

## Foreword

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This publication brings together a selection of recent Commonwealth research and analytical work on small states' participation in the multilateral trading system (MTS). The chapters have been written and reviewed by outstanding experts, both practitioners and academics, in the field of international trade. While sharing their findings and extensive experience, they have successfully managed to tailor their work to the special case of small states, many of which are World Trade Organization (WTO) members. This is a significant addition to the existing body of literature on multilateral trade, given its approach and orientation.

The timeliness of this publication cannot be overstated. The MTS is gaining momentum following the successful conclusion of the WTO Bali Ministerial Conference with an agreement reached on trade facilitation and a number of decisions made on development issues, including for the least-developed countries (LDCs) and the small vulnerable economies (SVEs). Indeed, the Commonwealth is a firm supporter of a rules-based, transparent, free and fair MTS that enhances trade liberalisation and developmental objectives, while taking into account the special requirements of SVEs and LDCs. The Commonwealth is also strongly committed to working with its member countries towards successfully completing the Doha Development Round of Trade Negotiations.

The inherent characteristics of small states have led to their increasing marginalisation in the global economy. Despite the rapid growth of developing countries' share in global trade, small states' share continues to decline. There is, therefore, a strong case for identifying and recognising their specific problems at the international level and addressing these in a manner that will better facilitate their integration and be conducive to their development imperatives. Recent developments at the WTO are indeed encouraging. The Trade Facilitation Agreement will allow for reductions in trade costs, a major problem faced by small states, given their remoteness from markets and high transport costs. Furthermore, this agreement promises to boost world trade, thereby creating the potential for jobs and income within small states. This is an unprecedented opportunity for small states; with the support of development partners, including the Commonwealth Secretariat, small states can achieve meaningful benefits.

The Commonwealth is focused on ensuring that its members do not stay at the periphery of global development initiatives, including the trading system. Its

research-led work provides member countries with informed analysis to assist in their decision-making process on trade policies and trade negotiations. Our proactive and forward-looking approach enables the Commonwealth Secretariat to respond to topical trade issues in a timely manner. In that regard, we have recently launched the Trade Policy Discussion Paper series with the objective of stimulating debate on key trade policy issues that have an impact on the Commonwealth and the global economy. The Commonwealth in-country programmes and those being implemented at the regional level are focused on helping member countries improve their supply response capacity and unleash their trade potential through improved trade competitiveness. Trade capacity-building and institutional strengthening through the Hubs and Spokes Programme has been instrumental in supporting African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and regions in their trade policies and trade negotiations. Dedicated advisory support has also been provided to small states through the Commonwealth Small States Office in Geneva.

The authors of this publication have come up with useful and innovative ideas for improving the functioning of the MTS, particularly from the perspective of small states with a view to enhancing their participation. It is my expectation that these insights will contribute to the ongoing debate on reform of the system and, more generally, on global economic governance. It is also my view that trade will have an increasingly greater role in the post-2015 development agenda.

I welcome this important publication and the value that it brings to Commonwealth members and the MTS.

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