Council for Trade in Goods
Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in
Information Technology Products

REPORT TO THE COUNCIL FOR TRADE IN GOODS ON IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE OF PARTICIPANTS ON THE EXPANSION OF TRADE IN INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY PRODUCTS

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. This report has been prepared under the responsibility of the Chairperson of the Committee of Participants on the Expansion of Trade in Information Technology Products (ITA Committee, or the Committee), Mr Don Spedding, at the request of the Chairperson of the Council for Trade in Goods (CTG) (JOB/CTG/29 and JOB/CTG/33), with a view to reporting on the discussions that have taken place in the ITA Committee on improving its functioning. The report was adopted by the ITA Committee at its meeting of 19 October 2023.[1]

2 PROCESS AND PROPOSALS

2.1. In October 2022, the Chairperson of the ITA Committee (Mr Hazrul Imran AZAHAR), at the request of the Chairperson of the CTG, prepared, under his own responsibility and with the Secretariat's assistance, a report describing the current functioning of the Committee, circulated as document G/L/1461-G/IT/W/55, dated 1 December 2022.

2.2. The ITA Committee held an initial discussion to identify possible areas for improvement in the functioning of the Committee under the interim Chairpersonship of Mr LOH Jia Jie, which had taken place at the Committee's formal meeting of 29 March 2023.[2] Upon the request of the Chairperson, and with a view to advancing those discussions in the most efficient manner, the Secretariat prepared and circulated a table in document JOB/IT/33. This table was used to frame the Committee's discussions at its informal meeting of 14 July. These discussions were reflected in the Chairperson's summary report of this informal meeting, which was circulated in document JOB/IT/34, dated 20 July 2023.

2.3. Based on the outcome of these discussions, a communication entitled *"Current Status of Work Following the Informal Meeting of 14 July 2023"*, was prepared and circulated by the Chairperson, in document JOB/IT/35, dated 9 August 2023. A revised table containing the following four columns was included in the document:

–   A list of areas for possible improvement, based on the consolidated list of next steps prepared by the Chairperson of the CTG (column 1);

–   a description of the current practice of the ITA Committee in each of these areas (column 2);

–   comments under the Chairperson's own authority, and some proposals (column 3); and

–   an overview of the status of discussions following the ITA Committee's informal meeting of 14 July 2023 (column 4).

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[1] The Chairperson circulated his report in document G/IT/W/57, dated 29 September 2023; this report was subsequently adopted by the ITA Committee as the Committee's own report to the CTG at the ITA Committee's formal meeting of 19 October 2023.
[2] Document G/IT/M/78, paragraphs 10.1-10.32.

2.4. Those items for which support was expressed during the meeting were reflected in bold in column 4 of the table. In addition, the Chairperson proposed that the Committee use written procedures to formally endorse two of the elements, namely: 3(a): Extending the minimum time required for circulating the airgram and list of proposed agenda items; and 4(a): Introducing the eAgenda on a trial basis.

2.5. In this context, a communication entitled "Written procedure for the adoption of proposals by the Committee" was circulated in document JOB/IT/36, dated 31 August 2023, which proposed that the two follow-up actions mentioned above be adopted. No objection had been received in writing by close of business on Tuesday, 12 September 2023, and the proposals were therefore deemed to have been adopted by the Committee. The decision by the Committee was circulated in document G/IT/34, on 26 September 2023.

2.6. Furthermore, the Chairperson in JOB/IT/35 indicated that the intention was to move forward immediately on the other elements in column 4 on which support had been expressed. In some instances, this meant continuing with current practice. These elements from the revised table were as follows: 1(a) Support for the Secretariat to organize regular introductory sessions on past work done in the Committee and updates on current work; 1(b) Support for the Secretariat to prepare a manual describing the main procedural and substantive aspects of the work of the Committee in a similar style to manuals being prepared for other Committees; 2(d) Support for holding dedicated/joint sessions on cross-cutting issues on an *ad hoc* basis as needed; 3(e) Support for the Secretariat to circulate any oral reports by the Chair and Secretariat after informal meetings; Support for the Secretariat to circulate any presentations and accompanying remarks after informal and formal meetings; 3(f) Support for the Secretariat to circulate documents, including research and analysis, as early as possible before meetings; 3(g) Support for the Secretariat to include hyperlinks to documents and references cited in documents; 3(i) Support for the Secretariat to circulate factual summary reports of informal meetings by the Chairperson; and 4(b) Support for maintaining the hybrid format of meetings unless there is a WTO-wide decision to the contrary. He also proposed that the revised table continue to be used as the basis for further discussions in the ITA Committee, as necessary.

3 IMPROVEMENTS IN THE FUNCTIONING OF THE COMMITTEE

3.1. As a result of these discussions, the ITA Committee agreed to implement 11 changes with a view to improving its functioning, including two changes where formal decisions had been taken by the Committee, and nine changes where the Secretariat had been requested either to introduce changes to the way in which it supported the work of the Committee, or else to continue current practice.

3.2. The improvements in the work of the Committee include the following:

General area	Improvements in the functioning of the ITA Committee
1. Assistance to delegates	• Support for the Secretariat to organize regular introductory sessions on past work done in the Committee and updates on current work. • Support for the Secretariat to prepare a manual describing the main procedural and substantive aspects of the work of the Committee.
2. Planning and organization of meetings	• Support for holding dedicated/joint sessions on cross-cutting issues on an *ad hoc* basis, as needed.
3. Work Procedures	• Proposal adopted by the Committee for extending the minimum time-frame for circulation of the airgram (convening notice) and proposed list of agenda items to 15 days in advance of each formal meeting, instead of the previous practice of 10 days. • Support for the Secretariat to circulate any oral reports by the Chair and Secretariat after informal meetings. • Support for the Secretariat to circulate any presentations and accompanying remarks after informal and formal meetings.

General area	Improvements in the functioning of the ITA Committee
	• Support for the Secretariat to circulate documents, including research and analysis, as early as possible before meetings. • Support for the Secretariat to include hyperlinks to documents and references cited in documents. • Support for the Secretariat to circulate factual summary reports of informal meetings by the Chairperson.
4. Use of Digital tools	• Proposal adopted by the Committee for introducing the eAgenda on a trial basis. • Support for maintaining the hybrid format of meetings unless there is a WTO-wide decision to the contrary.

4 NEXT STEPS

4.1. The Committee will continue to consider ways to improve its functioning, on an ongoing basis, as proposed by delegations, and as relevant.

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