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THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF MULTILATERAL TRADING SYSTEMS

Dr. M B MOHANDAS Sr. MANAGER (EXPORT & COMMERCIAL) INDIAN FARMERS FERTILISER COOPERATIVE LTD. NEW DELHI

ABSTRACT

One of the incredible features of post-war (World War II) epoch is many national economies had become more open and foreign trade had expanded at a faster pace than the world output. Economic development in a country at any stage is a function of many factors such as state of technology, skills of the population, political stability, good economic policy etc. International trade among different economies is an important factor in raising living standards, providing better employment opportunities and enabling the large population to enjoy a greater variety and quality of goods. As national economies with strong international trade have become more and more prosperous, it can be one of the major contributors towards poverty alleviation. RTAs and the MTS platform WTO share the common objective of trade liberalization wherein the former is discriminatory the latter is not. Over a time, many WTO Members are gradually embraced different types of RTAs as an effective trade policy tool, as complementary to MFN. By liberalizing trade, countries benefit not only from increased access to technology and consumer goods but also from the chance to find new markets and connect to global value chains.

KEYWORDS

RTA, MTS, WTO.

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INTRODUCTION

It is imperative that a well-organized and well managed world monetary system is an essential prerequisite for fostering economic prosperity, growth and also maintaining the financial equilibrium of the world economy. In the post-World War II period, Allied Powers who got an opportunity to revive the war ravaged global economy, instituted IMF and World Bank (the Breton wood twins) in 1944 in line with a trade -off, an international monetary system with convertible currencies at fixed but adjustable exchange rates along with restricted private cross border capital flows would stimulate a favourable climate for international trade and investment. The currency of the largest economy, US dollar became the key and vehicle currency for a globally accepted means of payment network system, investment and invoicing i.e. the three important functions of money – medium of exchange, store value and unit of account, due its economic size, influence, wide acceptance and commitment to convert dollar into gold at fixed rate. That is to say, that Bretton Woods conserved the shift from commodity to fiat. The dollar remained convertible into gold and other currencies into dollar; more precisely commodity money was entirely off the scene. The world economy was growing rapidly by five percent per annum, which was more than double as fast as between 1870 and 1913. In the absence of IMF not providing an elastic supply of international money (as the quotas for member countries in IMF were limited), the US found itself in a unique position to play the role of world banker, borrowing short and lending long in the international market place and thus influenced the global economy.

The creation of a third institution namely ITO (International Trade Organization) for facilitating and monitoring the cross border flow of goods and services in a less protectionist environment by removing tariffs and other kinds of quantitative restrictions and barriers could not take off as there was no consensus. However, countries engaging themselves about 80% of world trade did reach an agreement, called GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariff), which became a Treaty as well as an organization. More than 60 years later, that is 1995, it has evolved into a separate institution namely WTO (World Trade Organisation), coincided with the end of the Cold War, through several rounds of trade negotiations with the principal goal to ensure that trade flows as smoothly, predictably and freely as possible. This was seen in some countries as an opportunity to cash in the "peace dividend" and reduce the burdens of leadership, but some idealists more grandly proclaimed an "end of history" and saw an opportunity to devise a more cooperative world system and even advocated greater reliance on international organizations as deliverers of "global public goods". Today WTO is an organization towards a free market economy, a strong platform for governments to negotiate trade agreements and as place for settling trade disputes. It also operates a system of trade rules. It again helps developing economies build their trade capacity. In short, WTO is the multilateral based global platform for all individual economies.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

One of the incredible features of post-war (World War II) epoch is many national economies had become more open and foreign trade had expanded at a faster pace than the world output. At the same time, many insular and State controlled economies had progressively abandoned their conventional import substituting industrialization model and started advocating and adopting outward oriented development strategy with explicit export orientation. More precisely this involved a clear shift from state controlled public sector dominated economy to private sector centric market led economy. Over the years, the integration of the global economy through the progressive internationalisation of trade coupled with finance has touched at unprecedented levels, exceeding the pre—World War I peak and this new upsurge of globalization is having far-reaching implications for the economic well-being of the entire population sprawled across the continents and among all income groups. World trade has grown five times in real terms since 1980, and its share of world GDP has risen from 36 percent to 55 percent over this period. At the same time, almost all economies have ameliorated human development, the equal life chances for all, over the past few decades, and billions of people are now living in a substantially better level. The 2013 Human Development Report (HDR) revealed that 40 plus emerging market economies where the majority of the global population settled had greater HDI gains.

Another striking aspect was the emergence of three distinct major regional economic groupings namely East Asian, North American and European. Along with this regional grouping, multilateral trade negotiation also took place under the umbrella of GATT, leading to more integration of global economy. When developed economies became the net exporters of capital and technology, emerging economies acted as the recipients. International trade increased at a faster rate than the GDP growth of individual national economies. Rapid growth in foreign trade in goods, services and finance plus the predominance of new technologies and innovative modalities for production as well as marketing via the proliferation of MNCs were the visible features of the globalization process – integration of capital, labour, management and the rapid movement of goods and services with the rest of world.

