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विकासशील देशों की अनुसंधान एवं सूचना प्रणाली



ESCAP
Economic and Social Commission
for Asia and the Pacific



Training of Bhutan officials

on Multilateral Trading System and WTO Accession

(Venue: Parthasarthy Hall, RIS, 4th Floor, Core 4B, India Habitat Centre)

28-30 April 2026, New Delhi

Background

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is a multilateral institution that sets global rules for trade in goods, services, and intellectual property. Accession to the WTO provides a rules-based framework that supports trade integration, economic reforms, investment climate improvements, and predictable market access conditions. For countries seeking to join, the accession process is comprehensive, requiring substantial legal, policy, and institutional alignment with WTO principles.

Accession requires extensive legal and institutional reforms, ranging from tariff policy and import licensing to technical barriers to trade (TBT), sanitary and phytosanitary measures (SPS), subsidies, state trading enterprises, and intellectual property rights (TRIPS). New Members are also expected to ensure transparency, implement notification obligations, and establish mechanisms for rule-consistent trade administration. For many developing countries, this reform agenda supports broader national objectives such as improving competitiveness, attracting investment, and strengthening governance.

While WTO membership brings significant **benefits**—including predictable market access, a rules-based environment for trade and investment, participation in global trade governance, and access to dispute settlement—accession can also pose challenges. Negotiations often require commitments that exceed those of existing developing Members (“WTO-plus” obligations), and implementation may strain institutional capacities. Effective coordination across ministries, sustained political support, and proactive stakeholder engagement are critical for a successful accession process.

As Bhutan approaches the final stages of its accession to WTO, joining the World Trade Organization (WTO) is not merely a legal formality; it is a strategic maneuver to secure predictable market access, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and diversify an economy traditionally reliant on hydropower and regional trade. The WTO accession

requires deep technical grounding across multiple disciplines, including legal and regulatory alignment, tariff and services scheduling, customs valuation, SPS and TBT frameworks, investment measures, agriculture, trade remedies, and related policy domains. The commitments made in the WTO also need to be ratified internally and the domestic policies need to be in harmony with the obligations. Therefore, a deeper understanding of WTO rules are necessary for acceding country officials.

This capacity-building programme is strategically designed to equip government officials serving on the Negotiating Team and Technical Working Groups for Bhutan’s WTO accession with the requisite technical expertise on market access, scheduling commitments, and negotiation modalities. The training will provide hands-on exposure to accession-related disciplines, enabling officials to effectively engage in negotiations and manage post-accession obligations. Given the complexity of WTO commitments, the programme is of critical importance to ensure that Bhutan’s policy framework is aligned with multilateral trade rules, while preserving adequate policy space to safeguard sensitive sectors and support domestic development priorities.

Objectives

The training will bridge the gap between theoretical WTO frameworks and the practical administrative requirements facing Bhutanese ministries.

Course content

The training will cover the following topics:

- (i) Introduction to WTO and Its Core Principles
- (ii) GATT (Agriculture, NAMA, NTMs)
- (iii) GATS
- (iv) Trade Defense Measures
- (v) Market access and the scheduling of commitments
- (vi) Trade Facilitation Agreement
- (vii) Plurilateral agreements, FTAs etc.
- (viii) Practical exercise on TINA Tool
- (ix) Negotiation exercise: Tariff binding schedule, services schedule.

Tentative programme

Day 1: 28th April 2026 (Tuesday)	
09:30 – 10:00	Registration
10:00 – 10:30	Opening session

