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Agriculture and Rice Trade Liberalisation: Potential Implications for South Asian Countries

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Background

The Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture made significant progress on establishing new rules governing the operation of the sector and international trade in agricultural goods. The new regulations required, among other things, the replacement of non-tariff barriers with tariffs (known as tarrification), tariff-cuts, and reduction in domestic support and export subsidies. The initial reforms, however, did not bring about the expected substantial improvement in global competition and market access, and agriculture has therefore remained a key area of negotiations in the WTO. There is a strong pressure from a number of developing and developed countries for further and fuller liberalisation of this sector, and the attitudes of trade negotiations seem to suggest that the prospects of continued progress in global trade liberalization now critically hinge on commitments for further opening-up of the agriculture sector.

Although most gains arising from liberalisation of the agricultural trade will accrue to the developing countries as a group, they are far from being homogenous with as many as 48 out of a total of 63 low-income developing countries being net food importers (Valdés and McCalla, 1999). How these countries and their poor populations are to be affected by liberalisation of the agricultural trade is a critical question that needs to be rigorously assessed. For many low income developing countries, particularly in Asia, tackling food security and poverty is to a large extent dependent on a single cereal crop, rice. To ensure food security, many Asian nations aim to achieve self-sufficiency in rice production by means of tariff protection, input subsidies, and output support. On the other hand, to keep food prices affordable to consumers, governments often make widespread interventions in the domestic rice market.

Obligations for future liberalization of the rice sector are likely to restrict the scope for the adoption of appropriate policy instruments by governments. This can affect their ability to safeguard livelihoods and the food security of their rice-dependent populations and countries. Recently, the Economic Affairs Division (EAD) of the Commonwealth Secretariat undertook research exploring the likely consequences of global rice and agricultural trade liberalisation on four South Asian countries, namely Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Rice lies at the heart of South Asian livelihood with its cultivation the single most important economic activity in a region

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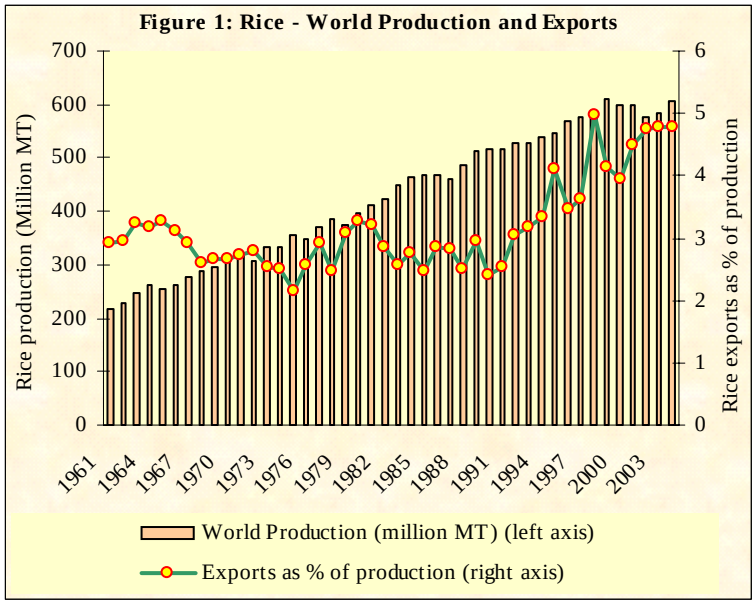
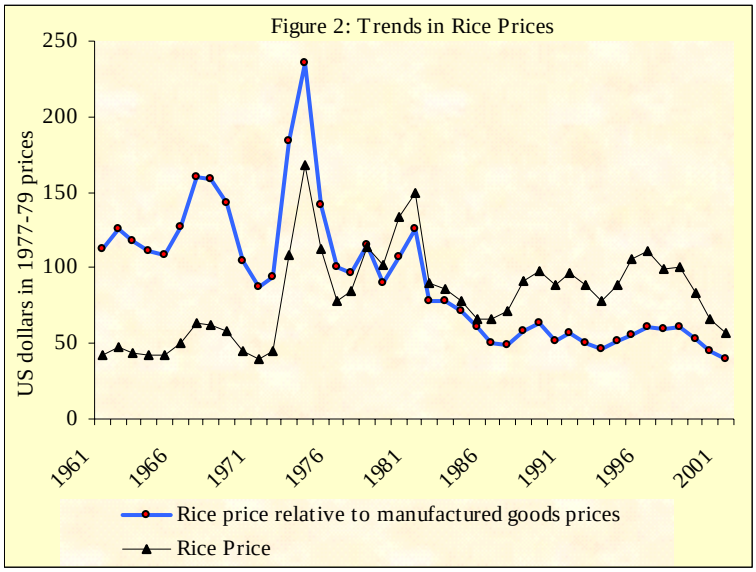
where the majority of the world's poor reside and the purchase of rice constitutes a large proportion of food expenditures of the poor. More than 60 percent of the daily calorie intake of the population in Bangladesh comes from rice, whereas for both India and Sri Lanka the comparable figure is about 50 percent. In the case of Pakistan, while the dependence on it as the basic food is lower, nevertheless it is the second staple food. For India and Pakistan, rice is also a major export item. Rather than focussing only on the macro effects, the studies conducted have also assessed the distributional consequences of different liberalisation scenarios within the individual countries. This paper provides a summary of the major findings of the research.

