

Trade-Related Agenda, Development and Equity (TRADE) Analysis Series

**CHANGING GEARS ON GLOBAL ECONOMIC
POLICYMAKING COHERENCE:
POLICY CHOICES, FLEXIBILITY AND DIVERSITY IN
DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES**

SYNOPSIS

This TRADE Analysis provides a brief overview of the “Coherence” agenda in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and tries to inject a new perspective on how such agenda can be made to serve the development goals and interests of developing countries. It emphasizes that the recognition of “policy space” and the placement of development goals as the central foci of coherence in global economic policymaking, can be used to form the core of a more positive “Coherence” agenda in favor of developing countries’ development interests in the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. This paper provides a brief overview of the “Coherence” agenda in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and tries to inject a new perspective on how such agenda can be made to serve the development goals and interests of developing countries. It emphasizes that the recognition of “policy space” and the placement of development goals as the central foci of coherence in global economic policymaking, can be used to form the core of a more positive “Coherence” agenda in favor of developing countries’ development interests in the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions.

2. The key elements of the current “Coherence” agenda being pushed at the institutional level by the secretariats of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF include: supporting the Doha work program (liberalization in goods, services, and investment); trade-related capacity building; improving global financial stability through capital account liberalization and channeling increased investment to developing countries and assisting borrower countries to improve coherence in policies at the national level. The implications of the current “coherence” agenda of the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions are threefold:

- the promotion of trade liberalization based on a flawed economic growth model as well as faulty assumptions on the relation between trade and growth through the Bretton Woods institutions’ policies and programmes;
- the “locking in” of economic liberalization commitments through the WTO; and
- the loss by developing countries of their national policy choices and the flexibility to choose the appropriate economic growth strategy based on national interests and needs.

3. The real debate with respect to coherence in global economic policymaking is not over whether integration into the global economy is good or bad, but rather over space for development policies and priorities. The relevant questions are about the correct sequence of economic policies and how much priority deep trade liberalization should receive in the economic reform process.

4. The paper suggests that in order for the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions to be able to effectively carry out the “Coherence” mandate in ways that support the development needs and aspirations of developing countries, the following need to be undertaken:

- Recognition and effective implementation of the concept of “policy space” (including the need to make special and differential treatment provisions effective and operational) and the maintenance of a wide range of policy choices, flexibility, and diversity in development

strategies for developing countries by the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions;

- The establishment of effective work programs in the WTO under the mandates established for the CTE and the CTD under Paragraph 51 DMD and for the WGTDF under Paragraph 36 DMD to carry out the new “Coherence” paradigm described above;
- “Coherence”-related activities need to be expanded to include and take into account development-friendly initiatives occurring elsewhere in the international governance system; and
- Reforms in the decision-making and institutional governance structures of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank need to be undertaken to provide for more transparent, participatory, and representative governance structures in these institutions.

CHANGING GEARS ON GLOBAL ECONOMIC POLICYMAKING COHERENCE:
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I. Introduction

1. This paper provides a brief overview of the “Coherence” agenda in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and tries to inject a new perspective on how such agenda can be made to serve the development goals and interests of developing countries. It first looks at how the “Coherence” agenda is currently being interpreted and implemented by the WTO. Then it looks at how another paradigm on “Coherence”, based on the recognition of policy choices and the placement of development goals as the central foci of coherence in global economic policymaking, can be used to form the core of a more positive “Coherence” agenda in favor of developing countries’ development interests in the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions. It concludes with some recommendations on how to move forward on this new agenda, especially in the context of the WTO.

2. The 1994 *Marrakesh Declaration on the Contribution of the World Trade Organization to Achieving Greater Coherence in Global Economic Policymaking* forms the basis for the “Coherence” mandate of the WTO under which it seeks to cooperate at the institutional level with the Bretton Woods institutions – the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank.

3. This mandate was further reaffirmed by WTO Members at the 2001 Doha Ministerial Conference, where they stated in the Doha Ministerial Declaration (DMD) that the WTO “shall continue to work with the Bretton Woods institutions for greater coherence in global economic policy-making.”¹

II. The Current “Coherence” Agenda

4. Since Doha, the WTO General Council has held two special sessions under this mandate, and regular meetings have been held by the heads of the secretariats of these organizations and at the staff level. In addition, stemming from the call in the 1995 UN Social Summit for the “coordination of UN activities, the BWIs and the WTO at the global, regional and national levels, including coordination with the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)” and a renewed call for coherence of the BWIs with the UN at the UN’s 2002 Financing for Development Conference, annual meetings of these economic institutions with the UNECOSOC have been taking place at least since 2002.

