To maximise their influence over the outcome of trade negotiations, it is crucial that developing countries put the right foundations in place. As experienced negotiators point out, it is extremely difficult to execute an astute negotiating strategy if political leaders are not sufficiently engaged, there are few skilled personnel in the trade ministry, information is of dubious quality or government institutions function poorly.

This chapter examines the steps that developing countries can take to tackle the underlying constraints that impede effective negotiation, even with relatively few resources. While negotiators have control over some of the reform measures proposed in this chapter, others rely on decisions being made by ministers. However, negotiators can be important advocates for reform, and it is hoped that some of the lessons from other countries will provide inspiration.

Make the links between trade negotiations and development

As we have seen ‘knowing your interests’ is a vital pre-requisite for effective negotiation, yet negotiators from developing countries often find themselves working in the dark, with little clarity on their country’s interests (Jones et al. 2010: 36).

This lack of clarity is often symptomatic of two deeper problems. First, policies in trade and related areas (such as industrial and innovation policy) are often poorly articulated. If there is no clear policy direction, and if it is not clear where and how international trade fits into the country’s development strategy, then positions in trade negotiations are likely to be merely reactions to either the immediate needs of domestic lobbyists or the agendas set by other countries.
Moreover, if links between trade and the wider development policy are not clearly articulated, then there is a risk that trade will be seen as an end in itself. For instance, a country might negotiate successfully for increased market access for its services exporters, but if no attention has been paid to upgrading the competitiveness of these companies, they may not be able to make use of the new market access. As negotiators emphasise, it is vital that a country’s negotiating objectives are clearly rooted in its wider development strategy; without this, any concessions gained in the negotiating room may turn out to have little value in practice.

A country’s negotiating objectives need to be clearly rooted in its wider development strategy; without this, any concessions gained in the negotiating room may turn out to have little value in practice.

Setting out a clear policy direction for international trade, and making this a publicly available statement that is regularly updated, provides an important reference point for negotiators and stakeholders alike. Forging such a policy requires strong political leadership. While it is vital to solicit inputs from stakeholders, they typically have narrow and relatively short-term interests. Ideally, government should take a broader view, filtering competing interests, identifying short-term priorities and working with key stakeholders to determine the long-term policy direction (Mkandawire 2010). Developing a medium-term vision and strategy for the role international trade should play in a country’s wider development is a challenging process, yet Mauritius has managed this process effectively for many years (Case Study 23).

### Ensuring sufficient priority is given to negotiations

**Are there clear national priorities for trade negotiations?**

Is there a [section on trade in the national development strategy](#)? If not, how might this be developed?

**Are there clear policies in areas related to trade (e.g. industry, agriculture, innovation)?** If so, how might these policy objectives be furthered during the negotiations?

**Are politicians fully informed about the salience of the trade negotiating issues for national development?** What steps can be taken to increase awareness among politicians and the wider public?