



ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION
on
HARNESSING INTERNATIONAL TRADE FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT
organised by
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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development considers trade as an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction as well as to achieve Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). International trade and increased integration of global value chains have made the relationship between trade and environment increasingly complex. The two are often seen at loggerheads, if not opposed to each other. Open trade has increased industrial production, thus increasing CO₂ emissions. However, trade, if regulated efficiently can be used as a tool to enhance the global environment. From upgrading the economy of a country to the exchange of new and more efficient technologies of production, open trade and trade liberalization are developing to be the key to facilitating sustainable practices.

Environmental concerns have become an important part of the bilateral trade negotiations within Free Trade Agreements (FTAs). As an emerging area, the initiatives to further integrate trade and the environment have been spearheaded by developed countries. These take the form of “Trade and Sustainable Development” (TSD) obligations which have become a non-negotiable part of the new-age FTAs. Often such obligations can lead to the creation of non-tariff barriers, specifically when considered from the viewpoint of developing or least-developed countries. As a country becomes more integrated within the world economy, its export sector becomes more exposed to environmental requirements imposed by the leading importers. Developing countries and least developed countries need to find a balance in terms of their development goals while ensuring that any TSD provisions undertaken as part of trade agreements, do not confine their necessary policy space and developmental priorities.

In the above backdrop, this discussion engages on the following questions –

- To what extent do trade and the environment interact with or influence each other? Do specific concerns within the environment domain, for e.g. climate change, impact trade or vice-versa? Are there any specific patterns in which this is being observed?
- How can trade address environmental concerns? What regulatory reforms would this call for in the trade regime?
- Can bilateral arrangements deal with trade-environment relations differently than multilateral arrangements?
- Can addressing trade distortions and having specific safeguards lead to cordial relations regarding environmental concerns between developed and developing countries? What balance should India strive to achieve on these issues?
- How far it is justified to impose labour and environmental standards on developing and least-developed countries as part of trade agreements, whether bilateral or multilateral?

RESOURCE PERSONS



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