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TRADE POLICY AND SUSTAINABLE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA

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I INTRODUCTION

1. Since 1990 the UNDP has, comprehensive annual human development reports, articulated, measured and popularized the concept of sustainable human development (SHD). In UNDP (1996), human development is defined as a process of enlarging people's choices. Thus, SHD is a people-centred concept; it places progress at the service of people, whatever form that progress takes, including cultural, economic, political, social and technological.

2. In the African context, poverty alleviation and food security concerns constitute, probably, two of the most critical dimensions of SHD. This note suggests that these two elements of SHD are important policy concerns with respect to which trade policy may have significant implications. More specifically, this note seeks to examine whether, how and the extent to which trade policy (and its different component parts) affect the key SHD dimensions such as poverty alleviation and food security in the African region.

3. The rest of the note is structured as follows. Section II lays out briefly what is known and the continuing controversies about the relationships among trade policy, trade expansion, economic growth and SHD. It defines its key components and examines the links between trade liberalization, trade expansion and economic growth. Finally, it explores the relationship between economic growth and SHD, pointing out that, in general, it would take more than trade policy alone to ensure that high rates of economic growth can be translated into correspondingly high levels of SHD. In section III, the forms of discussion shifts to trade liberalization in Africa. This section examines the evolution of African trade regimes over the last three decades or so in the context of two questions: how much trade liberalization has occurred? How does this compare with the theoretical "ideal"? Finally, the section reviews the trade liberalization approaches that have been (or can be) used in Africa and discusses the relative significance of each. Section IV concludes the note by suggesting how trade policy can be most appropriately used in Africa to promote poverty alleviation and enhance food security, two of the key dimensions of SHD.

II TRADE POLICY, TRADE EXPANSION, ECONOMIC GROWTH AND SHD

4. Trade policy measures are, typically, targeted at the tradable goods and services sector where they influence the structure of incentives and thus affect the relative prices of importables and exportables. In this process, trade policy measures exert their impact by altering the composition and levels of imports and exports (Helleiner, 1992, 1995; Oyejide, 1999)

5. In much of the literature on trade policy in the developing countries, analysis of trade liberalization is often limited to import liberalization or the elimination or reduction of tariff and non-tariff barriers to imports. In reality, however, trade liberalization should consist of both import liberalization and export promotion. The export promotion component of trade liberalization is important to the extent that a widespread and deep import liberalization programme is unlikely to be either successful or sustainable in the absence of successful export. Based on the trade liberalization experiences of a sample of developing countries, Michaely (1991, p. 123) concludes that "the survival of trade liberalization attempts trends strongly to be related to a favourable export performance, whereas the collapse of trade liberalization is overwhelmingly connected with a dismal export performance".

6. In addition to the constraint imposed by poor export performance the depth and speed of import liberalization in a country or region are likely to be influenced by at least two other considerations. First, the extent and speed of import liberalization should be such that the economy's productive capacity is not damaged in the process. Second, it would make sense to reduce the revenue-raising component of import tariffs only as the economy's capacity to generate fiscal revenue from other sources improves. The first consideration reflects the concern that, given the existence of a certain level of import protection, a rapid and radical reduction of tariff rates could be problematic, since the resulting loss of output and employment generated by tariff reduction may not be immediately compensated for by comparable surge in the output and employment of the non-protected sectors of the economy. Mussa (1997) suggest that this could well be the case in many African countries where the industrial sector is not only narrow but is also highly dependent on tariff protection.

7. The second consideration reflects the revenue objective of trade taxes which constitutes, perhaps, an even more binding constraint on the extent of realistic import liberalization in many low-income countries, especially in Africa. Africa depends more heavily on trade taxes for its fiscal revenues than any other region of the world. Although trade taxes as a proportion of total tax revenue declined in Africa from over 40% in the 1970s to just over 30%, in the mid-1990s, Africa's relative dependence remains much higher than that of the Asia-Pacific region (24%), as well as the Latin America and the Caribbean region (21%). Africa's level of dependence is of course, many multiples of the 2% level for the OECD countries (IMF, 1997). Clearly, "it will be

only over the long term, as domestic productive capacity (and hence the domestic tax base) grows and broadens and as administrative capacities improve, that a major shift from reliance on international trade taxation to a reliance on domestic taxation would be expected to occur" (IMF, 1997, p. 2).

8. Economic theory does not offer a magic formula for determining the appropriate degree of trade restrictions for achieving both the protection and revenue objective in the context of medium-term growth strategies of African countries. However, Rodrik (1998, p. 12) expresses the emerging consensus regarding the broad contours of a development-oriented trade policy for African countries as follows: "de-monopolize trade; streamline the import regime; reduce red tape and implement transparent customs procedures; replace quantitative restrictions with tariffs, avoid extreme variation in tariff rates and excessively high rates of effective protection; allow exporters duty-free access to imported inputs; refrain from large doses of anti-export bias; do not tax exports to highly".

