

***Regional Seminar on
WTO Doha Ministerial and the New Trade Round: An African Perspective
25-26, March 2002, Lusaka, Zambia***

1. Background:

The 4th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) was concluded at Doha, Qatar in November 2001 with the adoption of a Ministerial Declaration albeit mild opposition from a few countries and the civil society. Now it is time for not only evaluation of the outcome of the Doha Conference but also to prepare for a New Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations. If we look back, a lot had been expected from Doha Conference by the poor countries especially on correcting the implementation concerns arising out of the Uruguay Round Agreements. Infact, better market access and a solution to the implementation issues of the existing agreements had dominated the agenda of the south in the run up to Doha.

The poor countries felt that the various measures in favour of developing and Least-Developed Countries (LDCs) in the Uruguay Round Agreements have remained as mere promises because of the indifferent attitude of the rich countries' towards them. For instance, Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) provisions enshrined in the Agreements have never been implemented by the rich countries in letter and spirit. Moreover, these provisions were never enforceable elements but they remained as best endeavour clause therefore no legal binding. Implementation issues pertaining to Agreements such as Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPs), Agriculture, Textiles and Clothing, Sanitary and Phyto-sanitary Measures (SPS) and Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) have been a serious concern for the poor countries since the establishment of the WTO in 1995.

As regards the S&D Treatment for the LDCs, there have been some initiatives at multilateral, regional and bilateral fields such as the Integrated Framework for Trade Related Technical Cooperation (IF), the European Union initiative of Everything But Arms (EBA) and the US initiative titled the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA). But none of these initiatives seem to be comprehensive enough to bringing the poor countries into the mainstream of the multilateral trading system.

This was the background by which the 4th Ministerial Conference was held. During the run up to the ministerial, the poor countries had pushed hard for including several issues of their concern on the Doha agenda and hoped sincerely that those aspects would be addressed before taking up new issues and deciding on a new round of negotiations.

However, despite their opposition to the introduction of new issues and also on launching a New Round of Negotiations at the Ministerial, some of the new issues still found place on the agenda. This was done at the last moment unmindful of the suggestions of the poor countries that an assessment of the negative impacts of the Uruguay Round negotiations on their economics, would be a pre requisite for launching a new round. Succumbing to sustained pressure from the rich countries many poor members, which had opposed to the new round earlier, changed their stance, and agreed to launch a new round at Doha. This change in stance was reflected in the consensus arrived at Doha vis-a-vis a new trade round.

Therefore, it is appropriate for the trade policy makers and the civil society organisations in Africa to meet together and make an objective assessment of the outcomes of the Doha Ministerial Conference and devise strategies for the New Round of Negotiations. Further, it is

timely that efforts be made towards exchanging ideas so that the stakeholders will be familiar with the issues and they have the capacity to intervene in the respective levels to safeguard their interests. It is expected that this exercise would help to draw up a proactive agenda and make sincere endeavour to influence national, regional and international policy debate on making the world trade system work for the world's poorest countries and people.

2. Context

The Doha Ministerial Conference of the WTO set the stage for launching a New Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations. The Ministerial Declaration contained a detailed work programme, which has bearings on national economies and well-being of the people of the member countries. There are 19 subjects in the work programme and the time stipulated for completing negotiations under this activity is 1st January 2005. The WTO has already begun preparations for its meeting schedule and work programme for negotiations. Therefore, there is every possibility that the various Negotiations Group would meet shortly to finalise their work plans.

3. Seminar

Against this backdrop, Consumer Unity & Trust Society-Africa Resource Centre (CUTS-ARC) is hosting a regional seminar titled "WTO Doha Ministerial and the New Trade Round: An African Perspective" at Lusaka, Zambia. The seminar is to make an assessment of the work programme adopted at the Doha Ministerial conference from the regional perspective and also devise strategies for future research and advocacy. The objective is to keep the stakeholders updated about the developments so that they could prepare for the New Round of Negotiations scheduled to start soon. This exercise would be done by bringing together policy makers and the civil society and business representatives on a common platform to share each other's perceptions on the Doha work plan. The participants would comprise of representatives from the government, inter governmental organizations, consumer and research organizations, business, media and academia.

4. Objectives

The specific objectives of the seminar are:

- to share the experiences of African countries/delegates at the Doha Ministerial Conference for benefit of the stakeholders.
- to identify issues pertaining to countries in the region which were incorporated in the Doha ministerial Declaration.
- to suggest areas where the countries' need to focus in the new round of negotiations so that their best interests are protected.
- to gather the views of the stakeholders on the inclusion of the new issues in the WTO work programme
- to provide input to the national, regional and multilateral debates through governmental, intergovernmental and civil society channels to ensure that the genuine concerns of the poor are adequately reflected in the New Round of WTO Negotiations

5. Issues to be discussed

The following specific issues shall be discussed in a regional a point of view during the seminar:

- WTO Doha Ministerial Conference and emerging scenario for the trading system in the region
- Doha Declaration on creating an enabling environment for the LDCs
- A New Round of Negotiations with New Issues: Implications for the LDCs
- Role of Regional Trade Arrangements in the WTO Negotiations
- Priorities of Civil Society Groups in the New Round of Negotiations

6. Expected Outcome

The expected outcomes of the seminar are:

- drafting a research agenda based on the Doha outcomes for the benefit of countries in the Southern and Eastern African Region
- finalising an advocacy document, which could be useful for the stake holders for the new round of negotiations.

7. Organiser

Consumer Unity & Trust Society-Africa Resource Centre, Lusaka, Zambia, is an international public interest civil society organisation engaged in research and advocacy on international trade, sustainable development and economic equity issues from Southern perspective.

8. Participants

Thirty participants representing government, inter-governmental organisations, development and Civil Society organisations actively involved in trade policy debate, sustainable development from the Southern and Eastern African region would participate in this Seminar.

9. Venue

The Seminar will be held at Mulungushi Village Complex, Lusaka. This is a beautiful modern Zambian village complex built near the Manda hill. It is situated nearly five k.m. away from the city centre.

10. For further information, please contact:

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