The International Rice Market



The International rice market is usually described as 'thin', 'volatile', 'segmented' and 'highly distorted'. It is thin as only a small proportion (3-5 percent) of global production of rice is internationally traded, as rice imports and exports by large producing countries are generally small in comparison with their domestic sales (Figure 1).[1] Data from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) shows that, out of a global production of 605 million metric tonnes in 2004, only 28 million metric tonnes were exported. Efforts by rice dependent countries for achieving self sufficiency in food production have contributed to keeping the international market small.[2] On the other hand, the relatively small size of the international market implies a lack of adequate flexibility in supply, which induces the rice-dependent countries to be self-reliant in order to guarantee security of supply for their consumers. With the amount of rice that is traded internationally being so small as a proportion of total production and consumption, the rice market is characterised by big swings in traded volumes and consequent volatility in prices. Because of the thinness of the international market, even relatively small changes in a major producing country can generate significant supply shocks, which are most often reflected in the price of the commodity. Like many other primary commodities, the demand for rice is price and income-inelastic. In addition prices have been subject to long-term decline relative to manufactured goods (Figure 2).



Production and exports of rice are also heavily concentrated in a few countries. More than half of the world rice production takes place in China and India, while other Asian countries viz., Indonesia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Thailand, Myanmar, the Philippines, Japan, South Korea, and Pakistan are also major producers.

[1] The comparable export to production ratios for wheat, corn, and soybeans are 18, 12 and 35 percent respectively. The very low trade volume indicates that most rice-dependent countries are self sufficient. Rice trading is often considered as a residual option as the countries prefer to build-up their domestic reserves in periods of good harvest and to draw from these reserves whenever there is a production shortfall.

[2] Particularly in Asia, the dependence on rice is overwhelming, which accounts for about 90 percent of global production and consumption of the commodity.

Amongst the exporters, Thailand has the biggest share of the world market (about 29 percent) followed by India, China, the EU, the USA, Pakistan, and Vietnam. Amongst the importers, Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, Iran, the UK, Japan, Indonesia, France, the USA, Brazil, the Philippines, Bangladesh, etc. are prominent.

