

Foreword

CUTS is well known among trade policy makers, with its main focus on consumer advocacy, preparing information briefs/studies on issues of interest to developing countries, and augmenting the capacity of negotiators and policy makers. Examples abound, most recent being the very useful discussions on growth and equity issues related to trade policy, and the diverse views and constructive suggestions on the Doha Round trade negotiations. This book is another such effort arising out of CUTS' 'South Asian Forum for International Trade' (SAFIT) project, which identifies areas of common interest for SACs in the Doha Round and provides a basis for better coordinating and improving their negotiating strategies.

CUTS has worked for seven years on its SAFIT project, which is now in its third phase. This project has *inter alia* provided a forum for constructive interaction amongst the South Asian Countries (SACs), helped by research and informed assessment of different issues in the Doha Round. The studies in this book are an important result of this project.

South Asia is a region with relatively high population increase and density. It includes a member of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS), two members of the Next-11 high growth countries identified by Goldman Sachs, some Least-Developed Economies, and countries which have both complementary as well as conflicting trade negotiations interests. A study of South Asian concerns therefore covers

several different perspectives, and while the main focus of this book is on issues emphasised by SACs, its analysis and results would also be of wider interest for others.

Since the context of this book relates to negotiations, there would obviously be different views or emphasis with reference to individual issues. In fact, that is the case even among individual SACs, and the book clarifies both the overlapping or distinct interests, as well as provides a good basis for informed debate and interaction among different nations.

The Doha Development Round negotiations have been marked by many more coalition groups than earlier, based on regions (e.g., Africa, ACP, Arab Group, ASEAN, GRULAC), and different interests or issues (SVEs, RAMs, LDCs, Friends of Ambition in NAMA, G-10, Cotton-4, NAMA-11, Paragraph 6 countries, G-20, G-33, Tropical Products, W-52, Friends of Fish). These coalitions in the Doha Round show much greater maturity compared to the previous negotiations. For example, in G-20 we have a group of both agriculture exporting and importing developing countries which came up with common positions, Cotton-4 group has a core membership of four but has considerable support base from others, and some coalitions include both developed and developing countries.

With enhanced capability and information, the various coalition groups are able to better co-ordinate their positions amongst their members and with other coalitions. However, the SAFIT project of CUTS found that additional major possibilities existed to improve the co-ordination and exchange of relevant information amongst SACs.

The collection of articles in this book prepared under the SAFIT project has been guided by the objective to conduct *“in-depth research to explore specific areas in which SACs exhibit common interests and evidence-based advocacy was conducted to persuade policy-makers from these countries*

to hold more inclusive consultations at national and regional level to frame negotiating positions on the basis of such interests, a move that may result in more cooperation in future.” It is noteworthy that these initiatives have borne fruit in terms of more structured and frequent co-ordination meetings on negotiating matters amongst the SACs. These studies have therefore already given important positive results, which need to be assessed by the participants as well as others who could potentially make similar efforts.

The articles address topics within the Doha Round negotiations. Whenever a book is produced on issues covered by any on-going negotiations, there will always be developments which are new compared to the scope of the publication. However, much of the road in these negotiations has been traversed and provides a good basis for these studies. In addition, as shown by the Chairs’ texts brought out on April 21, 2011, some progress has been made even in recent months. Thus, the WTO Members are in a position to assess past experience and determine the best ways to move forward. These studies will play a useful role in such an exercise.

As in the case of any negotiations, there are always at least two views about any issue. The objective has to be to reach a “landing” zone which gives a balanced result for all concerned, while keeping in mind certain underlying principles of special and differential treatment. Many of the issues emphasised in different fora are already part of the progress made under the Doha Round negotiations. These include for example, market opening with less than full reciprocity for developing countries, correcting distortions in the international trading system in particular for agriculture markets, gradual introduction of reform, balancing market opening for products of interest to developing countries with steps to address preference erosion, developing additional rules or mechanisms to address non-tariff barriers (NTBs),

no requirement for least-developed countries (LDCs) to reduce their bound tariff levels, and improving trade rules and infrastructure to facilitate trade and enhance efficiency.

The on-going developments in the international trading system, whether it is the proliferation of regional trade agreements, growing inter-linkages through supply chains, new concerns arising due to food price volatility or climate change issues, they all require a stronger and more equitable system of multilateral trade rules. This is precisely the objective of the Doha Development Round.

Initiatives such as this book, which try to provide better researched information for supporting coordinated efforts to reach common goals, make a positive contribution towards this objective. I hope this book encourages further similar work to help clarify the underlying issues and concerns for others so that nations can move more easily towards greater consensus.

June 2011

Harsha Vardhan Singh
Deputy Director General, WTO