



**LEAST DEVELOPED COUNTRIES AND TRADE:
*CHALLENGES OF IMPLEMENTING THE BALI PACKAGE***

Edited by Debapriya Bhattacharya and Mia Mikić

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Foreword

I am very pleased that the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP) is issuing a publication titled “Least Developed Countries and Trade: Challenges of Implementing the Bali Package”, edited by Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya and Dr. Mia Mikić, which is going to be launched during the fourth session of the Committee on Trade and Investment taking place in November 2015 in Bangkok.

As is known, the least developed countries (LDCs) constitute one of the most structurally handicapped groups of economies in the world which are trying to integrate themselves in an accelerated and balanced way in the international trading system. However, the 48 LDCs continue to account for a meagre one per cent of global trade, and even this paltry share often fluctuates due to commodity price volatility. Curiously, the share has continued to stagnate notwithstanding the increase of the number of LDC members in the WTO to 34. The LDCs had pinned high hopes on the delivery of the promises embodied in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) which was launched in 2001. However, the history of the Doha Round testifies that we have failed not only to fully and faithfully conclude the negotiations on the DDA, but even to deliver “an early harvest” for the LDCs. This had been a rather frustrating experience.

In this context, the book has studied some of the most critically important aspects of the protracted Doha Round negotiations, particularly focusing on the concerns of the LDCs. A significant advancement was made at the Ninth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC9) in Bali, Indonesia held in December 2013. Indeed, the Bali Ministerial Declaration did make some notable progress in the pursuit of the DDA, particularly through its adoption of the ‘LDC Package’. The Ministerial decisions relating to this package along with decisions on public food stockholding and trade facilitation – had held the prospect of reviving the multilateral trading system. Regrettably, the progress has been slow during the post-Bali period and several important deadlines have once again been missed. While some positive movements took place on Agreement on Trade Facilitation and on operationalisation of services waiver for the LDCs, the decisions on coverage of items under Duty-Free Quota-Free (DFQF) schemes and uniform preferential rules of origin

for the LDCs still continue to elude us. In view of these, the book rightly highlights the post-Bali developments concerning the LDC interests.

One of the important aspects of this book relates to policy advisory about the preparedness of the LDCs as a group for a successful negotiations at the WTO. At the same time, given the high trade costs facing the LDCs, the study rightly suggests that they must capitalise on the successful implementation of the Trade Facilitation Agreement. Of course there has to be commensurate global support towards this. Moreover, the study identifies the gaps in LDC capacities, and articulates the needs in terms of national and regional policies and capacity-building programmes that will be called for to help them implement the Ministerial decisions in favour of the LDCs. The study also draws attention to what ought to be done towards finalisation of the DDA Work Programme and the ongoing WTO negotiations.

We are now heading to the Tenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC10) to be held in Nairobi in December 2015. Given this backdrop, the launching of this book is very timely as well as contextual. This book will help WTO members, especially the LDCs, to understand the nuances of Bali Package in greater details and depth so as to prepare for the upcoming MC10. As was noted, the LDCs face several structural challenges and volatility in economic growth. In view of this, a favourable Nairobi outcome that will advance LDC interests is quite important. I trust, this study will not only be useful for the policymakers and negotiators, but also to experts and think tanks who advise their national governments on various WTO issues.

Dhaka, 29 October 2015



Tofail Ahmed, MP
Commerce Minister
Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh
and
Coordinator of the LDC Group in the WTO

Acknowledgments

The initial stimulus for this publication came at the “High-level Meeting on Reviving Multilateralism – Bali and Beyond” organized by United Nations ESCAP on 19 November 2013 in Bangkok. This notion was reconfirmed during an ARTNeT seminar on “What trade and trade rules are needed for inclusive and sustainable development”, which was organized on 5 December 2013 as part of the ICTSD Trade and Development Symposium in Bali, Indonesia during the Ninth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

The United Nations ESCAP secretariat periodically organizes high-level policy dialogues to facilitate a common understanding of issues of mutual interest among the Member and Associate Member States of ESCAP. As the trade development nexus is of particular relevance to the group of least developed countries (LDCs) in the Asia-Pacific region, the focus of this publication is on the implementation of the Bali package, agreed on at the Ninth Ministerial Conference. The publication’s purpose is to provide evidence and insights to be used by government officials in LDCs to disentangle some persisting trade issues, both in national economies and in the multilateral trading system. Furthermore, the study also draws attention to what ought to be done towards finalization of the Doha Development Agenda Work Programme and the ongoing WTO negotiations to meet LDCs development needs.

This publication is centred on the contributions by Dr. Mostafa Abid Khan (chapter 1), Dr. John Gilbert (chapter 2), Dr. Florian Albuero (chapter 3) and Mr. Adam Heal and Mr. Noelan Arbis (chapter 4). All these chapters benefited from a review and comments by Mr Rajan S. Ratna who, together with Ms. Mari Tomova, contributed to the introduction and concluding recommendations.

We accumulated many debts in putting together this volume, the issuance of which would not have been possible without the excellent collaboration by a team from the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Dhaka (a founding institutional member of ARTNeT). The team comprised Ms. Nazmatun Noor, Mr. Avra Bhattacharjee, Mr. A. H. M. Ashrafuzzaman and Ms. Maeesa Ayesha, who worked in various capacities on the

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