

First Trade Knowledge Workshop for Parliamentarians

Ottawa, Canada

March 18 - 20, 2007

Final completion report submitted to:

The Inter-American Development Bank
(Integration and Regional Programs Department)

Foro Interparlamentario de las Américas
Fórum Interparlamentar das Américas



Forum interparlementaire des Amériques
Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. OVERVIEW.....	2
2. THE PROJECT	2
2.1 Activities	2
2.2 Methodology.....	3
3. RESULTS	3
3.1 Outputs.....	3
3.2 Outcomes	4
3.3 Integration of a Gender Perspective.....	6
4. LESSONS LEARNED.....	6
4.1 Workshop Content.....	6
4.2 Workshop Format.....	8
5. MOVING FORWARD.....	10

1. Overview

From March 18 to 20, 2007, the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas (FIPA) held its first *Trade Knowledge Workshop for Parliamentarians*, hosted by the Canadian Section of FIPA in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

The project consisted of a 3-day capacity-building workshop on trade issues for parliamentarians of the Americas, in order to:

- (i) strengthen the capacity of parliamentarians of the Americas to understand the nature of a rules-based international trading system
- (ii) improve their capacity to work with constituents, business and civil society in the formulation of international trade policy agendas and in the implementation of domestic complementary reforms that contribute to poverty reduction; and
- (iii) promote the sharing of experiences and lessons learned to encourage dialogue and cooperation among parliamentarians of the hemisphere on issues relating to trade policy.

2. The Project

2.1 Activities

Planned:

The main activity entailed holding a trade capacity-building workshop with 20 to 25 participants from legislatures of North, Central, South America and the Caribbean.

Actual:

A 3-day trade workshop was held March 18-20, 2007, with the participation of 16 parliamentarians from 8 countries of the Americas (Bolivia, Canada, Colombia, Dominica, El Salvador, Haiti, Jamaica and Mexico).

Variance:

There were fewer participants than expected, as many registered participants had to cancel their participation at the last minute due to exceptional circumstances:

- 2 participants from Ecuador cancelled their participation as they were ousted from Parliament as a result of a political crisis involving the legislative branch and the electoral tribunal
- 2 participants from the Dominican Republic were unable to attend as their flights were cancelled due to bad weather conditions in Miami and New York
- The President of FIPA, from Brazil, had to cancel his trip due to health problems
- One participant from Haiti wasn't able to attend due to visa complications

2.2 Methodology

As planned, the workshop was organized by FIPA, with the support of the Centre for Trade Policy and Law (CTPL) and the Parliament of Canada.

- The FIPA Secretariat provided general coordination and organizational support to the activity (invitation, administration of funding to participants, coordination of presenters, etc.)
- CTPL was the main organization responsible for the curriculum development, and was responsible for the delivery of 4 modules (one of which was conducted by the Parliamentary Centre)
- Input regarding the curriculum was provided by Inter-American Development Bank specialists (who also conducted one module), the Canadian International Development Agency and DFAIT
- The Parliament of Canada, through its Inter-Parliamentary and International Affairs Directorate and the Canadian Section of FIPA, was responsible for the logistical coordination of the activity, including the provision of facilities, hospitality and translation services.

There was therefore no significant difference between the planned methodology and the actual methodology used for the project.

3. Results

3.1 Outputs

All of the outputs identified in the project's terms of reference were achieved. The only change, as explained above, relates to the number of participants:

- 1 trade capacity-building workshop was coordinated, with 16 participants from South, Central, North American and Caribbean legislatures
- 6 course modules were prepared and delivered to participants on the issues of: trade rules and politics (modules 1 and 2), the role of Parliament in trade and development (module 3), public consultations (module 4), trade, poverty and development (module 5) and gender and trade (module 6).
- A briefing book was distributed to each participant, containing training materials and presentations prepared by the Centre for Trade Policy and Law, the Parliamentary Centre, the Inter-American Development Bank and the North-South Institute (materials are available at www.e-fipa.org)
- A workshop evaluation was conducted and feedback forms were filled out by participants, eliciting very positive comments
- A report of proceedings was prepared (and will be distributed to participants, parliaments and other FIPA stakeholders as soon as translated)
- Two press releases were issued by the FIPA Secretariat, and a section is being developed on the FIPA website including materials, presentations, press releases, a report and a photo gallery of the event

- Photographs of the event were published in the Ottawa Embassy newspaper, featuring workshop participants; an article will also be published in the next issue of the FIPA newsletter ParlAmericas

3.2 Outcomes

According to interviews with participants, a group evaluation session, and feedback forms completed by participants the workshop successfully achieved the expected results, as outlined in the terms of reference:

Legislators have a better understanding of the rules-based international trading system and of their role in promoting a more efficient and equitable economic global governance

Modules 1 and 2, "Trade Rules and Politics," provided participants with an overview of the essential elements of trade regulations and the political dynamics surrounding them, including the fundamentals of, and rule-making in, the international trade system and trade agreement implementation and administration.