5. The key common element of the current “Coherence” agenda being pushed at the institutional level by the secretariats of the WTO, the World Bank and the IMF focuses on increased market access through further trade

¹ WTO, *Fourth Session of the Ministerial Conference – Ministerial Declaration*, WT/MIN(01)/DEC/1, 14 November 2001, para. 5.

liberalization. This is clearly borne out by the WTO Secretariat's paper on this subject, which states in part that:

"2. The greatest contribution that the WTO can make to more coherent policymaking in current economic circumstances is to move ahead with the Doha Work Programme, in particular the market access negotiations."²

x x x

"5. The IMF and the World Bank have the means to support an ambitious and successful conclusion to the Doha market access negotiations in a variety of ways."³

x x x

"12. For the WTO, the key to implementing the Coherence mandate has been the strengthened multilateral trading system that has resulted from the Uruguay Round. Increased market access, broader sectoral coverage, strengthened rules, and effective dispute settlement have meant that trade policy can play a more substantial role in ensuring the coherence of global economic policymaking."⁴

"13. Institutional cooperation between the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank has been built on that. It has evolved considerably over the past ten years around two main themes. One is viewing trade reform and trade liberalization from the perspective of economic development and poverty reduction, with complementary efforts in favour of low income developing countries to increase their market access, help them develop the supply-side of their economies and build trade-related capacity. The second is linkages between trade and financial policies in the context of financial sector liberalization and reform, crisis prevention and financial stability."⁵

6. However, the economic reform process represented by the current "Coherence" agenda described above that has taken place to date has been on an asymmetrical basis, occurring rapidly and delivering benefits mostly in areas of interest to developed countries (such as in the development of new rules on trade in services and in intellectual property rights protection) while virtually standing still in areas of interest to developing countries such as agriculture, textiles, and movements of labour. There is also a trend evident not only in the WTO but also in the Bretton Woods institutions of promoting a uniform model of global economic integration, moving away from a recognition of the principle of national regulatory sovereignty towards the creation of an international

² WTO Secretariat, *Coherence in Global Economic Policymaking and Cooperation Between the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank*, WT/TF/COH/S/7, 29 April 2003, para. 2. This paper was prepared by the WTO Secretariat in consultation with staff of the IMF and the World Bank.

³ Id., para. 5.

⁴ Id., para. 12.

⁵ Id., para. 13.

framework of disciplines and rules that promote a lesser degree of regulatory authority at the national level.

7. Through their structural reform programmes and conditionalities, the Bretton Woods institutions have instituted an extensive series of trade liberalization measures within developing countries that have served as significant tools for supporting the WTO's trade liberalization objectives. For example, between 1995 and 1999, 65 percent of all World Bank structural adjustment operations support trade policy reforms. Between 1995 and 2001, 36 countries were required, under their IMF packages, to reform their national trade regimes in line with WTO accession requirements or to accelerate their implementation of their WTO commitments.⁶

8. However, the empirical literature that has often been used to support the existence of a positive relationship between trade liberalization and economic growth has major flaws and problems, and the key policy conclusions are not supported by what the research showed.⁷ In fact, as a UNDP report indicates, "the benefits of trade openness have been greatly oversold. Deep trade liberalization cannot be relied on to deliver high economic growth and so does not deserve the high priority it receives in the development strategies pushed by leading multilateral institutions."⁸ This is clearly seen in, for example, the fact that in the 1990s, poverty levels increased unambiguously in least-developed countries (LDCs) with the most open and the most closed trade regimes.⁹

9. Hence, the implications of the current "coherence" agenda of the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions are threefold:

- the promotion of trade liberalization based on a flawed economic growth model as well as faulty assumptions on the relation between trade and growth through the Bretton Woods institutions' policies and programmes;
- the "locking in" of economic liberalization commitments through the WTO; and
- the loss by developing countries of their national policy choices and the flexibility to choose the appropriate economic growth strategy based on national interests and needs.

10. It is increasingly becoming clear that the "one-size-fits-all" macroeconomic approach towards global economic integration and trade liberalization favored by the current "Coherence" agenda does not work. Trade

⁶ Sabrina Varma, *Improving Global Economic Governance* (South Centre TRADE Series Occasional Paper No. 8, August 2002), p. 9.

⁷ Kamal Malhotra, *Trade, Growth, Poverty Reduction and Human Development: Some Linkages and Policy Implications* (Study prepared for the Intergovernmental Group of Twenty-Four on International Monetary Affairs and Development, March 2004), p. 1.

