

CUTS-Commonwealth Secretariat Session at the WTO Public Forum 2008

The Missing Link between Trade Openness and Poverty Reduction

The Role of the Multilateral Trading System

24 September 2008, 1400-1600 hrs, Room W, Ground Floor, WTO Main Building

This Session will be held at the 2008 WTO Public Forum, 'Trading into the Future' under the Sub-theme 2: 'Challenges and Opportunities facing the Main Actors and Stakeholders'. It (Session 3 of the WTO Public Forum 2008) will be jointly organised by CUTS International, India and Commonwealth Secretariat, London.

The Theme

A discussion on the theme is called for to understand the impact of trade liberalisation on poverty reduction. The conception of the relationships between international trade, growth and poverty reduction have begun to receive increased attention in recent years. International trade has led to higher economic growth in case of many countries of the world. On the other hand, despite rapid liberalisation and much greater openness, some countries have failed to materialise high growth rates in a consistent manner. This suggests that its link to poverty reduction has not been as strong and direct as to economic growth. The session intends to capture impact of trade-led growth on poverty under the WTO regime while analysing the need for pre-conditions and accompanying reforms that are required to benefit from trade liberalisation. Also in the context of present Doha Round of negotiations by the WTO Members, development remains an important part of the system and is still valid. Keeping the 'development' dimension central, it becomes imperative to identify/ recognise implications of likely Doha-induced policy change in selected key areas like agriculture, manufacturing and services sector on the poor within LDCs/developing countries.

Thus, the objective of the Session is to locate the feasibility role of trade liberalisation under the WTO regime for poverty alleviation and how trade policy in the context of the Doha Round can foster some external discipline to insulate economies against shocks and ensures that the gains from trade are delivered in an equitable manner.

The Questions

- What is the evidence of trade influencing growth and poverty reduction? How well can the experiences of trade-development-poverty linkages in developing countries be generalised?
- How important are complimentary policies and institutions in materialising the benefits of trade? To what extent multilateral trade negotiations under the WTO can assist developing countries to take care of these complementary policy requirements?
- What could be the likely implications of Doha-induced policy change in sectors such as agriculture, manufacturing and services on the poor in developing countries? To what extent the interest of LDCs and small vulnerable states related to 'trading out of poverty' has been catered for in the Doha Round?
- In the light of Doha Round experiences, how realistically one can expect the WTO's future role in promoting trade-led development in poor developing countries? What are the opportunities and challenges facing the major actors and stakeholders in this regard?

The Panel

Moderator Atul Kaushik, Director, CUTS Geneva Resource Centre

Speakers

- Selim Raihan, Faculty, Department of Economics, University of Dhaka, Bangladesh
- Simon Evenett, Professor, International Trade and Economic Development, University of St. Gallen, Switzerland
- Mohammad A. Razzaque, Economic Adviser, Economic Affairs Division, International Trade & Regional Co-operation Section, Commonwealth Secretariat, London
- Veena Jha, Visiting Professorial Fellow, Warwick University, UK
- Richard S. Newfarmer, Special Representative to the UN and WTO, The World Bank in Geneva

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