

Briefing Paper

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The Doha Development Agenda: The State of Play of the Negotiations

Background

The current Negotiating Round of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) began in Doha, Qatar in 2001, and encompasses a broad set of issues, falling under what is known as the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). The Doha Round is still ongoing because of an apparent divide between interests of developed and developing countries, many of whom were unhappy with the results of the previous Uruguay Round of negotiations. As a result, the “development” dimension runs through the DDA mandate.

Principles underpinning the negotiations

The first principle is referred to as the principle of **single undertaking**, meaning that all items negotiated will be considered as an indivisible package, in other words, “nothing is agreed, until everything is agreed.”¹ This ensures that there are no opportunities for countries or groups of countries to pick and choose among agreements or to opt out of particular obligations. The second principle is one of **transparency and inclusiveness**, meaning that WTO councils and committees are open to all Members, and that all countries have access to the same information. However, in spite of this, some imbalances remain, for instance the processes of “concentric circles” - the famous Room E and Green Room meetings which aim at facilitating convergence by key, mostly developed-country, players. Finally, there is the principle of **special and differential treatment (SDT)**, which takes into account the particular situations of developing countries and attempts to level the playing field by providing flexibility on some matters. For instance, developing countries are allowed longer periods in which to implement certain agreements. Some industrialised countries take the position that an ambitious Market Access Round could further the goal of development. This position is worrying some developing countries, who feel that the focus of the Doha Round is now shifting from development, as the DDA mandate suggests, to market access.

The negotiations themselves

The negotiations under the DDA focus on Agriculture, Market Access for Industrial Products, Trade in Services, Intellectual Property and WTO Rules, and are undertaken in respective Negotiating Groups.

Agriculture continues to be the key issue for the DDA, whose success may well hinge on it. The aim of the negotiations, within this sector and in all others, is generally to liberalise trade. The negotiations have been difficult, primarily because of the widely divergent views and positions of members. A particularly tricky issue is that of trade distorting domestic support for agricultural production, such as the policies of the EU and US to grant substantial agricultural subsidies to their farmers. Other issues include reducing export subsidies and improving market access.

In February 2008, the Chairman of this Negotiating Group submitted a revised paper outlining both possible areas of convergence and other areas where gaps need to be bridged with regard to the ‘three pillars’ of domestic sup-

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port, market access, and export competition. While there has been progress on some issues, much remains to be done in order to reduce the number of the brackets in the Chair's text, and come to final agreement on modalities (these are methods and targets – including numerical ones – by which to achieve desired objectives).

All products not covered under the Agricultural negotiations are discussed within the framework of NAMA, which stands for **Non-Agricultural Market Access**. In practice, such products include industrial and mining products, fish and fish products as well as forestry products, which have, in past years accounted for over 90% of the world's merchandise exports.² The main objective is to promote trade through tariff reductions on these products. However, reductions cannot happen at the same rate for all countries (developing countries frequently maintain higher tariffs than their industrialised counterparts). Therefore the negotiations revolve around a Swiss formula that countries can use to reduce tariffs. According to the WTO, the formula will provide “transparency (every Member will know how the other will reduce its tariffs); efficiency (simpler process than request/offer approach), equity (tariff reduction depends on rules rather than “bargaining power”) and predictability (easy to foresee the results of the negotiations).”³ What remains then is to settle on coefficients for the formula, which will allow for it to yield different values for tariff reductions for countries at different levels of development. Developing countries have raised concerns about the implications of tariff cuts on their regional arrangements.

Negotiations on **Services** aim to achieve liberalisation on trade in services ranging from health care provision to architecture to voice-mail telecommunications, and have taken two tracks: consultations on a multilateral text to be adopted at the same time as those on Agriculture and NAMA modalities; and the preparation of a signalling exercise on services. The latter is intended to be a series of ongoing bilateral consultations to encourage key countries to consider the benefits of making substantial concessions when it comes to improving market access for trade in services. Challenges in this area include the issue of temporary movement of workers, especially considering that developed countries are likely to see this as a migration rather than a trade issue.⁴

The latest with regard to negotiations on **Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS)** is the submission on 13 March of a proposal on disclosure requirements, which would require patent applicants to disclose the use of any biological/traditional knowledge, with non compliance resulting in patent revocation.⁵ The proposal has gained the support of numerous developing countries, while developed countries are largely not in favour. The EC is of the view that the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) is more appropriate than the WTO for discussions on disclosure; and the US is of the view that the proposal would not be effective at achieving its purpose.

Since 2001, there has been increasing momentum to clarify **WTO Rules** on Antidumping, Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, and Regional Trade Agreements to enhance their application, while preserving their basic principles and also ensuring that they support the development aspirations of developing countries. The Chairman of this Negotiating Group has circulated certain texts that did not please all Members, some of whom have requested a new revised text that will take into consideration their previous proposals. The Chairman has suggested giving Members a document reflecting discussions to date.

To keep up to date with negotiations in the Doha Development Round, visit the WTO website at http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/dda_e.htm

Footnotes:

1)WTO website - http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/work_organiz_e.htm

2)WTO website - http://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/markacc_e/nama_negotiations_e.htm

3)Ibid.,

4)For a QUNO Briefing Paper on Temporary Movement of Workers, visit <http://www.quno.org/geneva/pdf/economic/Discussion/BP-GATS-Mode4.pdf>

5)Bridges: ICTSD Weekly Trade News Digest - <http://www.ictsd.org/weekly/08-03-19/story4.htm>