No other agricultural commodity is subject to such widespread policy interventions as pervasive as in the case of rice. Both developed and developing countries use such policy instruments as high import tariffs, tariff rate quotas, and state trading in order to influence and regulate domestic production and imports of rice.[3] Domestic support measures and export subsidies are also widespread with the developed countries providing massive amounts of domestic support and export subsidies. In terms of the producer support estimate (PSE) as a percent of gross farm receipts, rice is the commodity that receives the highest government support in the OECD countries (Naik, 2005).[4] Export-subsidies on rice in the EU have been estimated to be as high as $322 per tonne, while under different support systems a farmer in the US is shown to be earning $152 per tonne of rice produced. Tariff protection on rice is also very high, as the global trade-weighted average tariffs is estimated to be 43 percent with the medium to short grain varieties attracting duties as high as 217 percent (Wailes, 2004).

Studying the Impact of Rice and Agricultural Trade Liberalisation Scenarios

Shifts in agricultural policies are likely to trigger price changes which affect countries that are involved in trading. Tariffs and domestic support measures (including export subsidies) are two principal components of agricultural trade policies across countries. While tariff reductions will potentially depress prices, cuts in support measures will tend to exert an opposite effect. The net result therefore depends on the relative strength of these two differing forces. If food prices eventually rise following liberalisation, the net food-importing countries will experience adverse welfare consequences.

Under the EAD research project, the impacts of various agricultural trade liberalisation scenarios, combining both cuts in tariffs and domestic support measures, on a number of key players in the international rice market including the four South Asian countries are studied. This is done by using a global general equilibrium model and the associated database of trade flows and protection measures as constructed under the Global Trade and Analysis Project (GTAP), based at the Purdue University (Hertel, 1997). Different GTAP model simulations have been conducted reflecting a number of liberalisation scenarios that generate changes in import prices of rice along with other macroeconomic consequences (such as changes in GDP, terms of trade and welfare) for individual countries associated with various policy shocks. One salient feature of the research has been the linking of the global model with the country-specific computable general equilibrium (CGE) models in order to capture the poverty and welfare consequences of changes in the global agricultural trade regime on different population groups within the four South Asian economies. This link has been established by incorporating the global price shocks from different possible liberalisation scenarios into the individual country-specific models.[5]

It is, however, important to acknowledge that the CGE modelling approach to policy analysis is not free from limitations. Nevertheless, the analytical framework provides key insights on the process of adjustment involving intricate interactions amongst different sectors following policy shocks (such as liberalisation measures). The great strength of CGE analysis is that it models the whole economy explicitly, allowing for comparative assessment of the efficiencies with which resources are used amongst the sectors and the equity with which the consequent national income is distributed. That is why it has become very popular amongst empirical researchers as a tool for the *ex ante* analysis of policy impacts.

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[3] Wailes (2005) provides a review of country-specific policies. Amongst others, imports of rice used to be banned in countries like Japan and Korea, which had partially been relaxed following the WTO Agreement on Agriculture that allowed the provision for tariff rate quotas. However, excessively high tariffs over tariff rate quotas make imports prohibitive in practice. Both Japan and Korea also use monopolised state trading system to control rice imports.

[4] The PSE measures the tariff protection and the amount of direct subsidies given to those engaged in agriculture, as well as the financial effects of schemes intended to enhance the prices of agricultural commodities. Information given in Naik (2005) shows that for rice PSE as percent of farm receipts in the OECD countries is more than 80 percent in comparison with 48 percent for sugar, 35 percent for wheat, and 25 percent for maize.

[5] The country models were built to have different population groups, which the global model lacked. On the other hand, the individual country models were not capable of generating simulations reflecting different liberalisation scenarios.

