

**ASSOCIATION OF CARIBBEAN STATES (ACS)
XXVI MEETING OF THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND
EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS**

**WORK PROGRAMME APPROVED BY THE SPECIAL COMMITTEE
ON TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS
2011-2013**

I. FOCAL POINT OF THE AGENDA:

The Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations fosters cooperation and integration through the joint efforts of Member States and Associate Members of the ACS, the construction and consolidation of an enhanced economic space for trade and investment in the Greater Caribbean. In this regard, the Committee's Work Plan for the period 2011-2013 is based on the following four focal points:

- 1. Actions to further promote trade convergence and greater participation of ACS members, with special emphasis on the small economies of the Greater Caribbean.**
- 2. Develop actions to consolidate a logistics and multimodal platform, to promote the development and expansion of trade and investment, its facilitation, competitiveness and connectivity among the countries of the ACS Region.**
- 3. Integrate the ACS Region with other regional initiatives relating to the Business Convergence and Infrastructure.**
- 4. Promote and encourage International Trade negotiations and training on Trade Issues.**

II. SPECIFIC GOALS BY AREA:

3.2 TRADE DEVELOPMENT AND EXTERNAL ECONOMIC RELATIONS

3.2.1. Gradual Reduction and Elimination of Obstacles to Trade and Investment in the Greater Caribbean.

Promote initiatives and activities aimed at reducing obstacles to trade in the region (E-Regulations, Expedited Visas, Simplification of import procedures, establishment of e-consultation system for accessing information and import requirements).

3.2.2 Promote and facilitate the Special and Differential Treatment for Small Economies in the Greater Caribbean.

Promote convergence and intensifying trade through unilateral tariff concessions to the small economies of the Greater Caribbean.

3.2.3. Promote and encourage trade relations in the Greater Caribbean and develop initiatives to integrate the ACS Region into other regional initiatives for trade convergence.

Boost trade relations in the region through forums in which the business community can explore new business opportunities (MSMEs Forum of the Greater Caribbean, Business Forum of the Caribbean). Also, identify appropriate manners of integrating the ACS Region into activities taking place in other fora in order to build spaces for commercial convergence and infrastructure.

3.2.4. Promote and encourage international trade negotiations and training on trade issues.

Strengthen trade capacities in negotiation, management, and dispute resolution matters in regional agreements in the region through training sessions offered with support of WTO, IDB, ACWL.

To achieve these objectives, the Work Plan proposes to conduct the following projects (numbered) and activities:

3.2.1. Gradual Reduction and Elimination of Obstacles to Trade and investment in the Greater Caribbean.

3.2.1.1. Standardize and harmonize procedures and documentation requirements for customs and facilitation of customs procedures for members.

3.2.1.2. Digitization and electronic transmission of custom procedures between Member States authorities.

Present Position:

There is a vast difference in customs systems in the region depending on each country, which has become a concern and an obstacle to the development of greater and improved economic relations in the region.

To this end, we propose technical meetings between customs and border control authorities with a view towards signing an agreement for simplification of import procedures through standardization and harmonization of customs certificates and digitization of customs formalities for Members to promote quick, safe, and efficient trade in the ACS region.

Activities

- a) Promote technical meetings between customs and other competent authorities to:
 - 1. Sign agreements to simplify import procedures.
 - 2. Make a list and consolidate requirements and needs of cooperation to transfer customs capacities of the member countries and ACS associated members.

Negotiate with cooperating bodies and organizations the requirements and cooperation needs, to transfer customs capacities of the member countries and the ACS associated members.

Expected Results:

- a) Negotiation and signing by the ACS members of an agreement for simplification of customs procedures and other requirements for imports in the ACS region.

- b) Signing by the ACS members of an agreement for the commencement of information sharing on customs procedures through the electronic transmission of data, including topics such as digital certification of origin.

3.2.1.3. Expedited visas to businesspersons of the Greater Caribbean.

Present Position:

There is a need to facilitate business visas to persons, in order to increase their awareness of markets and facilitate their interest, and participation, as exporters, importers, service providers or investors. The best way to learn about the market is a major factor in enabling contacts between entrepreneurs, as it provides a necessary climate of trust for larger business transactions.

To date only three (3) countries have presented information.

Activities:

- a) Meeting between migration authorities to identify actions to facilitate procedures of expedited visas for the temporary entrance of business visitors from the Greater Caribbean.
- b) That all of the members provide visa information by September 2011 at the latest for the purpose of preparing at the latest by November 2011 a summary of migratory provisions for ACS members to obtain a business visa.
- c) Send this summary of information to Embassies, Consulates, Chambers and Associations to be updated as soon as there is a change so that there will always be trustworthy information available to the businesspersons. This summary will be published on the ACS webpage.

