

SECO and WTI jointly support development of Regional Competence Centres for Trade Law and Policy in Peru, South Africa and Vietnam

SECO funds regional knowledge hubs on trade regulation and policy with a 5 million CHF grant to assist economic development

The Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) and the World Trade Institute (WTI) of the University of Bern have joined forces in implementing a four-year academic cooperation project in three advanced developing countries. Funded by a five million CHF grant from SECO, in the framework of the Swiss economic development cooperation, the project's overall objective is the creation of regional knowledge hubs and competence centres in the field of international trade regulation in Peru, South Africa and Vietnam.

Importance of trade policy for economic development

Trade regulation and trade policy have gained in importance for the economic development of countries – large or small, developed or developing. This is increasingly recognised by governments, business communities and civil society organisations. There is greater awareness today of the central contribution that trade policy reforms can make to domestic governance, poverty alleviation, and overall development. Often however, such a contribution is held up by a lack of effective capacity of key stakeholders to devise, negotiate and implement trade policy strategies and assess their overall impact on national development objectives. One reason is that decision-makers and other key stakeholders often lack the general and specialised technical knowledge needed to influence trade policy debates.

Reaching development objectives through regional trade capacity building centres

This project in SECO's priority countries Peru, South Africa and Vietnam aims to complement efforts underway in each of the regions' partner institutions to build and strengthen trade-related research and training capacities. This involves academic training and joint research activities in trade policy, law and economics. Close cooperation will be established over the next four years between the WTI and competence centres in the partner countries. The academic partner institutions will be developed into regional knowledge hubs in the field of trade regulation. A central objective of the project is to create a sustainable and productive network of academic cooperation. This aim is to be supported by better connecting each of the three research communities and by promoting trans-regional research and mutual learning in areas of common policy interest. The project will equip the three host institutions with strengthened interdisciplinary knowledge, analytical methods and network capacities.

Focus on academic institutions, their human capital and research-related infrastructure

Training, research and infrastructure are crucial elements of the project. The objectives are the strengthening of the educational capacities of the host institutions, their human resources – students, faculty and researchers – as well as their research infrastructure. Teaching and training will be supported by academic scholarships to attend the WTI's flagship Master of International Law and Economics (MILE) programme and its yearly Summer Academy on International Trade Regulation as well as to pursue a PhD on trade-related matters at the WTI. In addition, exchange of academic staff, curriculum development and the design of graduate programmes of study in trade regulation (law, economics and international relations) shall be promoted. Institutional cooperation will enhance interdisciplinary research and allow for the supervision of doctoral students by members of the WTI network. Research fellowships, joint research projects, conferences and workshops complement these efforts and will aim to integrate foreign researchers into ongoing work under the NCCR-Trade Regulation project based at the WTI. A final project focus is on strengthening the capacity of partner institutions by upgrading their research infrastructure in areas such as specialised libraries and sophisticated research tools.

Project Partners

Peru: Pontificia Universidad Catolica del Peru, in Lima. See <http://www.pucp.edu.pe>

South Africa: The Mandela Institute, School of Law, University of the Witwatersrand, in Johannesburg. See <http://www.mandelainstitute.org>

Vietnam: Foreign Trade University, in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City. See <http://en.ftu.edu.vn>

World Trade Institute, University of Bern

Founded in 1999, the World Trade Institute (WTI) at the University of Bern is one of the world's leading institutions of advanced learning in the field of trade regulation. It is involved in graduate training, research and advisory services. Its flagship programme is the Master of International Law and Economics (MILE). The WTI also offers a Summer Academy, Distance Learning Programmes in cooperation with the United Nations Institute on Training and Research, and tailor-made courses. Since 2005, it has hosted the Swiss National Centre of Competence in Research (NCCR) on Trade Regulation, a 12-year project funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation, involving more than 50 projects and a network of 80 researchers. For further information please contact the Director of Studies Pierre Sauvé (pierre.sauve@wti.org).

State Secretariat for Economic Affairs/SECO

The Economic Cooperation and Development Division at the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) is responsible for the planning and implementation of economic and trade policy measures with developing countries (economic development cooperation, the States of Eastern Europe and Central Asia (transition aid), and the new member States of the European Union (contribution to the EU enlargement). SECO has two main objectives: to support the integration of partner countries into the global economy, and to promote their sustainable economic growth, thus contributing to poverty reduction. In order to do this, SECO intervenes principally to promote stable economic framework conditions, to strengthen competitiveness and to support trade diversification, to mobilise Swiss and foreign investment and to improve the basic infrastructure. For further information, please contact Hans-Peter Egler (hans-peter.egler@seco.admin.ch) or visit the following website: www.seco-cooperation.admin.ch