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APRIL 2007

Trade Advocacy Groups and Multilateral Trade Policy-Making of African States

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M C I S B R I E F I N G S

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ISBN 978-0-7727-0832-8
ISSN 1715-3484

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April 2007 ISBN 978-0-7727-0832-8.
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Trade Advocacy Groups and Multilateral Trade Policy-Making of African States

Sylvia Ostry and Thomas Kwasi Tiekou

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Introduction

Multilateral trade policy-making has become more complex since the Uruguay Round. Both the range of issues under consideration and the number of active players have increased. The new players have demonstrated in recent talks that they have the capacity to shape outcomes. Among the new actors to have increased their profile in recent times are sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) countries, who had been bystanders under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade system. African states were an important constituency of the group of developing countries that were instrumental in the collapse of recent

trade talks such as the Cancun Ministerial Conference. The increased involvement of SSA countries in the making of international trade policies and the direct impact they have had in recent trade talks suggest that we need a better understanding of their policy-making processes. In addition, the enormous impact trade rules have on many ordinary Africans make a study of trade policy-making of SSA states significant. The high ratio of trade to gross domestic product in many African states means that a slight shift in African countries' share of global trade has major implications for economic development and poverty reduction (Economic Commission for Africa 2004; Commission for Africa 2005; World Bank 2002). Yet, we know little about the way African states develop negotiation positions, agendas, and strategies on multilateral trade. Do African states have effective mechanisms to make decisions on multilateral trade? Have African governments created a policy environment in which interested sectors of their national economies can take advantage of existing market access? Do they have the technical capacity to make informed decisions on trade issues? The trade policy literature tells us virtually nothing about these important questions. This study begins to fill these gaps in the trade policy literature.

In our exploratory research on this theme, we hypothesized that *western-funded Trade Advocacy Groups (a type of non-governmental organization hereafter labeled TAGs) decisively influence the positions of African countries in multilateral trade negotiations*. Three reasons explain why we took this position. First, there is a widely held view in trade policy circles that officials from African states rely on TAGs' technical information and analytical assistance to make important decisions on multilateral trade. The Trade Minister of Zambia, Dipak Patel, seemed to admit this when he was quoted as saying that "we [i.e., African governments] get criticized for allowing NGOs to dictate our policy. But if we don't have the capacity to do our own research, what can we do?" (Beattie 2005, p. 22). Second, many trade policy officials from African states have developed unusually close relationships with western-funded TAGs. TAG members constituted a significant portion of official African trade delegations to recent World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conferences (Ostry 2006). Third, virtually all well-functioning domestic African NGOs working in trade advocacy areas receive the bulk of their funding from western countries (Graham 2005, p. 58). We therefore thought that western-

funded TAGs operating inside African states (henceforth, indigenous African TAGs) would have the necessary resources and organizational abilities to play an assertive role in multilateral trade policy-making processes of African states.

Contrary to our orienting hypothesis, however, initial fieldwork leads us to conclude that, although TAGs such as the South Centre assist many trade policy officials from African states with technical information, there is little empirical evidence to support the view that western-funded TAGs determine negotiation positions, agendas, and strategies of African states. The evidence even shows that indigenous African TAGs play a peripheral role in multilateral trade policy-making processes of African countries. TAGs play a minimal role because few governments in Africa make critical decisions on their global trade through formal institutional structures at the state level. The majority of African governments use informal pan-African institutional structures to make important decisions on WTO-related issues. The governments of South Africa and Egypt are perhaps the only exceptions. Though these two governments participate in pan-African policy-making processes, their stances on WTO issues are often independent of the consensual position arrived at through the informal structures. Many African governments' use of pan-African institutional structures to take critical decisions on WTO issues has given TAGs operating outside of the African region the opportunity to shape multilateral negotiation positions, agendas, and strategies of African states. The central role that informal institutional structures play in the development of multilateral negotiation positions and agendas of many states in Africa makes decision-making processes on WTO issues of those countries unique. As a Zambia representative indicated, "what we do here is the exact opposite of what the Americans do. American trade representatives come to Geneva knowing what they want and have firm positions on all the issues. We come to Geneva to find out what is going on and to use common sense to develop our countries' positions on the issues. American representatives often receive instructions from Washington. We don't get instructions from capitals except in rare cases" (Chisanga interview 2005).

