

Project Inception Workshop
WTO Doha Round & South Asia-Linking Civil Society with Trade Negotiations
Phase-II
Jaipur, India, 21 & 22 April 2006

Objective

To have a through discuss on the issues and research methodology of the project “*Linking Civil Society with Trade Negotiations – Phase II*”, and also finalising on the research issues, hypothesis and the methodologies of carrying out the new research work.

Background

CUTS initiated the first phase of the collaborative project “WTO Doha Round & South Asia – Linking Civil Society with trade Negotiations” along with other research partners in the five South Asian countries i.e. India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Pakistan and Srilanka on the five important issues of the “July Frame work Agreement” namely Agriculture, Non Agriculture Market Access, Trade in Services, Trade Facilitation and Development Dimensions in January 2005. The project was launched on the premises that the outcome of the Doha Round will have significant implications on international trade and national development and this is more so for developing countries. International trade is being increasingly linked with livelihoods and associated national development (poverty reduction) strategies. The novelty of the project’s approach laid in seeking country positions on these issues from participating countries and then find common ground in order to develop a common South Asian position for the Hong Kong Ministerial and beyond.

The Doha Round of negotiations was expected to come to an end by December 2005, when the sixth Ministerial Conference of the WTO took place in Hong Kong, China. However, given the realpolitik of negotiations, predictably the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) launched in 2001 could not be concluded in Hong Kong, members just managed to achieve a modest outcome. In agriculture, the so-called core modalities, the formulas for cutting tariffs and subsidies, are left unresolved. This unfinished business includes the intractable issues of the relevant liberalisation thresholds for developed and developing countries, the treatment of sensitive products, developing countries’ self-designated Special Products, the Special Safeguard Mechanism, as well as disciplines on food aid. In NAMA, as in agriculture, the core modalities remain to be negotiated, within the same time period, including the vexed questions of the number of coefficients in the Swiss formula, the meaning of “less than full reciprocity” for developing countries, the development of sectoral initiatives and the treatment of preference erosion. In services, there seems to have been a step backwards, the new text, instead of obliging members to enter into plurilateral market access negotiations, simply requires that they “shall consider such requests”. And finally, the commitment in respect of market access for the products of least developed countries is weakened by the fact that the obligation relates only to, at least, 97% of products originating from LDCs (defined at the tariff line level) and there is no deadline set for the call to progressively achieve compliance with the Hong Kong obligation.

Context

Although there is impasse in the negotiation process, the recently concluded ministerial did throw some more pertinent issues for future research and advocacy. Based on the Hong Kong Ministerial declaration, five cross cutting core issues has been selected for further research work to be carried out by the five research partners in the five south Asian countries. The researchers will analyse the possible changes could take place in the negotiating position of a country in the light of Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration which would help to further consolidate the positions of the South Asian countries. On each issues covered in a particular

topic, the research will take into consideration concerns and perceptions of different stakeholders (NGOs, trade bodies, industry bodies, trade unions, WTO experts, women group, etc). The organisations from five South Asian countries would be undertaking the research on the following areas.

- Services
- Non Tariff Barriers
- Preference Erosion and Aid for Trade
- Agriculture: Special Products and Special Safeguard Measures
- Duty and Quota Free Market Access for LDCs

The Event

To formally initiate the research project in a close group workshop of representatives of project partners, advisory committee and few other select experts to give direction to the research work. The meeting would be of one and a half-day

1st session (Day 1)

Five key researchers from the five South Asian countries would present the overview of current situation of country background study and literature review done on the specific issue, covering areas like the ministerial declarations and different provisions under WTO, country's experiences so far with respect to the five South Asian countries. The sessions would be followed by comments and perspective of the advisory members and their brief presentation on the light of this.

2nd Session (Day 2)

The researchers would present the overall research methodology, starting from the how they would address the research issues and proceed to carry out the exploratory research work, the hypothesis to be tested, methods of collecting data, techniques applied to draw inferences and other aspects of the research work. This would be followed by expert comments from the members of the advisory committee and their views on carrying out the project.

The Programme: Project Inception Workshop

Venue: Hotel Country Inn & Suites, Jaipur-302 001

Time: 0930hrs to 1800 hrs

Date: 21 & 22 April 2006 (Friday & Saturday)