With gradual deregulation in financial markets, massive private capital flows took place across the continents and as a result, fluctuations in both nominal and real exchange rates became violent. Exchange rate movements were not generally governed by national price level movements but rather by the weight of the capital flows and the consequent intervention policy of the central bank. Macroeconomic stability and the incentives to engage in trade, in short and medium terms, began to revolve around the concerns related to real exchange rate stability. Thus the main condition for successful trade performance of a country began to depend on its greater financial and exchange rate stability. The major key currencies (G3 currencies) started to exhibit short-term volatility and medium term misalignments. With successive capital account liberalization in many countries in a progressive manner, largely propelled by IMF, the number of currency crises also increased. Slowly but steadily the excessive volatility of exchange rates under managed floating eventually gave birth to the fear of floating and the evolving managed floating exchange rate system thus degenerated into a more or less fixed exchange rate framework of the olden times. Under the new scenario, an independent monetary policy and free capital movements became inconsistent with rigid fixed exchange rate. In an environment of managed float and fear of

floating, exchange rates of emerging markets became rigid, but capital flows became massive. This created setback for the monetary management of these countries and also led to huge accumulation of forex reserves.

In today's globalised world, Multilateralism is a diplomatic term that refers to cooperation among several nations. The last US President Barack Obama has made multilateralism as a dominant element of US foreign policy under his administration. Given the global nature of multilateralism, multilateral policies are diplomatically intensive but offer the potential for great payoffs

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This Paper tried to synthesise the significance of post war period global trading systems towards Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in September, 2015, to certain extend. The two main objectives of this research Paper are:

- 1. To track and emphasis the role of multilateral trading system to reduce the global trade barriers towards a free trade economy.
- 2. To identify and pin point the influential role of RTAs / FTAs / PTAs in a multilateral trading system.

METHODOLOGY

This study is exploratory and broadly qualitative in nature, based on review of mainly WTO, IMF, UNCTAD and other UN agencies' studies engaged with both primary and secondary data, which obtained from their respective web sites.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

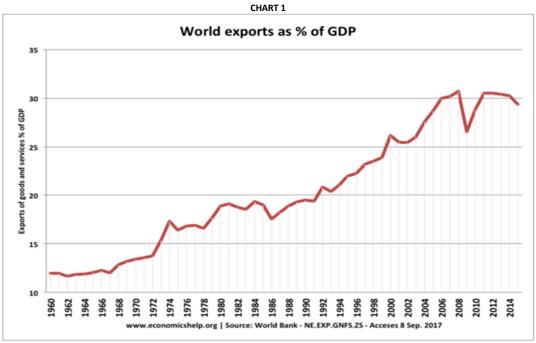
Economic development in a country at any stage is a function of many factors such as state of technology, skills of the population, political stability, good economic policy etc. As it is widely believed, economic development must not be just measured or judged by high growth statistics number registered by the country but, rather taking into account the content of growth i.e. to what extent the economic progress is translated into reducing inequality and poverty and also improving the quality of the life of the poor. It has been also demonstrated that, in economies where gender equality is greater in terms of both opportunities and benefits, there is not only high economic growth rate but also a better quality of life.

International trade among different economies is an important factor in raising living standards, providing better employment opportunities and enabling the large population to enjoy a greater variety and quality of goods. However, International trade can be traced from the earliest civilisations, in recent years it has become to play an increasingly important role with a larger share of GDP devoted to exports and imports. Trade itself has been transformed over the last two decades wherein production chains have become increasingly international, offering new opportunities as well as challenges to countries aiming to participate in global trade flows. Further, overall trade in goods has nearly quadrupled, while WTO members' import tariffs have declined by an average of 15 per cent. Over half of world trade is now tariff-free. As national economies with strong international trade have become more and more prosperous, it can be one of the major contributors towards poverty alleviation. The main domestic influential factors of international trade are geographical, political, resource and technological dependency, fiscal and monetary policies and the choice of exchange rate regime.

DISCUSSION & FINDINGS

THE ECONOMICS OF FREE TRADE

Adam Smith's concepts of division of labour and absolute advantage is the basis of free trade which accounts about three quarters of the rationale for open markets, especially for those countries that have clear natural advantages in the production of certain goods. David Ricardo's concept of comparative advantage offers the rest of that rationale, explaining why even countries that are the best at nothing can still gain by exporting those things in which they are comparatively more productive and importing those things that they produce least efficiently. The concept of comparative advantage underscore the economic logic of multilateral trade reform by dictating that under global free trade, production will be shifted to the most efficient producers. Both increased trade and trade liberalisation can enhance the development prospects of any nation – say many modern economists. Today, trade has been recognized in the UN 2030 development Agenda as well as in the Addis Ababa Agenda for Action as an important means for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