Many countries, and certainly those in the advanced industrialized world, develop multilateral negotiation positions and agendas through formal state institutions and agencies. Advanced countries such as

Canada have developed participatory decision-making processes on multilateral issues at the state level.¹ Informal structures have little role to play in multilateral trade policy-making in many advanced industrialized societies.

The rest of the paper proceeds in three stages. We begin by providing a concise description of central concepts and the research strategy. The second section shows the role that informal structures and TAGs play in WTO-related policy-making of African states. The third and concluding section looks at areas that require further research.

Conceptual Clarification and Research Design

To avoid confusion, we need to clarify our use of the term “TAGs.” Trade Advocacy Groups are voluntary associations of people who seek to shape mechanisms — i.e., rules, norms, structures, and decision-making procedures — that govern international trade. They may be formally registered bodies such as labour unions or informal groupings like unregistered agricultural associations. Significant aspects of TAGs’ activities are directed toward changing WTO rules, norms, structures, and decision-making procedures. TAGs use non-coercive instruments such as lobbying, public education, capacity building, information gathering, information sharing, and protests to pursue their objectives. Unlike political parties, TAGs do not aim at forming a government; nor do they seek to make financial profit, as do firms. Though TAGs occupy private space, they may have access to public resources or may be the creation of states and/or promote government objectives. This study tried to capture four types of TAGs: abolitionist, transformationalist, reformist, and conformist. The abolitionist TAGs are NGOs that seek to persuade state officials to abolish the WTO. An example of an abolitionist TAG is the Third World Network (TWN). Transformationalist TAGs, like the South Centre, attempt to use the WTO framework to transform the international political economy. Reformist TAGs, such as the Southern and Eastern African Trade Information and Negotiations Initiative (SEATINI), encourage state officials to reform WTO institutional mechanisms. The majority of private business advocacy associations based on the African continent are conformist TAGs, which lobby state officials to implement WTO commitments.

1. See, for instance, Ostry et al. (2002).

Our research employed qualitative research techniques, such as content analysis, email correspondence, process tracing, and elite interviews. In order to ground the paper in the relevant literature and to build on the work of others, we examined trade policy literatures and soft primary materials like media reports on activities of trade officials and TAGs. We then went on an exploratory research trip to Geneva, Accra, and Addis Ababa between June 9 and July 31, 2005. We travelled to Geneva and Addis Ababa because initial research led us to suspect that the African Union and the Economic Commission for Africa — both of which have their offices in Addis Ababa — as well as the African missions in Geneva, play critical roles in the development of multilateral trade policy of African countries. We added Accra to the list of cities because journalistic accounts and secondary literatures led us to believe that NGOs such as the African branch of the TWN and the Organization of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU), both headquartered in Accra, play a prominent role in trade policy-making of African countries. We also interviewed commercial counsellors and economic attachés in six African missions to Canada on November 10, 2005.² In all, about two dozen people, including bureaucrats, trade experts, trade negotiators, commercial counsellors, representatives of intergovernmental agencies, officials of trade advocacy groups, and former and current government officials were interviewed.

Findings

TAGs' involvement in trade policy-making varies across the African continent. Indigenous African TAGs participate in the making of trade policies in states such as South Africa, Mauritius, Uganda, and Botswana. They are particularly active players in the decision-making processes on regional, bilateral, and continental trade policies. However, indigenous African TAGs are virtually uninvolved in the decision-making processes of WTO-related issues in many African states. They have little contact even with policy officials of African countries who deal with WTO issues.

A combination of three factors accounts for the limited involvement of indigenous African TAGs in the decision-making processes of WTO-related issues. First, many African states do not have formal

2. The diplomatic missions are Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda, and Zimbabwe.

consultative structures at the state level for indigenous African TAGs to participate in policy-making on WTO issues. WTO issues are discussed at the cabinet and ministerial levels in many African states, and there are no formal channels for TAGs to engage these higher level officials. Only the governments of Botswana, Mauritius, Uganda, and South Africa appear to be developing formal institutional mechanisms for policy-makers to hear and exchange views on WTO issues with NGOs. TAGs are either ignored or consulted on an ad hoc basis in the rest of Africa. Whereas the governments of states such as Burkina Faso, Togo, Malawi, and Zimbabwe have no formal structures for TAGs to provide input into the making of WTO-related decisions, public officials in countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya consult TAGs on an ad hoc basis. The ad hoc consultative meetings are often for private business associations only. For instance, the prime minister of Ethiopia and the presidents of Nigeria, Ghana, and Kenya meet business groups once every six months to discuss a broad range of issues, including WTO issues. The Nigerians call it a “retreat,” and the Ethiopians call it “the PM Forum.” Even in Uganda, where formal institutions have been established, public officials try to minimize TAGs’ participation in decision-making processes because they think the NGOs “always try to spoil things” for them or “always look for faults about government officials” (Lukwiya interview 2005). It is not uncommon in countries where formal institutional structures do exist for policy officials either to give short notice to TAGs to attend important meetings on trade issues or provide limited and general information to TAGs during discussions on trade-related issues.

