



25 March 2019

(19-1833)

Page: 1/3

Original: English

## OPEN-ENDED THEMATIC SESSION ON IMPROVING ACCESS TO INFORMATION FOR MSMEs: TAKEAWAYS AND NEXT STEPS\*

*Revision<sup>1</sup>*

The following communication, dated 15 May 2018, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of Switzerland, as co-coordinator of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs and organizer of this thematic session, and the delegation of Uruguay, as general coordinator of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs.

---

Reflecting on the Informal Group of MSMEs thematic session held at the WTO on 27 March 2018, we, the co-coordinator and general coordinator of the Informal Working Group on MSMEs, took note of the following key messages from speakers and participants:

### 1 MESSAGES FROM KEYNOTE SPEAKERS

1.1. According to Undersecretary (Vice Minister) Ceferino S. Rodolfo, Philippines' Vice Minister for Trade and Industry, many small companies struggle in accessing international markets. Therefore, they rely on national and regional information portals to facilitate MSME trade. However, these efforts have their limits and a broader initiative such as the Global Trade Helpdesk ([helpmetrade.org](http://helpmetrade.org)) can be an effective solution.

1.2. Alan Wolff, WTO Deputy Director General, highlighted the importance of: reaching out to different Ministries that have an interest in raising awareness for the MSME initiative – these will be able to contribute ideas and practical guidance; reaching out to national legislators, to small business committees, to the press and to social media to raise awareness about the MSME initiative; promoting experience sharing and best practices; helping improve the tool by providing feedback on a regular basis; and establishing institutional links with key organizations that work on issues that matter to MSMEs, such as standards setting organizations.

1.3. Dorothy Tembo, ITC Deputy Executive Director, noted that access to information has been and continues to be an enormous challenge. Ms. Tembo maintained that trade information is essential to the way that businesses trade with other countries, particularly the smaller size companies and that information makes all the difference between going global and not.

### 2 DISCUSSION ON THE GLOBAL TRADE HELPDESK: A JOINT INITIATIVE FROM WTO, UNCTAD AND ITC

2.1. Following a presentation on the current state of the Global Trade Helpdesk (GTH), the floor was opened to participants to comment and react. The main points made during the discussion were the following:

**a. Participants believed that a one-stop shop is a good and efficient approach.**

---

\* This document was originally circulated as JOB/GC/183/Rev.1 dated 15 May 2018.

<sup>1</sup> Please note changes to paragraph 1.1.

- i. There is a need to ensure that the system is user-friendly and easy to understand.
  - ii. Information provided needs to be global, up to date and timely.
- b. MSMEs should be able to be informed in their own language.**
- i. Such platforms should not only be limited to WTO languages.
  - ii. Governments can play a role in helping translating information into their respective national languages.
- c. There is a need for training and technical assistance.**
- i. As a mean to disseminate information to potential users.
  - ii. Some pilot countries could be identified among LDCs and developing economies.
- d. Governments have a responsibility to inform MSMEs of such initiatives.**
- i. Raising awareness of such initiatives is key.
  - ii. Governments should reach out to national legislators, interest groups, the business sector and the press to enhance the efficiency of the GTH.
  - iii. Furthermore, synergies between national and international platforms must be enhanced.
- e. National contact points on MSMEs could be established.**
- i. It would allow the managers of the GTH to more easily interact with the national authorities that detain relevant information.
  - ii. It could enable MSMEs to receive personal assistance whenever necessary.
  - iii. The idea of using already existing contact points, in particular those established in the context of the TFA can be explored.
- f. Participants highlighted the importance for the portal to provide user-friendly information on MFN tariffs (preferential and non-preferential), NTMs, rules of origin, import licensing requirements as well as mandatory documents and forms.**
- i. Furthermore they could also include information on trade finance, distribution channels, trade statistics, customs clearance costs and duration, trade remedies, and logistics services.
  - ii. It should also ensure that forms required to import and export be made available on the GTH platform.
  - iii. The idea of developing manuals and videos to explain import and export procedures can be explored.
- g. Several delegations stressed the need for WTO Members to better fulfil their notification requirements to support the development of the GTH.**
- h. Country surveys could be conducted to have a better feedback on the use of the GTH.**
- i. In addition, the GTH should be "smartphone friendly" as many users rely solely on mobile technology.

2.2. Additionally, some delegations expressed the importance to give MSMEs the possibility to convey their concerns to national authorities and to establish a mechanism between public authorities to exchange best practices.

### 3 NEXT STEPS

3.1. Based on the interest expressed by delegations during the meeting and numerous feedbacks received, **a follow up meeting at the technical level will be organized for interested delegations in order to look into operational steps**. Dates of the meeting will be communicated in due time by the group of coordinators.

3.2. Discussions will continue between the informal working group on MSMEs and WTO, ITC and UNCTAD in order to reinforce mutual collaboration.

3.3. The Informal group of MSMEs will send an invitation to all WTO Members to contribute to the success of the Global Trade Helpdesk initiative.

---