⁸ UNDP, *MAKING GLOBAL TRADE WORK FOR PEOPLE* (UNDP, London and Sterling, 2003), p. 32.

⁹ *Id.*, p. 34 (Box 1.3 – Trade, Poverty and Growth in Least-Developed Countries).

liberalization and the drive for increased market access should not be seen as ends in themselves but rather as among the tools or policies that countries can choose from to achieve their development objectives. Developmental benefits from trade liberalization will accrue only when the domestic conditions have been established (through a range of appropriate and autonomously determined domestic policies) that allow the domestic economy to adjust to global competitive pressures.

11. Given the unequal economic and political power relations currently prevailing among countries, requiring countries to adopt harmonized rules and economic approaches will simply lock weaker countries into existing unsatisfactory and unfavorable relationships that fail to address their developmental problems. Instead, the global trade regime needs to ensure that differences in economic capacity among countries are taken into account. This can be done through the provision of more policy flexibility to such weaker countries so that they can adopt and implement development policies more suitable to improving their economic conditions, even if such policies may diverge from those that are reflected in the current “Coherence” agenda. A new agenda on “Coherence” needs to be developed.

III. Changing the “Coherence” Agenda

A. Basis for A New “Coherence” Agenda

12. The real debate with respect to coherence in global economic policymaking is not over whether integration into the global economy is good or bad, but rather over policies and priorities. The relevant questions are about the correct sequence of policies and how much priority deep trade liberalization should receive in the economic reform process. The experiences of the developing countries that are currently experiencing high rates of growth, such as China, India, and Vietnam, as well as the historical experience of those countries that are now developed, suggest that there must a gradual and sequenced approach to trade liberalization and that import and trade liberalization by themselves are not likely to be accorded the highest development priority during the early stages of the economic development process.

13. The experiences of those countries that have managed to develop successfully show that leadership committed to development and supportive of a coherent growth strategy counts for a lot more than trade liberalization – even when such a national strategy departs sharply from the current standard view on economic reform and liberalization. Furthermore, integration with the world economy is an outcome, not a prerequisite, of a successful growth strategy.

14. In fact, at the Eleventh Meeting of UNCTAD (UNCTAD XI) in Sao Paulo, Brazil, in June 2004, the Conference joined an increasing number of critiques of the extent to which current process of globalization has failed to deliver on their promised benefits, especially to most developing countries and their poverty-

stricken populations. Through the Sao Paulo Consensus, UNCTAD XI has recognized that the delivery of the benefits of the process of globalization has been unequal and that it has had, for many developing countries, adverse social impacts.¹⁰

15. Even as UNCTAD XI called for more coherence in the global economic policy regime, especially with respect to international rules and disciplines in the international monetary, financial, and trading systems, among the major policy statements of UNCTAD XI is its recognition of “policy space”, especially for developing countries, and the need for a better balance between policy choices and international disciplines and commitments.¹¹ “Policy space” refers to “the scope for domestic policies, especially in the areas for trade, investment and industrial development.”¹² Essentially, it reflects the idea that governments through the preservation of policy choices should have the leeway to “evaluate the trade-off between the benefits of accepting international rules and the constraints posed by the loss of policy space.”¹³

16. As one author has put it:

“A world trade regime friendly to human development would provide domestic policy space and give developing countries flexibility to make institutional and other innovations. Such policy space should take precedence over market access considerations, even as the trade regime continues to recognize that market access can make an important contribution to human development in specific situations and for specific sectors and issues.”¹⁴

17. Hence, the development-friendly paradigm for coherence in global economic policymaking is one in which developing countries take a strategic and deliberative approach to globalization and liberalization. The focus is on the preservation of a wide range of policy choices and flexibility that can be used to adjust the pace and direction of economic development initiatives to the country’s own economic development needs and priorities. They should be

¹⁰ UN, *UNCTAD XI: Sao Paulo Consensus*, TD/410, 25 June 2004, available at http://www.unctad.org/en/docs/td410_en.pdf, paras. 6 and 12.

¹¹ *Id.*, para. 8.

¹² *Id.*

¹³ *Id.* In this regard, see also UNCTAD, *Notes on the concept of economic policy space*, 4 March 2004, para. 1, in which the UNCTAD Secretariat described the concept of economic policy space as referring to “the extent to which national governments have the authority to make decisions concerning economic policy and, correspondingly, the extent to which such authority is constrained by international disciplines and processes.” This concept is also linked, according to the UNCTAD Secretariat, to the concept of “open nationalism” which “suggests policies and approaches that take appropriate account of the pursuit of national objectives and goals but are consistent with the growing integration of the world economy and the increasing participation of developing countries in its challenges and opportunities. Such policies and approaches are conceived primarily as efforts to upgrade the capabilities and skills of the national labour force, as well as of national capital, in order to better integrate into the global economy.” See UNCTAD, *A conceptual note on “open nationalism”*, 4 March 2004, para. 26.