Liberalisation Scenarios and Aggregate Impacts

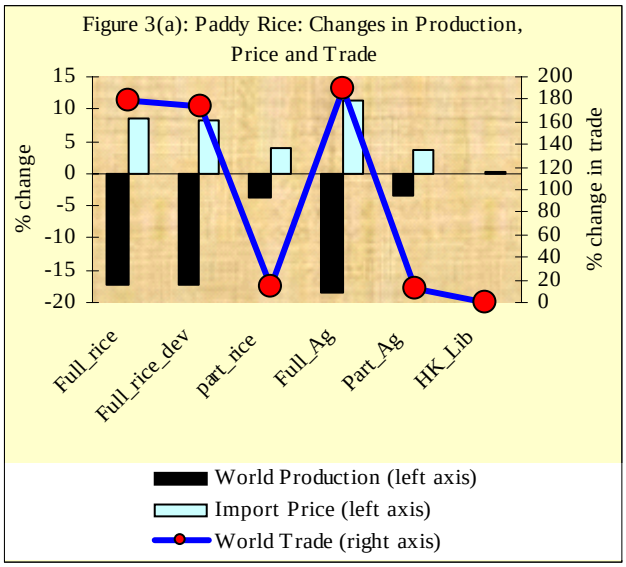
Using the global model, six simulation experiments, as explained in Table 1, are undertaken. In the first three scenarios (i.e., *full_rice* and *full_rice_dev* and *part_rice*) only the rice trade is considered, leaving other agricultural commodities unchanged. In the next two experiments, liberalisation measures are introduced to the whole agricultural sector including rice. The last simulation depicts the liberalisation measure as agreed by WTO Members in the Hong Kong Ministerial Conference to remove export subsidies only.[6] In each simulation, a distinction is made between paddy and milled rice and the database is aggregated into 14 broad commodities and 19 country groups.[7]

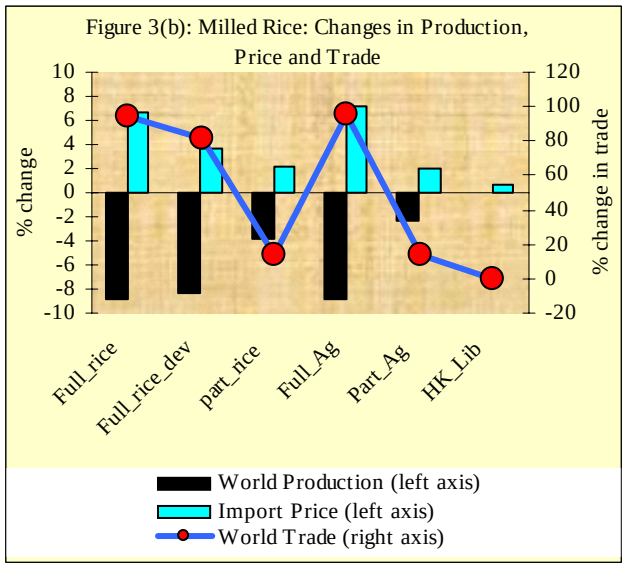
Table 1: Liberalisation Scenarios

Simulation Design	Explanation
Simulation 1: Complete Rice Trade Liberalisation (full_rice)	Complete abolition of all tariffs, subsidies, domestic supports on rice trade only in all countries.
Simulation 2: Complete Rice Trade Liberalisation in the Developed Countries (full_rice_dev)	Complete abolition of all tariffs, subsidies, domestic supports on rice trade only in the developed countries; the developing countries do not participate.
Simulation 3: Partial Rice Trade Liberalisation (part_rice)	Partial liberalisation of tariffs, subsidies and domestic supports on rice trade in all countries.
Simulation 4: Complete Agricultural Trade Liberalisation (full_ag)	Complete liberalisation of all tariffs, subsidies, domestic supports on all agricultural trade in all countries.
Simulation 5: Partial Agricultural Trade Liberalisation (part_ag)	Partial liberalisation of tariffs, subsidies and domestic supports on all agricultural trade in all countries.
Simulation 6: Hong Kong Liberalisation (HK_lib)	Elimination of all export subsidies only from agricultural trade.