As a result, all participants in the Trade Knowledge Workshop reported that they had a more profound understanding of international trade and related issues following the event and some of them, who had little background in trade, indicated the workshop had the effect of a wake-up call on them regarding the importance of parliamentary involvement in trade policy.

Module 3 and 4, about the role of parliaments in trade policy and consultation processes, seemed to have been effective as most participants indicated willingness to take on a more active role in parliament in this area. Several parliamentarians indicated that this would serve them well in their role as legislators, particularly with regards to information sharing with constituents and parliamentary colleagues through discussions and consultation.

Participants contribute, through their parliamentary functions, to the effective oversight of trade policies implemented by governments

In the feedback forms submitted following the workshop several parliamentarians reported specifically that they would use their new found knowledge from the trade workshop in parliamentary discussions and debates. Discussions indicated that participants gained new perspectives the importance of scrutinising trade policies presented to them by their governments, both prior to and following implementation, so as to mitigate negative impacts. The importance of taking poverty and gender issues into consideration when negotiating and implementing trade agreements was also discussed.

Some participants indicated that this new information would be used as a means of improving the quality of their contribution to effective and equitable legislation on trade issues through parliamentary debate. One participant reported that she would use the information in a presentation she had to make to the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Colombian Senate (responsible for studying the proposed trade agreement between Colombia and the United States).

Participants contribute to an informed dialogue on trade and pro-poor trade policies at the country level / have a better understanding in working with constituents, business and civil society of the formulation of international trade policy agendas and the implementation of domestic complementary reforms that contribute to poverty reduction

Module 5, "Trade Liberalization and Poverty Reduction," provided participants with an overview of the implications of trade liberalization reforms on poverty reduction and strengthened the participants' capacity to analyze and identify trade policy options that have a relevant poverty-reduction impact, whereas module 5 provided information on the gender impact of trade policies.

Thanks to the analytical and practical tools acquired, legislators became better equipped to bring the needs of constituents, and of more vulnerable groups in particular, to national debate regarding trade policy, which, we hope, will have an effect on trade policy formulation.

Legislators of the hemisphere contribute to a regional dialogue on pro-poor trade and integration, by sharing their views and recommendations in the context of hemispheric institutions and coordination mechanisms

Following the presentation regarding trade liberalization and poverty reduction parliamentarians from across the Americas discussed the relationship between trade, trade liberalization, integration and poverty. With both government and opposition members, men and women, and representatives of small and large economies present at the workshop there was significant variety in the views and experiences contributed to the discussions, which were summarised in the public report for the workshop posted on the FIPA website and shared with parliamentarians and international institutions throughout the region.

Although this particular workshop's objective was not to agree on recommendations, discussions will serve as a basis to debates and recommendations at the next FIPA Plenary Meeting of FIPA. As such, we believe holding capacity-building activities more regularly will complement and enrich policy discussions held on an annual basis by FIPA member parliaments.

The activity leads to enhanced collaborative efforts with a view at developing a permanent capacity-building process for the parliamentarians of the region

The implementation group for this workshop included several organizations with significant knowledge in the areas of trade, training and the implementation of programs for parliamentarians. Given the success of the working relationship and of the even as a whole it is hoped that this will create the foundation for future similar projects. The FIPA Secretariat will present a proposal to this effect to the FIPA Executive Committee and will follow up with the institutions involved in the pilot project in order to assess their interest in a longer-term collaboration in this area.

Some of the partners involved have already expressed their interest in participating in a longer-term project.

Participants will bring back the experience to their respective Parliaments to expand the effect of the activity

As stated above almost all of the participants specifically stated that, upon their return to their respective Parliaments, they would share their new found trade knowledge and make use of it in their work, thereby increasing the overall impact of the activity. Several participants also mentioned the value of learning about the Canadian Parliamentary system and noted that this too was something they would bring back to their own parliaments.

3.3 Integration of a Gender Perspective

Gender issues were taken into consideration during the project coordination; and efforts to achieve gender balance resulted in significant participation by women parliamentarians (more than one third of participants). The event was particularly useful for these women, most of which were completely new to the issue of trade.

A module devoted to links between gender, development and trade was also built into the curriculum, allowing all participants to acquire knowledge on the differentiated impact of trade liberalization on men and women and possible policy responses.