Expected Results:

- a) Facilitate the procedures for visa issuance for businesspersons.
- b) To promote the creation of a special visa for businesspersons in the Greater Caribbean.

3.2.1.4. Propose the opening of *E-Regulation Programmes* within the ACS countries to promote transparency and efficiency in a timely manner for the formalities related to business.

Present Position :

Among the most fundamental obstacles to trade, experienced by economic entities of Member States is the lack of knowledge regarding regulations and processes to achieve their commercial purposes. The access or non-access to information determines their effective participation in foreign trade environment. In the long run, everything hinges on the level of transparency offered by each country to facilitate and / or promote economic activities linked to international trade. The lack of, or limited information then makes simple activities sluggish, and therefore costly, increasing transaction costs for those who conduct the transactions, for the end consumers, and for the economy in general.

Activities:

- a) To urge ACS member countries to incorporate in their transparency agenda the news of E-regulations programs (offered by the UNCTAD to promote transparency and accelerate business procedures and paper work.

Expected Results:

- a. To install in the greatest possible number of countries an E-regulation program by the end of February 2013 at the latest.

3.2.2 Promote and facilitate the Special and Differential Treatment to the Small Economies in the Greater Caribbean.

3.2.2.1 Promote the deepening of trade through new unilateral tariff concessions.

Present Position:

The commercial data available shows that there is a concentration of exportable supply in specific countries, particularly small economies of the Caribbean.

Likewise, it can be seen that said exports are being made by some of these countries which demonstrates the scant participation of the remaining countries. This would require the drawing up of mechanisms to favor greater participation in said trade.

Activities:

- a) To entrust the ACS Secretariat through the Trade Directorate, to request the collaboration of the ECLAC for the analysis (mapping) of the real and potential flow of trade in the ACS member countries and associate members and to propose a plan for the concession of preferential tariffs among these countries.
- b) The ACS member countries and associate members will present through the ACS Secretariat, their requests for tariffs concessions by means of lists of products (at the level of tariff subgroups), by country, by September 1st 2011 at the latest.
- c) In the case of Haiti, special attention will be given to requests for tariff concessions submitted by the Republic of Haiti.
- d) As a result of the activities mentioned in the preceding paragraphs, work will be done on identifying the parameters to define plans for the granting of unilateral preferential tariffs.

Expected Results:

- a. Unilateral granting of tariff preferences for ACS member countries and associate members as soon as the internal procedures of each country allow it.

3.2.2.2 Promote multi-modal facilities in the ACS

Present Position:

Exports among ACS members are kept within a conservative margin, a product of the existing difficulty to transport cargo by sea and air. The certainty of having regular transportation guaranteed at a reasonable cost would help develop the interchange of trade among ACS member states, particularly in exports from the [insular] countries.

Recommended Actions:

a) Promote the reaching of **Trade Agreements on Technical Cooperation** between operators in the maritime industry, port and Free Zones of the ACS countries. In addition, the industry is expected to recommend to authorities actions to improve the mode of organizing the integration of multi-modal transportation services in the region, especially the development of regional distribution facilities; maritime and auxiliary services related to industry.

b) Study the possibility of creating an entity called **TransACS - Logistic** to serve as liaison between island private sector exporters and shipping lines that offer their services in the Caribbean, as well as those companies that provide specialized cargo services (shipping, insurance, banking, refrigeration among others).

Its mission is to provide support and advice on all matter relating to the logistics of transporting cargo within the insular countries along with the rest of the ACS Member States. TransACS - Logistic shall, if necessary, negotiate with the shipping lines interested in serving ACS members, a guaranteed-cargo volume with a view that it is more attractive to shipping companies to regularize their visits to the largest ports in the Caribbean area where the cargo would conglomerate for distribution and subsequent transport to their final destination.

To this end, through its management it shall, promote the interest of companies in an organized manner to achieve the consolidation of cargo from various companies in a single container, which will allow a substantially lower transportation cost as this is shared between multiple users. Thus, exports are promoted which in turn encourages carriers to offer a more regular and secured service, and other companies related to the export sector to offer better services to exporters.

Expected Results:

That the ACS Member States could make their exportable offers reach member countries and the rest of the world with lower transport costs in the shortest time.

3.2.3 Promote and Enhance Trade Relations with the Greater Caribbean

3.2.3.1 Greater Caribbean Business Forum (large companies)

Present Position:

The Greater Caribbean Business Forum is an activity of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS), which is held annually. The event is held under the mandate of the Heads of State or Governments of the Association with the aim of consolidating an enlarged space for trade and investment in the region.

The Declaration of Panama emphasizes the importance and significance of the institutions of the Business Forum as a tool for promoting trade and investment in the region.

