

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

As a follow up to the 4th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) held at Doha in November 2001, a regional seminar was organised by Consumer Unity and Trust Society-Africa Resource Centre (CUTS-ARC) at Lusaka on 25-26 March 2002 to discuss its outcome. The two-day event focussed on Doha Ministerial Declaration and the work programme adopted for trade liberalisation.

The specific purpose of the seminar was to make an assessment of the Doha work programme and also devise strategies for future research and advocacy, especially for the non-state actors of the southern and eastern African countries. It brought together 40 trade policy experts belonging to government and inter-governmental agencies, civil society and business organisations hailing from six countries in the region viz. Mozambique, Kenya, Uganda, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

Background and Overview

The experience of the Uruguay Round has not been very inspiring for the poor countries. Many clauses of the Uruguay Round (UR) Agreements of 1995 relevant to poor countries have remained mere promises. Implementation difficulties 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. The Special & Differential (S&DT) provisions for the poor countries were never implemented in letter and spirit.

Out of the various Agreements, TRIPs and Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) are very crucial for African countries, as they are closely linked to two important aspects of Africa's development - public health and food security to the people. As regards the S&DT provisions for the LDCs, there have been some initiatives at the multilateral, regional and bilateral levels such as the Integrated Framework for Trade Related Technical Co-operation (IF), the European Union (EU) initiative of Everything But Arms (EBA) and the US initiative entitled the Africa Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA). But none of these initiatives seem to be comprehensive enough for bringing the poor countries into the mainstream of the multilateral trading system.

During the run up to the Doha Ministerial Conference, the poor countries had pushed hard for including several issues of their concern into 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 the launching of a new round of trade negotiations at the Ministerial, some of the new issues still found place in the agenda.

It is, therefore expected that this seminar would help in drawing up a proactive agenda and influence national, regional and international policy debate on making the world trade system work for the world's poorest countries and people.

Recommendations

The seminar concluded with the adoption of separate sets of recommendations for research and advocacy work in certain critical areas identified by the delegates. They are as follows:

- The capacity building exercise provided by the multilateral and the regional organisations should be a targeted exercise so that the policy makers, the negotiators and the civil society representatives should be adequately equipped to participate meaningfully in the various parleys taking place at the WTO.
- Strengthen accountability in the whole process of trade policy making and the country representatives should be held accountable for decisions which they take during international negotiations.

- It is important that the delegates assess whether African countries have the capacity to derive benefits from new commitments and obligations, which they may undertake at the WTO.
- In order to enhance the analytical capacity of the countries in the region to effectively perform at the WTO negotiations, it was suggested that further research must be conducted on various issues such as supply-side constraints; national and regional capacity to implement WTO Agreements; need-assessment for capacity building of stake holders; and market access issues for agriculture like tariff reduction, subsidy and income support schemes.
- The role of advocacy has been underlined in the context of bringing trade and economic development issues into the mainstream of the policy debate at the national, regional and international forums. At the national level, the advocacy efforts should be targeted to policy makers, particularly Members of Parliament for increasing awareness on the WTO processes.

Regarding WTO processes, the general assessment of the meeting was that the positions of poor countries have been weak in the past, because they were divided and ill-prepared for the talks. Therefore, it is necessary to correct the past by initiating pro-active policies both by the government and civil society groups.

Africa in World Trade: A Fact Sheet

- In 2001, Africa's share in world merchandise exports and imports was 2.28 and 2.08 percent respectively.
- The regional aggregate hides very divergent trends at the country level. South Africa and the eight major fuel exporters account for two-thirds of total exports from Africa.
- In imports the situation is opposite, other African countries (excluding South Africa and major fuel exporters) account for more than 50 percent of the total African imports.
- The regional trade surplus reflects a substantial trade surplus of the oil exporting African countries.
- Primary products account for three quarter of African merchandise exports in 2001.
- Intra-regional trade in Africa is estimated to have decreased since the mid-1990s, keeping the share of intra-African trade in total trade at 8 percent.