	<p>Welcome remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head and Director, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi • Prof. Sachin Kumar Sharma, Director General, RIS <p>Special remarks:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Yashvir Singh, Additional Secretary, Department of Commerce <p>Inaugural address:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • H.E. Amb. Sudhakar Dalela, Secretary (ER), Ministry of External Affairs
10:30 – 11:00	Tea break
11:00 – 12:30	<p>Session 1: Goods market access and scheduling commitments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Bipin Menon, Trade Advisor (Ministry of Textiles) and Additional DGFT, Department of Commerce
12:30 – 13:30	Lunch
13:30 – 15:00	<p>Session 2: Panel discussion on S&DT principles and developing countries in WTO</p> <p><i>(The panel will discuss the logic behind building S&D principles in GATT/WTO. Panel will deliberate on how has the developing and least developed countries benefitted from these provisions, what are the existing challenges? The panel will also deliberate on current debate relating to S&D principle, especially with regard to WTO MC 14 and its implications on Bhutan.)</i></p> <p>Moderator</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Coordinator, DAKSHIN, RIS <p>Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amb. Jayant Dasgupta, Ex-Indian Ambassador to WTO • Amb. Dammu Ravi, Secretary, ER, Ministry of External Affairs (retired)

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Abhijit Das, Former Head and Professor, Centre for WTO Studies • Prof. Pritam Banerjee, Head and Professor, Centre for WTO Studies • Mr. Sumanta Chaudhury, Senior Policy Advisor, CII
15:00 – 15:15	Tea break
15:15 – 16:45	Session 3: Agreement on Agriculture <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Sachin Kumar Sharma, DG, RIS
16:45 – 17:15	Session 4: WTO plurilateral agreements, ITA, IFA, E-Commerce etc. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Abhijit Das, Former Head and Professor, Centre for WTO Studies • Mr. Atul Kaushik, Fellow, GDC, RIS
Day 2: 29 April 2026 (Wednesday)	
09:30 – 11:00	Session 5: GATS: Commitments and scheduling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sonia Pant, Advisor, NITI Aayog
11:00 – 11:15	Tea break
11:15 – 12:45	Session 6: Market access and the scheduling of commitments (Goods and Services) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sonia Pant, Advisor, NITI Aayog • Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Coordinator, DAKSHIN, RIS
12:45 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 15:15	Session 7: Trade Defence Measures in WTO <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Mukesh Bhatnagar, Former Professor, Centre for WTO Studies
15:15 – 15:30	Tea break
15:30 – 17:00	Session 8: WTO Reforms including Dispute Settlement Reforms

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Atul Kaushik, Fellow, GDC, RIS
Day 3: 30 April 2026 (Thursday)	
09:30 – 11:00	Session 9: Trade Facilitation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof. Prabir De, Professor, RIS
11:00 – 11:15	Tea break
11:15 – 12:45	Session 10: SEZs – Engines of Growth (Sharing of experiences on challenges and opportunities of SEZs) <i>Moderator</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dr. Ajay Sahai, Director General, FIEO <i>Panel</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Bipin Menon, Trade Advisor (Ministry of Textiles) and Additional DGFT, Department of Commerce (Former Development Commissioner, Noida Export Procession Zone) • Sri Vijay Kumar, Former Development Commissioner, GIFT City SEZ, Dahej SEZ, Jamnagar SEZ and Sterling SEZ, Gujarat • Dr. Minh Tam BUI, Assistant Professor of Economics Faculty of Economics, Srinakharinwirot University (Online)
12:45 – 13:45	Lunch
13:45 – 14:45	Session 11: Practical Session on TINA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mr. Alexey Kravchenko, Economic Affairs Officer, ESCAP (Online)
14:45 – 15:00	Tea break
15:00 – 17:00	Session 12: Negotiation Exercise <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ms. Sonia Pant, Advisor, NITI Aayog • Dr. Rajan Sudesh Ratna, Coordinator, DAKSHIN, RIS •
17:00 – 17:30	Concluding session

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Mikiko Tanaka, Head and Director, ESCAP South and South-West Asia Office, New Delhi• Prof. Sachin Kumar Sharma, Director General, RIS• Mr. Aman Varma, Joint Secretary, Department of Commerce <p><i>Vote for Thanks</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ms. Pem Zam, Chief Trade Officer, Trade Negotiation Division, Department of Trade, Ministry of Industry, Commerce and Employment, Bhutan
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