¹⁴ Malhotra, *supra* note 7, at p. 5.

selective and deliberate in choosing how and when, and in which sectors and to what extent, to integrate with domestic economies with the global economy in the areas of trade, finance, and investments. This recognizes that integration into the global economy can provide benefits to developing countries, but only if such integration is carefully undertaken on the basis of a pragmatic and realistic (rather than ideological) assessment of the potential impacts of such integration on national development policies, priorities, and goals.

18. At the multilateral level, the need to recognize and preserve developing countries' policy choices for development requires the development of a coherent global economic policymaking structure that underlines the importance of getting the balance between free markets and State regulation correctly. This balance recognizes that trade is an important component of development, and that both trade and trade policy have their roles to play in the context of a country's overall development policy framework.

19. However, all too often today, many developing countries are required under their WTO commitments or "advised" as a consequence of World Bank/IMF loan conditionalities to focus on trade and trade policy in ways that may be inappropriate for them and their development plans. Therefore, at the very least, this means that when approaching the issue of coherence in global economic policymaking, multilateral economic institutions such as the WTO, World Bank, and IMF, need to ensure that global trade and financial integration are carefully balanced with the promotion of social and economic development, especially in developing countries.

B. Defining Elements for a New "Coherence" Agenda

1. Provide for Policy Choices, Flexibility and Diversity in Development Strategies

20. Hence, for global economic policymaking structures to be coherent and responsive to the development needs and concerns of developing countries, the rules of the multilateral trade regime and the policies and actions of the Bretton Woods institutions that complement and support such multilateral trade regime need to shift. Instead of over-emphasizing a market access perspective, they should instead prioritize or enable the maintenance of the domestic policy choices available to developing countries that would allow these countries to adopt and implement a range of diverse (and even unorthodox) policies and growth strategies.

21. These ideally should be policies and growth strategies targeted at raising the standards of living of their peoples through the improvement and establishment of conditions that provide for a wide range of opportunities for individual and collective social and economic advancement. Environmental sustainability considerations that form the backdrop and natural resource basis for any economic growth plan also need to be taken into account within the

universe of policy choices that countries may take as part of their development strategy.

22. The WTO, World Bank, and IMF need to recognize that the point of departure for ensuring coherence in global economic policymaking is not whether the multilateral trade regime maximizes the flow of goods and services but on whether trade relations maximize human development possibilities, especially those in developing countries. This means that the global trade regime should be “coherent” in terms of allowing for maximum policy choices and the development of diverse development strategies rather than promoting a “one-size-fits-all” approach that seeks to unify and harmonize national economic and development policies.

23. A possible outcome of the current coherence agenda of the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions may include having developing countries’ development policy choices be made coherent with trade and economic policies of the major economic powers. Such an outcome should be avoided. Instead, the UNCTAD XI’s call for the recognition of policy choices for developing countries in pursuit of their own strategies and approaches towards development and the prioritization of the development dimension for developing countries in global economic policymaking must be made the central foci for coherence in global economic policymaking.

2. Maximize Existing DMD Mandates – Paragraphs 51 (CTE and CTD) and 36 (WGTDF)

24. In the WTO, a mandate already exists under Paragraph 51 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration (DMD) for the WTO’s Committee on Trade and Development (as well as the Committee on Trade and Environment) to “identify and debate the developmental and environmental aspects of the negotiations, in order to help achieve the objective of having sustainable development appropriately reflected [in the Doha negotiations].” This means that through the Paragraph 51 mandate of the CTE and the CTD, the WTO can maximize existing mechanisms so that it can play a defining role in how “coherence” in global economic policymaking can be achieved in ways that are responsive to the development needs, interests, and priorities of developing countries in particular.