The simulations show liberalisation scenarios to raise paddy and milled rice prices. While there are some significant variations in regional prices, rice prices on average rise by 8-11 percent under complete agricultural trade liberalisation (*full_ag*).[8]

The price rises are triggered by the withdrawal of agricultural support measures, particularly in the EU and US, resulting in significant reduction in the global production of paddy and milled rice. Under both the scenarios of complete rice (*full_rice*) and agricultural trade (*full_ag*) liberalisation, the world production of paddy rice falls by about 18 percent while the corresponding figure for the milled rice is about 9 percent (Figures 3(a) and 3(b)). The trade in milled rice, however, doubles with an even more rapid increase in the traded volume of paddy rice. In





[6] WTO Members agreed to withdraw all export subsidies from agriculture by 2011. Export subsidies are however only a very small component of all domestic support provided in agriculture.

[7] The constructed commodity groups were paddy rice, milled rice, wheat, other cereals, commercial crops, milk and dairy products, other foods, livestock, other agricultural items, minerals, textiles, wearing apparels, other manufacturing and services. Apart from the four South Asian countries, the other individual countries considered were Brazil, Canada, China, the EU, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand, Uruguay, Vietnam, the USA, and the rest of the World. Version 6.0 of the GTAP database was used in the simulation exercises, which were updated to reflect the phasing out of the Multi-fibre Arrangement (MFA) and China's accession to the WTO.

[8] The global model used for the analysis recognises the fact that goods are not homogenous and thus there is no unique world price. This causes variations in regional import prices.

Figure 4(a) Export market share in the base year

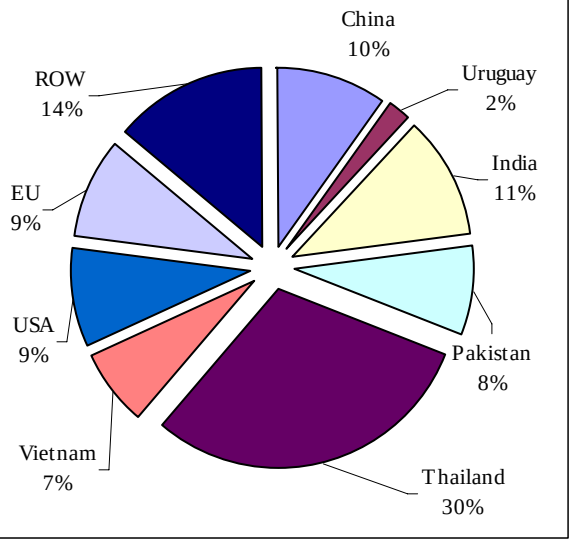
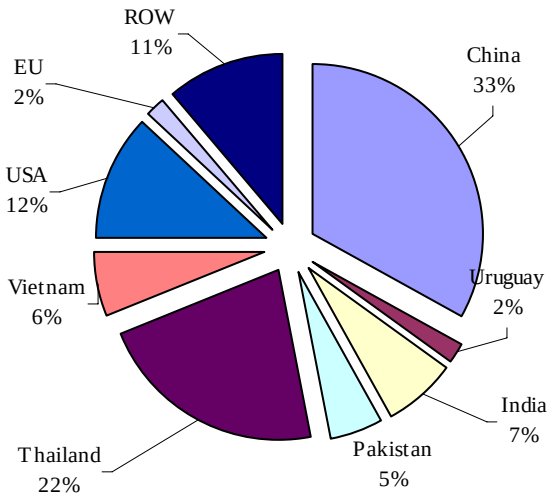


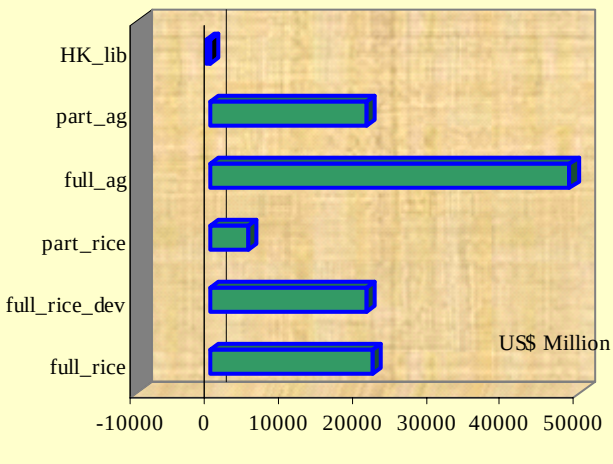
Figure 4(b): Export market share after full_ag liberalisation