Second, and closely related to the first point, the “naming and shaming” method typically employed by indigenous African TAGs has pushed a wedge between them and public officials. Aside from the fact that many public officials are not used to public criticism of their actions, the post-1990 NGOs’ willingness to critique actions of African governments in public has made some public officials view and treat indigenous African TAGs as opposition groups that are always looking for faults to report to their financiers in the West. The unfriendly relationship that has developed between public officials and NGOs is partly responsible for the exclusion of indigenous African TAGs from decision-making processes. The mission staffs were unanimous on this issue. Even the commercial counsellors could not avoid using adjectives such as “imported,” “foreign,” “self-seeking,” “radical,” “confrontational,” and “hostile” to describe trade advocacy groups in

Africa. It is perhaps unsurprising that state officials in many African states do not find it necessary to hold regular consultations with trade-related NGOs.

Third, and more important, indigenous African TAGs play a limited role in multilateral trade policy-making processes because many trade officials from African states rely on informal institutional structures provided by the African Union to make important decisions on WTO issues.

Informalization of Multilateral Trade Policy-Making

African governments through the African Union have established two informal consultative mechanisms to enhance solidarity and cooperation among African states that are WTO members. The institutions are the African Group in Geneva and the African Trade Ministers Conference. Virtually every position that a majority of African trade policy officials take at WTO meetings is based on the consensual view agreed on during meetings of the African Group in Geneva or the African Trade Ministers Conference.

The African Group in Geneva

The African Group in Geneva consists of African ambassadors accredited to WTO and UN agencies in Geneva and the African Trade Experts. The ambassadors meet at least once a month to discuss and take collective decisions on a range of issues, including trade. The monthly meeting of the ambassadors serves as the highest decision-making body. In practice the ambassadors “give political guidance and decide on issues on which the experts fail to reach agreement” (Muremy interview 2005). The actual day-to-day decisions on multilateral trade of SSA states are made at the level of the experts.

The experts are African technocrats accredited to Geneva to negotiate and cover WTO issues and UN agencies. They have developed a well-structured informal consultative mechanism to deal with WTO issues; they hold regular consultative meetings every Tuesday morning. The weekly meeting and, indeed, the expert forum were originally created to provide a platform for middle-level professionals in the African missions in Geneva to consult each other on issues of common interest to African states. The experts turned the consultative meetings into a trade policy-making forum because of lack of experts at home and insufficient staffing at the Geneva missions.

To ensure division of labour and specialization, the experts have established Focal Points for key WTO issue areas. At present, there is a Focal Point for Non-Agricultural Market Access (NAMA), Services, WTO Rules, Agriculture, and Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS). The role of Focal Points in the process is to develop proposals, make presentations, and attend negotiation sessions on behalf of the African Group. Focal Points are also supposed to provide updated information on their areas of jurisdictions to the entire African Group at the weekly meeting of experts held every Tuesday morning. The informal institutional machinery of the trade experts is managed by a coordinator. The coordinating position rotates among the African missions on a six-month basis. On paper, Focal Points are supposed to develop the African Group positions and advance their interests at the WTO. In reality, Focal Points rely on TAGs such as International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty, the Economic Commission for Africa, and the South Centre to do their work. As the longest serving trade representative within the African Group put it, “there is nothing African about the proposals and things we defend at meetings of WTO. We provide little input to the proposals we send to WTO ... The NGOs have been so helpful to the extent that we always expect them to spoon feed us. The problem, however, is that we usually submit proposals to WTO that we do not understand and cannot defend in any coherent manner” (Anonymous interview 2005).