25. In addition, another existing mechanism that can be utilized by WTO Members for the WTO to be able to play its part in ensuring “coherence in global economic policymaking” is the WTO’s Working Group on Trade, Debt, and Finance (WGTDF) which was established by the Doha Ministerial Conference in 2001 as a result of initiatives from developing countries.¹⁵ Paragraph 36 of the DMD required the WGTDF to undertake an examination of:

¹⁵ See e.g. WTO, *Dominican Republic, Honduras, and Pakistan – Preparations for the 1999 Ministerial Conference: The Future WTO Work Programme (Under Paragraph 10 of the Geneva Ministerial Declaration)*, WT/GC/W/255, 16 July 1999, para. 11; WTO, *Cuba, Dominican Republic, Egypt, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Pakistan – Preparations for the 1999 Ministerial*

- the relationship between trade, debt, and finance; and
- any possible recommendation on steps that might be taken within the mandate and competence of the WTO to enhance the capacity of the multilateral trading system, so as to enable the WTO to contribute to a durable solution to the problem of external indebtedness of developing and least-developed countries, and to strengthen the coherence of international trade and financial policies, with a view to safeguarding the multilateral trading system from the effects of financial and monetary instability.

26. Developing countries that were proponents for the establishment of the WGTDF felt that it was necessary for the WTO to effectively address the relationship between trade and finance so as to ensure that global financial flows, exchange rates, and commodity price fluctuations, do not adversely affect but rather support the economies of developing countries. In addition, effective work in the WTO to address the relationship between trade and debt from the perspective of developing countries and their development needs also needed to be undertaken.

27. Unfortunately, however, since Doha to date, work in the WGTDF on effectively and substantively addressing, in a satisfactory manner, the issues and concerns previously raised by developing countries on trade and finance and trade and debt has not significantly advanced. It is therefore critical that the WGTDF be used to shape the discussion and lead the debate on “Coherence” and thus redefine the “Coherence” agenda into a positive one that incorporates development as its central goal. The WGTDF and, through it, the WTO needs to recognize that the preservation and maintenance of policy choices for developing countries is a key development policy instrument.

3. Ensure Coherence with Other Development-Friendly International Initiatives

Conference, WT/GC/W/326, 22 September 1999, para. F, tirets 2 and 3; WTO, Dominican Republic, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand – Preparations for the 1999 Ministerial Conference: Proposal for the Establishment of a Working Group for the Study of the Impact of the Current Global Financial and Monetary System on Trade and Development, WT/GC/W/347, 8 October 1999; WTO, Ecuador – Preparations for the 1999 Ministerial Conference: Interrelationship Between Trade and Debt, WT/GC/W/356, 12 October 1999, and Addendum: Note on Trade, WTO and External Debt, WT/GC/W/356/Add.1, 22 October 1999; WTO, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe – Preparations for the Fourth Session of the Ministerial Conference: Proposal for the Establishment of a Working Group for the Study of the Inter-Relationship between Trade and Finance, WT/GC/W/444, 18 September 2001; WTO, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Malaysia, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda and Zimbabwe – Preparations for the Fourth Session of the Ministerial Conference: Proposal for the Establishment of a Working Group for the Study of the Inter-Relationship between Trade and Debt, WT/GC/W/445, 18 September 2001.

28. Furthermore, more effort must be exerted within the WTO to ensure not only coherence of policies among the WTO, the IMF and the World Bank but also coherence with development-friendly policies (such as the UN's Millennium Development Goals, the UN WSSD Plan of Implementation, and UNFfD's Plan of Action) being formulated or proposed by other multilateral bodies such as the United Nations and its specialized agencies, Southern intergovernmental institutions (e.g. G-77, South Centre, Southern regional organizations), and other actors as appropriate.

4. Structural Reforms in Global Economic Policymaking Institutions

29. Ensuring that a positive "Coherence" agenda supports and promotes development of developing countries and helps create a fairer and more equitable global economy in the long-term will also require reforms in the decision-making structures of the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions so as to provide for better transparency in decision-making and more effective and representative participation by developing countries in such decision-making.

IV. Conclusion

30. In summary, in order for the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions to be able to effectively carry out the "Coherence" mandate in ways that support the development needs and aspirations of developing countries, the following need to be undertaken:

- Recognition and effective implementation of the concept of "policy space" (including the need to make special and differential treatment provisions effective and operational) and the maintenance of a wide range of policy choices, flexibility, and diversity in development strategies for developing countries by the WTO and the Bretton Woods institutions;
- The establishment of effective work programs in the WTO under the mandates established for the CTE and the CTD under Paragraph 51 DMD and for the WGTDF under Paragraph 36 DMD to carry out the new "Coherence" paradigm described above;
- "Coherence"-related activities need to be expanded to include and take into account development-friendly initiatives occurring elsewhere in the international governance system; and
- Reforms in the decision-making and institutional governance structures of the WTO, the IMF, and the World Bank need to be undertaken to provide for more transparent, participatory, and representative governance structures in these institutions.

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