in Services, Intellectual Property, Environmental and development issues. All through the training, quizzes are carried out to evaluate the knowledge of the participants before and after the modules are explained. The training is mostly in a paperless environment and all the materials are made available through a virtual classroom set up and administered by the University of Mauritius. The training also included a professional visit whereby the participants visited the Customs department at the Port Area, Port Louis and the Alteo Sugarcane Factory, Union Flag. The participants are assessed on two criteria: their participation in class and the final examination that was held on Thursday 5th July 2018. All the participants have succeeded in the examinations and have been very active over the 8 weeks in the training by asking questions to the resource persons as well as contributing to group works and simulation exercises.