terms of the share in global rice export market, China turns out to be the biggest beneficiary of liberalisation with its market share under *full_ag* rising to a staggering 33 percent compared to the current share of 10 percent (Figures 4(a) and 4(b)).[9] While the US remains a significant exporter of milled rice after liberalisation, EU market share is reduced to 2 percent from the 9 percent of pre-liberalisation situation. The principal suppliers from South Asia, India and Pakistan, also experience declining market shares from 11 and 8 percent to 7 and 5 percent, respectively. However, as the international rice market expands quite considerably accompanied by the rise in prices, the falling share for India and Pakistan may not imply an absolute fall in export revenues.

Simulation results also reveal that the maximum global welfare gains of nearly US$50 billion are achieved under complete liberalisation of all agricultural trade (*full_ag*), while the liberalisation of rice alone (*full_rice*) generates gains of US$21 billion (Figure 5). Although liberalisation measures are generally expected to raise global welfare gains, an interesting finding is that, other things remaining constant, the implementation of Hong Kong Declaration, calling for removal of all export subsidies from agriculture, will have adverse welfare, *albeit* small, consequences. Elimination of export subsidies tends to push prices up, which induces many countries, notably those relying on different support measures to allocate more resources in the same relatively inefficient activities thus causing further efficiency losses. On the other hand, since export subsidies constitute only a very small component of the overall support measures directed to agriculture, the price rise would not be sufficiently large to provide benefits to the traditional suppliers that will outweigh the efficiency losses. Therefore, the impact of complete removal of export subsidies alone will not have any significant effect on global rice trade.

Figure 5: Global Welfare Gains



The distribution of welfare gains turns out to be highly unequal. Net rice-importing countries like Bangladesh are likely to suffer from welfare losses in most cases, while there are clear gains for net rice-exporting countries like China, India, and Thailand. There is also evidence of most welfare gains accruing to countries with the most restrictive agricultural policies such as Japan, Korea, the EU

[9] This figure is for milled rice only. In the case of paddy rice, China's share increases even more dramatically – from 7 percent of the existing market to 46 percent under the full agricultural trade liberalisation scenario.

and the USA. Welfare gains in these countries are found to be dominated by allocative efficiency gains as the removal/reduction of tariffs and other support measures in these countries prompts reallocation of resources to different sectors based on their actual comparative advantage. On the other hand, for traditional exporters of rice and agricultural commodities such China, India, Pakistan and Thailand gains arise mainly because of improved terms of trade as global liberalisation pushes prices up.

Table - 2: Welfare Gains for Selected Countries (US$ Million)

	full_rice	*full_ag*
Bangladesh	-2.8	-56.5
Brazil	13.6	4085
China	470.5	3229.1
EU	318.2	3083.4
India	101.9	1125.6
Indonesia	-13.6	204
Japan	16.3	16.4
Korea, Rep of	3.4	8.3
Pakistan	50.9	62.4
Philippines	8.5	-90.6
Rest of the world	21	48.5
Sri Lanka	-4.9	-38.2
Thailand	677.3	1600.3
USA	493.1	6974.8
Vietnam	93.4	94

Poverty and Welfare Effects for the Individual South Asian Countries[10]

To undertake poverty and welfare analysis and to consider the distributional consequences arising from different scenarios, the country-specific CGE models are characterised by representative households of different types.[11] The Bangladesh model considers nine household groups based on their location (i.e., urban or rural) and ownership of assets (land in rural and education in urban areas). The Indian model also has nine representative households: five in rural and four in urban areas. For Pakistan, the number of representative households is very large as it incorporates 19 household groups from both the rural and urban areas. The rural households are categorised by the ownership of cultivable land, whereas the urban households are classified as poor and non-poor. Finally, there are eight representative households in the Sri Lankan country model – each reflecting its province of residence.