A number of factors combine to account for the overreliance of the African Group and Focal Points on these TAGs. Three of these factors are worth emphasizing. First, because over 80 percent of African delegates to UN agencies in Geneva, and the WTO in particular, work for ministries of foreign affairs, the African Group finds it difficult to get well-trained staff and/or trade specialists to serve as Focal Points. The majority of African delegates have limited intellectual background in trade law, international economics, and international negotiation. The overwhelming majority of African delegates to the WTO obtained their technical skills on trade-related issues from the capacity-building exercises of the WTO and other donor agencies. But as the Coordinator of the African Group pointed out, “the training we have received so far was meant to help us understand the WTO system and terms. They are only meant to open our minds to the liberalization process. The training was not meant to help us make trade policy, draft negotiation texts, and/or develop negotiation strategies” (Muremy interview 2005).

Second, because African missions in Geneva are under the ministries of foreign affairs, it is practically impossible for the missions to build institutional memory and retain experienced staff. Staff of African ministries of foreign affairs are on missions for a maximum of three years; the Geneva missions are no exception. In fact, the longest serving delegate, who, incidentally, was the only person we know of who worked at a ministry of trade prior to his appointment, had been at the African mission for just over four years.³

Third, many African states do not have institutions that specifically train international negotiators, trade policy experts, and analysts of the multilateral trading system. Those few states that have such institutions also teach trade-related issues and international negotiations as part of international economics and international law in the humanities. The problem with this kind of training is that students do not receive a solid understanding of the multilateral trading system, trade policy, and trade law. Aside from the inadequate time given to trade-related subjects, the teaching of international economics is primarily a discussion of trade theories and international financial regimes. In addition, the teaching of international law concentrates unduly on human rights issues, international conventions, and treaties. William Lyakurwa blamed the weak technical skills of African negotiators on the African universities, observing, “in a typical [African] university setting, the teaching of international economics concentrate [sic] on trade theory and international finance and very little if any on trade policy. Similarly, lawyers are taught to defend the law, prosecute, and convict with little if any exposure to trade policy. Thus, in both disciplines, there is a weak understanding of trade policy and trade law” (Lyakurwa 2002, p. 4).

The result is that African countries employ these graduates, who have little insight into trade-related issues, in ministries and foreign missions to manage multilateral trade. It is perhaps unsurprising that many of the African delegates and Focal Points do not have the required technical skills and sophistication to make competitive trade policy decisions. The problem is compounded by the fact that the missions do not receive any meaningful directives from “home.” Many of the delegates felt that few people in their ministries in the capitals

3. The Zambia delegate, we were told, had overstayed and every effort was made to send him back.

“even know and understand what is going on” at the WTO (Muremy interview 2005). Almost all the delegates interviewed indicated that they get little instruction and input from the capitals on the content of issues under consideration. The lack of meaningful input from the capitals and the weak technical expertise of the “Experts” have compelled Focal Points to seek assistance from non-state actors and agencies who work on trade-related issues.

The Role of TAGs

International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty (ILEAP), the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA), and the South Centre are the non-state actors that are involved in the development of multilateral negotiation positions, strategies, and agendas of the African Group. ILEAP and ECA play a comparatively limited role in the process, providing comments on proposals that the African Group submits to the WTO. The South Centre, however, helps the African Group to understand the issues under consideration at the WTO and also works with the African experts in the development of proposals for the WTO.

International Lawyers and Economists Against Poverty

The role of ILEAP in the Geneva process is confined to providing comments and opinions on proposals. The African Group in Geneva also seeks the opinion of ILEAP representatives in Geneva before they take definite stands on issues under consideration. One of the trade representatives explained ILEAP’s role this way: “We ask them sometimes to comment on our proposals ... And we sometimes discuss things with them” (Adebayo interview 2005). Many members of the African Group seem to be genuinely satisfied with the work of ILEAP. A few of them, however, felt the emphasis that some ILEAP representatives in Geneva place on reciprocity was at odds with the development orientations of the African Group. In the view of a delegate, ILEAP officials “hardly take a radical stand. They often tell us WTO is not a development agency and we should not request for A, B, C. We trust their judgment, though, and we usually give them proposals to comment on. We take the ideas that we feel support our goal and leave the rest” (Anonymous interview).

It is perhaps unsurprising that some members of the African Group expressed this reservation given ILEAP’s desire to provide independent professional advice to beneficiaries. Part of the problem

is that many members of the African Group do not possess the kinds of knowledge, skills, and expertise required to make appropriate responses to proposals. The inclination of the African Group is to respond to proposals by requesting assistance from the negotiating parties. ILEAP representatives, however, want the African Group to take a strategic approach in making requests during WTO negotiations.