One participant reported specifically that she would try to use the knowledge acquired to improve the participation of women in trade issues.

4. Lessons Learned

The following is an overview of lessons learned by the organizational team and the implementing institutions, and recommendations for the future, as discussed during meetings of the organisers following the conclusion of the *Trade Knowledge Workshop*. Significant consideration is given to results from the feedback forms completed by participating parliamentarians following the event.

4.1 Workshop Content

What should a future workshop contain?

Following the workshop all 6 of the modules were chosen as the 'most valuable module' by a significant percentage of participants, and no one topic received any serious degree of criticism, showing that overall the balance of content provided in the pilot project was appropriate. Parliamentarians, however, suggested several possible future subject areas that could be included in a future workshop, including interests of small economies, policy reform case strategies, and methods of channelling positive elements of globalization for local benefit.

What would be the appropriate level of difficulty?

There were some challenges because of the disparate levels of participants' background knowledge – from those with virtually no previous knowledge of international trade issues to a former trade minister. All in all, most presenters seem to have achieved a good balance

between basic and more complicated themes, and participants with higher levels of knowledge were gracious about the need for a slower pace for novices.

Though the workshops strive to be inclusive, there is a danger of pitching the technicality of the material at an overly basic level to respond to the needs of the least experienced. This may give the workshops a reputation as being overly simplistic and basic, making those with more knowledge and a broader range of experiences reluctant to participate and making it difficult to fulfill the goals of information sharing and joint problem solving.

Rather than simplifying the workshop content it may be worthwhile to encourage other donor/technical training organizations to offer foundational training programs for parliamentarians at the national or sub-regional level. FIPA's network and organizational skills could be offered to support these training efforts but it is recommended that the responsibility for such training be situated outside of the FIPA organization and at the national or sub-regional level, and that the Trade Knowledge Workshop remain at a more intermediary level.

How can we give parliamentarians a more meaningful role?

The pilot project showed that parliamentarians are eager and able to make a more substantive contribution to the program and take on more leadership. The range of interest and expertise among the participants indicated that future workshops should give parliamentarians a greater role in both directing sessions and sharing lessons learned.

Though we have to be careful about over-loading busy parliamentarians with advance preparation demands it should be possible to involve them without requiring onerous homework. One possible solution is that future programs could be divided between thematic teaching sessions in the morning and panel discussions on the same theme(s) in the afternoons. Panels could be chaired by parliamentarians and include one or two other parliamentarians as discussants as well as the academic or subject specialist responsible for the morning session. Parliamentary panellists would be asked to prepare in advance by considering and reporting on their own country's experiences with a particular issue or problem.

For example, in the morning session an economist could discuss the prospects and challenges for small economy competitiveness, and during afternoon discussions, parliamentarians would discuss their own country's experiences, lessons learned, policies and programs, etc. Panel chairs could be secured several weeks before the workshop to give them time to prepare and communicate with other potential panellists. Perhaps some of the more active members of the 2007 workshop could be approached as chairs for 2008, as this would create continuity between the workshops.

How can we help trainers to prepare for the workshop?

In helping trainers to prepare their presentations it may be useful to emphasize that the parliamentary audience is not the same as the business or academic audience to which they may be accustomed. With a parliamentary audience it is important to focus on the specific priorities and problems of elected officials and then filter out to more general principles and practices (and to avoid the academic tendency to go the opposite way - from the general to the specific).

How can we improve linkages between presentations?

There was a small degree of fragmentation between the presentations by the trainers and some disparities in presentation style. It is suggested that future workshops build in a role for content chair or training facilitator to interact directly with participants at least once a day in order to build linkages between modules, reinforce key concepts and answer lingering questions. This person would not replace the parliamentary chairs and hosts assigned to the meetings but would act as an adjunct to these chairs. As well s/he could work with the trainers in advance of the workshop to ensure consistency of tone, technicality, length of presentation, background information etc.

How can we streamline the document preparation process?

Given the cost and time requirements associated with translation, and the limited time parliamentarians generally have to read background material, it is important that documents be kept to a reasonable size and be submitted well in advance of the event. Ideally participants will be provided with a course manual, translated into their own language, which contains the PowerPoint presentation for each module. Each module should contain no more than 40 and ideally 25 slides. Two to three weeks should be allowed for translation.

Although late entries were unavoidable in the pilot project, as some presenters were brought into the program late, during future offerings every effort should be made to ensure that presentations are submitted early and adhere to page/size limits.