Simulation outcomes of the country models have been reported under the sectoral price and volume effects, as well as under households' income, consumption, welfare and poverty effects. Both the domestic tariff reforms as well as the external price shocks from the global trade reform affect the relative prices in the economy, which influences the allocation of resources, and consequently, gross domestic value-added, incomes and consumption expenditures. Given the factorial income distribution, household incomes are affected by different liberalisation shocks, directly influencing their consumption expenditures leading to welfare and poverty consequences.

Bangladesh

It appears that liberalisation in rice trade alone (*full_rice*) has significant negative welfare and poverty implications for Bangladeshi households. The situation becomes even more precarious when the liberalisation encompasses agricultural trade (*full_ag*). The long-run poverty impacts are found to be more acute than the short-run ones and every category of household experiences adverse welfare consequences and a rise in poverty incidence. The findings show the long-run national poverty incidence for the rural areas under *full_rice* rises by about 0.65 percentage points, while the corresponding figure for households in urban areas is 0.3 percentage points. Under the complete agricultural liberalisation (*full_ag*) the rural and urban poverty incidences increase by 1.71 and 0.65 percentage points, respectively. It turns out that the impacts of liberalisation are not uniform across the household groups. For example, under *full_rice* the landless and marginal farmers in the rural area and urban low education households are affected most while the large farm households do not experience any rise in poverty. On the contrary, *full_ag* leads to significant structural changes in the economy, where investment in agriculture becomes less attractive with resources moving from agriculture to manufacturing and services sectors. As a result, all rural and urban poorer households are affected, and the poverty effects are more pronounced for the larger farm households. The partial liberalisation scenarios (*part_rice* and *part_ag*) also lead to a rise in the incidence of

[10] The individual country studies can be found in the forthcoming volume: Razzaque, M. A, and Laurent, E. (eds) (2007), Agriculture and Rice Trade Liberalisation: Implications for South Asian Countries, Academic Foundation and Commonwealth Secretariat.

[11] There are differences amongst the country-specific CGE models. For example, while, the models for India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka are comparative static in nature, the Bangladesh model is a sequential dynamic one. A comparative static CGE model examines the short- and/or long-term effects depending on certain capital mobility assumptions. A sequential dynamic model, on the other hand, analyses the accumulation effect and the path of a transitional dynamic toward a new steady state after an initial shock.

poverty. In essence, global liberalisation increases poverty and reduces welfare by removing the implicit subsidies to Bangladeshi consumers generated by support measures provided to their farmers by the EU and US. One particularly distressing finding is that relatively poorer households such as landless, marginal farmers and urban low education households are likely to bear the most disastrous consequences of these liberalisation measures.

India

Being a net-exporter, the increase in rice prices contributes to the rice sector's growing significance, particularly under the complete agricultural trade liberalisation (*full_ag*) scenario. The changes in the incidence of poverty are found to be minimal. For the three simulations associated with the liberalisation of rice trade only, the effect is very insignificant or negligible, while the cases of agricultural trade liberalisation (*full_ag* and *part_ag*) show some decrease in poverty head-count ratios. The simulations are found to affect different types of households differently. For example, *full_rice* leads to a very small increase in poverty incidence among the rural self-employed non-agricultural household but leaves others unaffected. On the other hand, under *full_ag*, the poverty incidence declines for all households except for non-agricultural labour and self employed agricultural labour groups. The empirical results demonstrate that household incomes vary significantly in response to liberalisation shocks, which is however not reflected in the figures for poverty incidence. Considering the variance of income across simulations, the most vulnerable groups turn out to be the ones depending on their labour incomes such as non-agricultural households, agricultural labour households, and urban casual labour households. On the other hand, households relying mainly on self-employment are least affected by policy changes. The experiments also reveal increases in rice consumption for all household types. On the whole, the maximum welfare gains for the Indian economy takes place under the agricultural trade liberalisation, which is however associated with some significant rise in inequality.