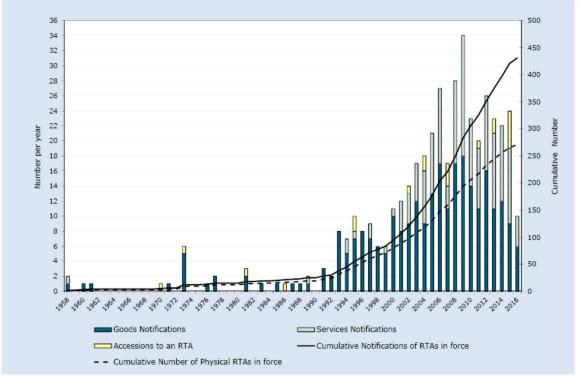
HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The Second World War unleashed an opportunity to the Allied Powers to remake the world economy through international organizations, which had been instituted like the structure of national governments. The post-war Multilateral Trading System (MTS), towards GATT – WTO, was emerged from recognising the sovereignty of every nation and its best exercise is to enter into binding agreements with other states voluntary and mutual limits on sovereignty, framing International law, including the forms and norms of diplomacy, protocol, treaties, conferences and eventually the establishment of international organizations. Accordingly, the coexistence of preferential and multilateral (GATT MFN) trade liberalization was viewed as ultimately positive in international trade relations. Thence

prevailing perception was that genuine regional initiatives, promoting extensive trade liberalization among sub-sets of the Members could be congruent with multilaterally-agreed trade liberalization which could contribute to enhance the global trade as well as MTS. Thus, from the infant state of the GATT, Members were allowed to deep their market access through RTAS / FTAs / PTAs, subject to certain number of GATT criteria. The number of preferential agreements as well as the world share of preferential trade has been steadily increasing over the past two decades.

THE EVOLUTION OF TRAS



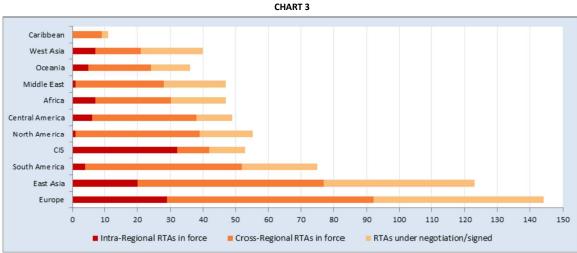


Source: WTO

LATEST TRENDS

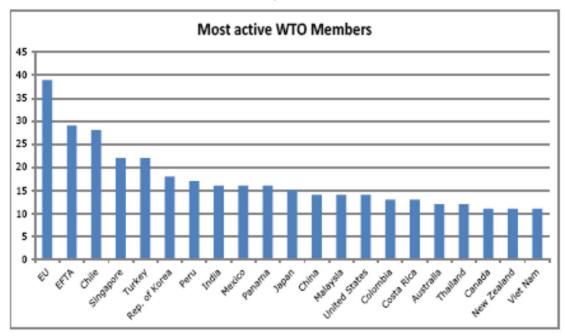
RTAs and the MTS platform WTO share the common objective of trade liberalization wherein the former is discriminatory the latter is not. Over a time, many WTO Members are gradually embraced different types of RTAs as an effective trade policy tool, as complementary to MFN. RTAs are a major and perhaps irreversible feature of today's MTS. But economic considerations are only one facet of complex RTA strategies being pursued by individual or groups of countries which often include broader foreign policy aims such as political and security considerations. PTAs can reduce policy-imposed barriers to the flow of goods, services, capital, labour, technology etc. The promotion of free trade at a preferential level may help developing economies to implement domestic reforms and open up to competitive market pressures at a sustainable pace, thus facilitating their integration in the world economy. This may also benefit the multilateral process by exerting leverage for openness and competitive liberalization in international trade relations. Yet, the development of complex networks of non-MFN trade relations and of regulatory regimes which increasingly touch upon policy areas uncharted by multilateral trade agreements may place developing countries, in particular, in a weaker position than under the multilateral framework. As for the MTS, such RTA proliferation is already undermining transparency and predictability in international trade relations, which are the pillars of the WTO system. This can ultimately alter the global trade patterns with severe implications for WTO Members through, among others, trade and investment diversion and diminished attention to the multilateral system. Today, global trade barriers are historically low and the 164 WTO members are home to more than 7 billion people and account for nearly 96 per cent of the global economy and 98 per cent of world trade. Trade volumes have increased two-and-a-half times.

RTAs IN FORCE, AND UNDER NEGOTIATION BY REGION



Source: WTO

CHART 4



Source: RTA Section, WTO Secretariat.

CONCLUSION

In today's complex environment of international trade liberalisation, politics and economics operate hand-in-hand. Though RTAs have conventionally been steered towards gradual elimination of all formal trade barriers among participants, they are progressively being used as fora to address wider policy concerns that have emerged over time. With the gradual lowering of formal trade restrictions, in particular in the form of GATT-bound industrial tariffs, and the emergence of international production chains, other barriers have gained in economic importance. Besides, RTAs provide a basis to extend trade disciplines to factor flows - investment, technology and labour. However, it is to be ensured that all types of RTAs / FTAs are well crafted and implemented to complement the systemic significance of MTS. It is a widely recognised and accepted fact that trade drives growth and development. By liberalizing trade, countries benefit not only from increased access to technology and consumer goods but also from the chance to find new markets and connect to global value chains. This can quickly translate into GDP growth and a rise in the standard of living.

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