In this process, it is recognized that the expansion and strengthening of trade relations among countries in the region requires actions that go beyond market access. To increase trade and investment it is necessary to promote the creation of spaces for knowledge among entrepreneurs in the region, contributing to the emergence of an entrepreneurial culture in the Greater Caribbean

Activities:

To conduct two business forums for the interaction of the business community and promote business. The first of which will be held in Panama.

Expected Results:

Expand and strengthen trade relations within the ACS, recognizing the need to promote a more entrepreneurial culture in the Greater Caribbean, contributing to increased trade between its Member States and Associate Members, generating more interest.

3.2.3.2 Trade Transparency Forum:

This Forum aims at increasing the transparency of the institutions of the Member States, through procedures for access to information on: technical regulations, certification, and information on sanitary and phyto-sanitary requirements for import, standards, and procedures to ensure food safety and entry control systems existing in the ACS countries.

Activities:

a. To conduct meetings for dialogue between member institutions of the ACS, in order to achieve procedures for access to information on: technical regulations, certification, and information on sanitary and phytosanitary requirements for imports, among others.

b. Consolidate sources of information on technical regulations, certifications and information on sanitary and phyto-sanitary import requirements, standards, and procedures to ensure food safety and entry control systems in place in ACS countries and points of contact.

Expected Results:

Increased cooperation and transparency between the members of the ACS to facilitate trade.

3.2.3.3 Meeting of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in the Greater Caribbean.

Micro, Small and Medium enterprises (MSMEs) have been identified as an engine for economic and social development, especially in developing countries. Besides, the potential to create and expand job opportunities and alleviate unemployment, MSME facilitate the development of skills in entrepreneurship, ensures the expansion of market opportunities and use local raw material. They promote labor-intensive enterprises, promote exports, and import substitution. MSME development is therefore a comprehensive economic development strategy that guarantees an equitable growth within a short and medium term.

Activities:

With the participation of MSMEs, hold a seminar in which expert entities on the subject of MSMEs, present the importance of the sector and opportunities for development in ACS.

Expected Results:

- a) Raise awareness on the role of MSMEs for economic and social development in the region.
- b) Raise awareness of the banks, government support and other resources that exist in the region for the opening, development, and consolidation of MSMEs.
- c) To promote entrepreneurship and business development in the region.

3.2.3.4 Meeting between Maritime Authorities and shipping companies serving the Caribbean

Activities:

Conduct a seminar between Maritime Authorities of the ACS Member States and the local Shipping Authorities of the Greater Caribbean to share knowledge and to create links to ensure greater port efficiency.

Expected Results:

Improve ports connectivity to facilitate import and export networks among members of the ACS.

3.2.3.5 Participation of ACS Region in the activities taking place in other initiatives related to trade integration matters.

Present Position

Currently the ACS Region maintains no effective link with the development and growth initiatives and other regional forums to promote convergence on trade and infrastructure development in the region. The ACS Region needs to keep abreast with these initiatives. Also, taking into account its peculiarities, it should be considered by international funding and cooperation entities within the projects and related initiatives currently being put forward.

Activities:

- a) Identify appropriate ways of integrating the ACS Region in the activities taking place at other forums to build commercial spaces and infrastructure convergence.
- b) To request international organizations to consider the ACS region in initiatives that promote regional convergence schemes and regional projects of infrastructure development

Expected Results:

Incorporate the ACS Region into existing initiatives that promote regional convergence schemes and regional projects of infrastructure development, to avoid gaps in regional competitiveness.

3.2.4 Promote and encourage international trade relations and training on trade issues.

3.2.4.1. Promote trade convergence by strengthening capacity in trade negotiations, taking into account the commercial characteristics of the members of the ACS, with a focus on those insular member islands.

Activities:

Consolidate the offers of regional cooperation for the strengthening of the institutional capacities of countries in negotiation, implementation, and dispute resolution matters from existing commercial instruments.

Expected Results:

Strengthening the Institutional capacities of ACS countries on international trade negotiations, administration, and dispute resolution.

3.2.5 ACS Meetings: Special Committee on Trade development and External Economic Relations.

Finally, the Presidency proposes the holding of two (2) annual meetings of the Special Committee on Trade Development and External Economic Relations with the objective of presenting the initiatives and obtaining the approval of the activities and work plan proposed by the Chair; monitor the implementation of the Work Plan and conduct meetings.

Numerical Key:

- The first two digits (3.2) indicate the area: Trade Development and External Economic Relations.
- The third digit indicates the number of the Programme.
- The fourth digit indicates the number of the project within the programme.

In regard to 3.2.5 this refers exclusively to the Special Committee Meeting on Trade Development and External Relations

Example: Code 3.2.2.4 refers to:

- 3.2- Trade and Development and External Economic Relations.
- 2 – The number of the Programme.
- 4 – The number of the project within the Programme.