

# Preface

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The establishment of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 led to a major transformation of the multilateral trading system. Until then, the system comprised only those rules that countries were expected to apply to trade in goods. With the WTO, these rules were extended to trade in services and to trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights. The widening of the rules, and their bewildering complexity, posed challenges to the delegations of developing countries in participating in the discussions.

A number of these countries had become members only a few years before or during the Uruguay Round of negotiations (1986-1994), which led to the establishment of the WTO. Many of them had not been able to establish effective national mechanisms to undertake the studies and analysis required for briefing delegations on the approaches they could adopt in the discussions. At the same time as the Geneva-based delegations of these countries struggled to improve their understanding of the complicated existing rules, the First WTO Ministerial Conference (Singapore, 9-13 December 1996) took decisions to include new subjects for study and analysis with a view to developing even more new rules.

This difficult situation prompted ambassadors from some of the Commonwealth developing countries to take action. They requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to employ the services of a Geneva-based senior adviser with expertise in WTO law and practice to help improve the knowledge and understanding of the WTO's rules-based system and to prepare for participation in the new round of negotiations that was expected to be launched. I was appointed to the post in August 1997. Immediately afterwards steps were taken to constitute the Geneva Group of Commonwealth Developing Countries as a forum for discussion and exchange of views on WTO negotiation issues. These exchanges were to be based on background papers prepared by me. The Group also adopted a constitution setting out broad principles governing how I should provide advice and assistance, and on the relationship between the Group, the Secretariat and myself.

In accordance with these principles, the Group evolved procedures to ensure the assistance provided was recipient driven, and that it did not clash with assistance provided by other Geneva-based organisations such as UNCTAD. I was encouraged to collaborate with officials from the missions in the preparation of the background papers. After being discussed in the Group, and reviewed and revised taking into account the comments these papers were attributed to the Group and made available to its members. To encourage wider discussions on the issues raised the papers were

made available to the Commonwealth Secretariat for publication after delegations had used them in the negotiating groups.

I was also required to provide, on request, advice and assistance to individual delegations. Where this support involved the preparation of papers in addition to discussions, such papers were made available only to the requesting delegation. These papers were circulated to all members of the Group if the requesting delegation agreed.

At the time of my appointment I was working on some of the trade-related subject areas on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretariat in a joint effort with the International Trade Centre (ITC). It was agreed that I should also devote some of my time to this work.

The purpose of this handbook is to provide an overview of the work done during the project's 11-year span. In deciding to publish it, the Commonwealth Secretariat and the members of the Group were influenced by two considerations. First, it could help in assessing the extent to which delegations of the member countries had been successful in adopting approaches in the negotiations that took into account their perceived trade and development interests both on liberalisation of trade and on rule-making. Second, increasing access to background papers previously available only to the Group would be useful to negotiators in the last phase of the negotiations and, after the termination of negotiations, to the officials from capitals and future negotiators. Academics, research scholars and others engaged in studying how the WTO negotiating process worked in the Doha Round of negotiations will also find it useful.

One of the achievements of the Doha Round during the time of the project was the recognition of the important role the 'Aid for Trade' initiative can play in enabling developing countries to participate actively in WTO negotiations and other work and take advantage of the benefits of the liberalisation measures agreed in the negotiations. This aspect of the project, as recorded in this handbook, will be useful to Aid administrators from international organisations and from the national donor agencies as well as officials from recipient countries. The project experiences will be particularly beneficial in deciding on the framework and procedures for providing assistance to developing countries participating in trade negotiations to enable them to pursue their perceived trade and development interests independent of the interests of the donor countries and other participating countries.

In compiling this book I have taken care to be objective and factual, mindful that historical accounts such as this are greatly influenced by the perceptions of the author.