

Introduction

A major challenge for most developing countries is how to use ongoing international negotiations and existing multilateral trade agreements as instruments for increasing their volume of trade and access to export markets and by so doing improve the quality of life of their citizens. A common constraint that exists among these countries is their limited capacity to both understand, and negotiate in the various international fora.

About two years ago, the Commonwealth Secretariat commenced publication of its trade briefs as part of its on going mandate to integrate its developing member states more fully into the multilateral trading system. These briefs are intended to be a source of information, analysis and guidance on trade issues and disputes for officials and policy makers in the ministries of trade, industry and finance, private sector associations, non-governmental organisations and overseas missions and embassies of Commonwealth developing countries.

The major objective of the briefs is to provide information on the implications of, and options available to, Commonwealth developing countries on various issues presently under negotiation and in dispute at the World Trade Organisation. Experts were asked to write relatively short and concise briefs on a variety of issues at the national, regional and international levels. Although there is an emphasis on issues and disputes in the WTO, some of the other subject covered are in the context of the ACP-EU Negotiations of Regional Economic Partnership Agreements (REPAs) and developed countries preference initiative to least developing countries.

Structure of Volume one

The first volume – “Multilateral and Regional Trade Issues for Developing Countries” - is divided into three sections: Issues in the WTO, WTO Disputes, and, Regional Issues:

Section One contains six briefs on present areas of interests and concerns to developing countries in the WTO. The section provides an analysis and seeks to present a case to policy makes of the effective use of WTO Agreements and Rules by developed countries to deny benefits to developing countries.

Section TWO contains seven briefs on WTO disputes; two of which deals with the use by developed countries of subsidies and safeguard actions, one deal with the dispute over genetic modified organisms, and another two deals the India – European dispute on GSP Conditionalities and the India-EC-USA textile dispute over rules of origin respectively. The remaining two

briefs present an analysis of two potential disputes that if successful would have serious implications for developing countries economies.

Section Three contains eight briefs. Six of these briefs provide an overview of the ACP-EU Negotiations, the analysis of negotiations of Economic Partnership with the EU from a Caribbean and an Eastern and Southern Africa perspective, and a review of regional economic integration from the Eastern and Southern African experience. The final two briefs deals with an analysis of the Rules of Origin of the United States Africa Growth and Opportunity Act and the European Union's reform of its Common Agricultural Policy.

The selection of Hot Topic briefs presented in this book is by no means exhaustive. The Commonwealth Secretariat continues to produce other briefs on topical issues as they develop. I would invite you to visit the Commonwealth Website, <http://www.commonwealth.org> for a review of other briefs in the Commonwealth Hot Topics series as well as our other newsletter, "the Doha Development News".

For electronic and hard copy versions of both the Commonwealth Hot Topic series and the Doha Development News please contact:

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