It is also recommended that, rather than print large numbers of ancillary documents, the organizers request that trainers provide electronic copies that can be put on the FIPA website. This takes the burden of printing off of the host country and enables parliamentarians to access them at any time, printing only what they require. A training facilitator acting as a liaison between trainers and administrative personnel would be helpful in these areas of document submission and management.

4.2 Workshop Format

How can we ensure greater participation?

Though many of the reasons for lower than expected participation were well beyond the control of the organizers (political crisis in Ecuador, snowstorm throughout the eastern seaboard, etc...) many lessons can be learned from the pilot project. Perhaps most significant is the need to seek the greatest possible flexibility on the number of attendees, and to be very clear with stakeholders that the number of participants for the event maybe anywhere within a broad range. Increasing the ideal number of participants in the event to a range of 20-40 would be reasonable.

Some other lessons to keep in mind include that planning meetings in the north during the winter may not be advisable and that, should this occur, it is useful to consider alternate travel routes and methods (such as car rental from nearby cities) in the case of emergency. Focusing on countries that do not require visas for entry into the host country is also useful in increasing the likelihood of registering new participants at the last minute.

Should the workshop be longer?

Though getting parliamentarians to Ottawa posed a number of challenges, once they arrived there did not seem to be any complaints that the workshop was too long. In fact, many expressed the opinion that it was too short. From a training perspective, the number of modules was about right but they could have been spaced out over one more day in order to alleviate pressure on the participants and provide more rest and recreation time. Based on this experience, three or four days seem appropriate, with a suggestion that the program could end at noon on the final day to allow participants a free half-day.

Based on concerns about a lack of participant attendance at an official dinner it is also recommended that future official functions be limited to lunches or receptions immediately following the teaching programs. In this way, participants are a 'captive audience', discouraging them from opting out of official functions.

Could the workshop be offered in other countries?

Canada proved a great location for hosting a workshop given the high quality of facilities and interpretation services, among others. However, from a training perspective it would not present any problem to offer this program outside of Canada, nor would it from a logistical perspective, given FIPA's experience in coordinating events throughout the hemisphere. Indeed, offering the workshop in various locations around the region would bring a greater variety of participants and sub-regional expertise, thereby providing value added to the project. If there were a training coordinator assigned, s/he could work with host country specialists to ensure substantial local content in the training program.

From the training perspective, the meeting space at the Old Ottawa City Hall was ideal. It was large enough to comfortably accommodate participants, presenters, interpreters, and observers. It was quiet and with no disturbance by outside activities. It had a wonderful anteroom for breaks and secretariat functions, washrooms were close by and there was even a nearby cafeteria for morning coffee. As well, the document translations, onsite interpretation and presentation/sound equipment were all excellent. Internet connection was greatly appreciated by the participants. Organizers should try to find a similar space if the workshop is held in another country.

How can we improve participant dynamics?

In all cases, the dynamics between groups and individuals were very good. The Canadian parliamentarians who attended and who hosted were excellent ambassadors for Canada and made substantial time commitments during a difficult parliamentary week. The trainers related well to the parliamentarians and the parliamentarians were eager and well-informed participants in group discussions. Any advance concerns we had about observers being intrusive were not born out. In fact, their presence signalled to the visitors that there is broad interest in hemispheric affairs within the Canadian governmental community and they in no way detracted from the proceedings.

Given the multilingual nature of FIPA events, however, host countries need to give significant consideration to language issues. In the future, organizers could consider having consecutive interpretation during social events.

5. Moving Forward

The *Trade Knowledge Workshop for Parliamentarians* was born of a need for more and better capacity building opportunities for Parliamentarians, particularly in the area of international trade.

The pilot project highlighted a number of similarities in the challenges faced by parliamentarians, among them the complexity of trade issues, the predominance of US and European interests in global trade, and balancing domestic interests in effective policy making. At the same time, the workshop also highlighted the diversity of FIPA members –states of different size and composition with varying levels of industrialization and development, etc.

This diversity underscores the strength of FIPA as a vehicle for sharing information, promoting dialogue and generating new understandings in the hemisphere, especially with regards to pro-poor trade policy.

Given the general success of the workshop, and the valuable lessons learned from the pilot project, the FIPA Secretariat will propose to the Executive Committee that such capacity building events be held on an annual basis, in a different sub-region of the hemisphere each year, in order to reach parliamentarians from across the region. A follow-up will be done with the institutions involved in the pilot project in order to assess their interest in a longer-term collaboration with FIPA in this area.

Questions or comments about this project or about future initiatives in this area are welcome and may be directed to Sabra Ripley, Deputy Executive Secretary at the FIPA Secretariat, info@e-fipa.org, 613-594-5222 (tel), or 613-594-4766 (fax).