Pakistan

Pakistan is also a net rice-exporting country and is thus found to benefit from global liberalisation of rice and agricultural trade. More households stand to gain as the increase in their incomes more than offset the rise in prices. The maximum welfare gains – a rise of 1.6 percent over the base year value – is achieved under the complete agricultural trade liberalisation (*full_ag*), as against of the smallest gains (0.39 percent increase over the base period value) recorded under the partial liberalisation of the rice trade alone (*part_rice*). Particularly, with complete liberalisation of agricultural trade, large and medium farm households gain substantially. While small farms and agricultural labour households in some regions manage to register relatively small gains, rural non-farm poor and agricultural labour households in some regions actually experience adverse welfare consequences. Although every liberalisation scenario helps reduce poverty, the head-count index registers a maximum decline of 1.1 percent under *full_ag*. Most of this decline is attributable to falling urban poverty, which reduces by 2.6 percent over the base year headcount index as against of 0.8 percent fall in the rural index. In the case of rice trade liberalisation alone (*full_rice*), the urban poverty situation remains unchanged, while the rural head-count index falls by 0.75 percent. Again, the reduction in poverty is mainly attributable to large and medium farm households, with the small farms and agricultural labour households experiencing either very small or no change in their poverty situation. Comparing the poverty and welfare effects across rural and urban households it is found that whilst rice trade liberalization alone contributes to reducing the urban-rural disparity, more comprehensive agricultural liberalisation (i.e. *full_ag*) seems to intensify it. There is some clear evidence that both rice and agricultural trade liberalisation widen the gap between rich and poor households in rural areas.

Sri Lanka

Apart from the liberalisation of rice trade by the developed countries alone (full_rice_dev), in all other scenarios, the decrease in the cost of importation significantly increases the volume of imports of rice. There are also noticeable reductions in rural incomes in these cases, as the tariff liberalisation measures undertaken by Sri Lanka result in reduced government revenues, which in turn, stifle government's transfers to the region. Rice and agricultural trade liberalisations, under different scenarios, change the prices faced by the representative households and on the whole reduce their incomes. The resulting impacts on welfare are negative for all types of households. Complete liberalisation of agriculture (*full_ag*) causes the highest welfare loss to the economy in general. The results show that the relatively well-off Western province turns out to be least affected, but the

poorer provinces such as Uva and Sabaragamuwa appear to be most vulnerable. The impacts on poverty are found to be rather small, which might be attributable to the fact that the Sri Lankan model incorporates only the average provincial households, and households with different socio-economic conditions could not be modelled in the absence of suitable data. As the incomes of average households decline under all liberalisation scenarios, the actual poverty impacts might be significantly larger than what is being found in this exercise.

Policy Implications

Three important insights can be drawn from the aforementioned Commonwealth study. Firstly, the liberalisation of trade in rice and agriculture is to generate global welfare gains. However, the distribution of the gains is likely to be highly skewed. There will both be losers and winners among the developing countries depending on their respective situations, including whether they are net exporters or net importers of rice and agricultural products. Secondly, the analyses seem to support the concern raised by many regarding the negative consequences of the global agricultural trade liberalisation for the poor in the net-food importing developing countries. Thirdly, it also appears that there might be significant variations in the incidence of poverty among different household groups within a country. The impacts of liberalisation on different household groups vary because of the differences in their sources of income and differences in consumption patterns.

It follows from the above therefore that, because of uneven distributional consequences amongst different types of households, it is important to identify the groups that are most susceptible to shocks associated with global liberalisation. It needs to be recognised that, even when countries experience overall welfare gains, certain groups within the population may very well be subject to adverse welfare and poverty consequences. This reinforces the role and legitimacy of appropriate and effective domestic policies in mitigating the negative and uneven distributional consequences and ensuring food security for the most vulnerable segments of the population.

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