The Economic Commission for Africa

ECA is the agency that has had long-standing working relations on economic issues with African states. It has unparalleled access to African policy-makers, and it is the non-state actor that has the greatest opportunity and the technical resources to drive African trade policy. ECA took advantage of its access to policy-makers and brought African trade ministers together in Tunis in October 1994 to discuss the implications of the WTO for the African region. ECA succeeded in making the ministers appreciate the importance of the WTO to the African economy and the need for African states to participate more effectively in the multilateral trading system (Osakwe interview 2005). It was on that basis that the ministers appealed to the international community to help strengthen the capacity of their state to

- participate in the World Trade Organization;
- integrate into the new multilateral trading system;
- take advantage of new trade opportunities arising from the globalization of world markets.

ECA has since tried to help policy-makers and representatives “make informed decisions” on international trade (Mwalwanda interview 2005). In an effort to help African delegations to the WTO make “trade decisions based on informed economic research,” ECA established an office of Advisory Services in 2001 (ibid.). The Head of the Advisory Services has a close relationship with the African Group in Geneva. He participates actively in both formal and informal meetings of the African Group on trade-related issues, and provides the African Group with information and background studies on African economies. As Audu Suleman Adebayo put it, “We maintain an open door policy [with ECA], and we speak with ECA people as often as possible. The ECA do not usually comment or write proposals for us, but Dr. Mwalwanda often provides ideas both at formal and informal meetings” (Adebayo interview 2005).

It appears that the African Group maintains closer contact with ECA than any other TAGs. ECA's effectiveness in helping African trade representatives make informed decisions on trade is open to debate. It is definitely not the principal actor in the development of proposals and the negotiation positions of the African Group. Another trade representative noted that "the ECA has been helpful, though not as critical as the South Centre. We invite Dr. Mwalawanda [the ECA representative] to our meetings, and we consult them also for background economic information" (Chisanga interview 2005).

The South Centre

As a component of efforts to enhance participation of developing countries in the multilateral trading system, the South Centre (the Centre) has become a key player in the Geneva process. The Centre's Trade and Development Programme (TADP) supports the Geneva process in five major ways (Kaukab interview 2005).⁴ First, the Centre organizes informal working lunches with African trade representatives and Focal Points to discuss specific trade issues and exchange ideas and information; to prepare them for major meetings at the WTO; and to help African delegates coordinate and harmonize positions. The Centre's TADP officials provide written materials and discussion papers for the informal working lunches. The discussion papers and materials provided at the lunches often shape African delegates' views of issues under consideration at the WTO.

Second, the TADP officials provide the Focal Points with technical and analytical papers. Such papers are intended to build and develop a distinctly pro-poor and "developing country-centered" viewpoint on trade issues (South Centre 2005, p. 4). A number of trade representatives interviewed suggested that the Centre's pro-poor and pro-development agenda makes it the ideal institution for the African Group to work with.

Third, the TADP acts as a think-tank for the Focal Points and the African delegates. African delegates consult TADP staff for research papers and information before they make any major presentations at WTO meetings. TADP staff work with Focal Points to develop written materials for "presentations and submissions" during meetings of the WTO and the African Group, and at the Brainstorming sessions

4. See also South Centre (2005).

(Adebayo and Kaukab interviews 2005).⁵ The TADP produces policy reports and papers on trade issues likely to be considered at the WTO meetings. The policy reports and papers are intended to bring to the attention of the delegates key issues that might come up at the WTO meetings and their potential impact on the countries, and to encourage delegates to take proactive actions.

Fourth, the TADP organizes seminars and workshops for the African Group and other developing countries on trade issues. The workshops and seminars are intended to open the minds of participants to think about trade issues through pro-poor and pro-development lenses (Kaukab interview 2005; South Centre 2005, p. 4).

Fifth, TADP staff members participate in the experts meetings of the African Group. They play a critical role in agenda setting for the meeting, and they also participate actively in the discussions. Some interviewees described them as “resources persons” for the African Group meetings in Geneva and during the Brainstorming sessions in Africa (Chisanga interview 2005). The overall view within the circles of African trade representatives was that they have developed a solid working relationship and partnership with the South Centre. The level of trust and dealings that exist between the Centre’s staff and the African trade officials is high. African representatives are comfortable approaching the Centre with any WTO-related concerns they may have. African trade representatives share many documents with the Centre’s officials, and the Centre in turn provides them with technical resources for their day-to-day work.

Trade Ministers Conference

The Trade Ministers Conference was established by the African Union (AU) and the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA). The two organizations came together in 1998 to persuade African leaders to allow their trade ministers hold annual meeting in order to build coalitions, develop strategies, and coordinate African positions for WTO negotiations (Karanyi interview 2005). Because many African states “do not yet have the domestic institutional structure to deal with the challenges of the WTO ... [the Trade Ministers Conference] has become a mini-trade policy forum” (Tsilimbiaza interview 2005). The AU not only claims ownership of the processes but has also made

5. More information on the Brainstorming sessions can be found in the section on the Trade Ministers Conference.

the Ministers Conference an integral part of its institutional structures. In theory, decisions taken at the Ministers Conference requires approval of the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government. In practice, however, the Assembly usually rubber-stamps the Ministers Conference's decisions.

The AU and ECA have created an ad hoc technical committee to assist the Trade Ministers Conference. Bureaucrats from member states, trade attachés in African states' missions in Geneva, and African diplomats based in Addis Ababa constitute the technical committee.⁶ The committee holds at least two sessions prior to every Trade Ministers Conference. The senior trade officials do the technical work; they provide clarification and explanation of issues for the ambassadors to set the agenda for the Trade Ministers Conference; and they develop consensus on key issues.

The AU Commission is supposed to act as the policy entrepreneur, providing information and assistance to the technical committee. However, the Commission does not have the technical expertise to do trade analysis and provide technical information. Instead, the Commission, together with ECA and the African Development Bank (ADB), organizes Brainstorming sessions.

The Brainstorming sessions bring together African trade negotiators based in Geneva, Brussels, the capitals, selected African research institutions, a couple of civil society groups, a few private sector operators, the World Bank, and African regional economic communities to provide technical information for the work of the technical committee. The Brainstorming idea came originally from ECA, which brought in the AU in order to give it the political backing. Other intergovernmental agencies, such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the ADB, and the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), have since joined to sponsor the Brainstorming sessions.

In addition to the Focal Points, experts from international organizations such as the World Bank and UNCTAD present technical and research papers at the Brainstorming sessions. The Focal Points often seek input from the South Centre during the preparation of the

6. Participants in the latest session included representatives of UNCTAD, the WTO, the African Economic Research Consortium, ILEAP, the Southern Africa Trade and Research Network (SATRN), and the Third World Network.

technical papers for the Brainstorming sessions. Brainstorming sessions have become a rich source of ideas and technical information for the work of the technical committee. Ideas discussed at the Brainstorming sessions are synthesized in a report with recommendations and forwarded to the technical committee. The ambassadorial/senior experts examine the report, develop consensus on key issues, and make recommendations to the ministers of trade and commerce to adopt as common African positions. The general view is that African states, with the exception of South Africa and Egypt, do not deviate from a common African position at WTO ministerial summits.

Conclusion and Future Research Direction

A majority of governments in Africa develop negotiation positions, agendas, and strategies on WTO issues through informal pan-African institutional mechanisms. The informal nature of the decision-making processes has allowed TAGs operating outside the African region to play a central role in the development of multilateral trade positions and agendas of many governments in Africa. These informal processes have also prevented indigenous African TAGs from taking part in WTO decision-making processes. Public officials in many African states do not consult indigenous African TAGs, except for business groups, in making WTO-related decisions. The informal nature of African states' decision-making on WTO issues differentiates it from conventional level one trade policy-making processes.

Though this exploratory study has provided insights into an underexplored phenomenon, it does not give us an in-depth understanding of the trade policy-making processes of individual African states. We do not, for instance, know the extent to which the informal mechanisms help individual African governments take decisions on WTO issues that fulfill the developmental objectives of their states. Or the extent to which the informal processes assist in mainstreaming trade into the national development of African states. We also do not know the relationships between African states' stands on WTO issues and their positions on bilateral trade and other multilateral trade. Thus, we need to gain a better sense of broader trade policy-making processes. After all, the WTO is a small though important aspect of the international trade of African states. We also do not have a much deeper case-study understanding of the extent of TAGs' involvement in policy-making on non-WTO issues. If

expanding trade marks a route to reducing poverty in Africa, which we believe it does, a better understanding of broader trade policy-making processes is indispensable. More detailed case-studies of multilateral trade policy-making in Africa are needed.

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