9. A less than critical reading of the literature on trade liberalization and development would suggest a strong, unique and unidirectional link between "openness" and development. In other words, liberal trade policy leads to trade expansion which, in turn, generates economic growth. This broad statement is obviously something of a caricature; but it captures, rather starkly, the general thrust of the trade policy prescription that has been offered to many African countries since the early 1980s. It is in this context that the marginalization of Africa in world trade is generally blamed on the region's "closed" trade regimes (see, e.g. Ng and Yeats, 1996; Sachs and Warner, 1997). In addition, the lack of growth of many African economies, especially between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s is ascribed largely to the region's poor trade performance. This latter point suggests that trade was, apparently, not working effectively as "an engine of growth" in Africa.

10. But there are other perspectives to these issues as well. Rodrik (1997) and Coe and Hoffmaister (1998), show that Africa's relatively low level of bilateral trade with other regions mainly is due to the relatively small size of the average African economy and the relatively low rates of their economic growth over the last two to three decades. Furthermore, Ndulu and Ndung'u (1997, p. 21) presents an analysis of African experience which suggests that "trade and trade policies affect growth and growth in turn affects trade performance "; but that "growth performance is key to successful link between export and growth". More generally, Rodrik (1999) finds no convincing evidence to suggest that a country's economic performance is strongly and systematically enhanced by its openness to trade, when that is indicated by low barriers to trade and capital flows. Stiglitz (1999), p. 36) affirms that "trade liberalization, while necessary, is not sufficient for developing countries to reap the full benefits from integration with the world economy". In other words, a liberalized trade regime would not necessarily, on its own, place an economy on a self-sustained growth path. The composition of exports

does matter for growth. More specifically, experience shows that developing countries with greater manufactured export growth tend to achieve faster overall economic growth than those relying primarily on exports of primary commodities, regardless of the stance of their trade policy regime. In other words, openness to trade may be relatively more growth-inducing for the developing countries that have already succeeded in establishing an efficient and competitive manufacturing base prior to deeper liberalization of their trade regimes.

11. Even when trade expansion generates high economic growth rates; it cannot be taken for granted that high economic growth would, automatically translate into correspondingly high levels of SHD (UNDP, 1996). Rather, it would depend on how and the extent to which the pattern and character of economic growth affect specific dimensions of SHD. In other words, what kind of trade-policy-induced growth would promote poverty alleviation and enhance food security, for instance?

12. It would appear that in many African countries overall economic growth emanates from the promotion of labor-intensive manufacturers and processed agricultural and food products for both intra-regional and international export, SHD is likely to be enhanced through poverty alleviation. The reason is that such growth is typically accompanied by expanded opportunities for income-generating employment for the poor. There appears to be substantial potential, in particular, for poverty alleviation through the promotion of processed agricultural and food exports. Athukorala and Sen (1998) identifies several favourable trends, in this respect. First is the significant increase in the share of processed food products in total non-manufactured exports between the 1970s and 1990s; this share increased from 30% to 41% for the developing countries. Secondly, processed agricultural and food exports have shown greater dynamism compared to primary commodity exports over the same period; in virtually all African countries examined, the annual compound growth rate of processed food exports over the 1970-94 period exceeded that of primary commodity exports. Yeats (1998) offers complementary evidence with respect to the dynamism of the processed agricultural and food products sector in Africa. Probably because many African countries have significant comparative advantage in a wide range of processed foods and animal feeds, these products are becoming dominant as the fastest growing component in Africa’s intra-regional trade. While their shares Africa’s total exports are still small, they have increased markedly between the 1980s and the 1990s.

13. Trade-induced economic growth could also enhance SHD to the extent that it involves the promotion of food security in Africa through regional cooperation and expanded intra-regional trade in processed agricultural and food products. In particular, trade contributes to national food security by augmenting domestic food supplies to meet consumption needs, and reducing overall food supply variability. In addition, to the extent that it fosters economic growth and increases employment opportunities and income - earning capacities of the poor, trade could enhance access to food, an important element of food security.

14. Maasdorp (1998) points to are unique way in which infra-regional trade could contribute to food security in Eastern and Southern Africa. Local food preferences are important in food security concerns. Noting, first, that the primary food staple in this sub-region is white, not yellow, maize and second, that only the latter maize variety is internationally trade in white maize would enhance food security in the sub-region. The same argument would appear in central and west Africa where the locally preferred foods, such as roots, tubers and coarse grains (Tekly, 1996) are also either not internationally trade or such markets are quite then. In addition, high transport costs, as well as differences in food production and consumption patterns suggest that there may well be substantial potentials for expanded intra-regional trade to enhance food security in African (Koester, 1996; Weeks and subasat, 1998). Yeats (1998) provides evidence that demonstrates that these potentials are being increasingly realized through the rapid expansion of intra-African trade in processed foods and feeds.

15. The extent, to which trade can contribute to national food security, is influenced by a country's import capacity. Since African exports have not performed well, the capacity of African countries to finance over time. The value of maize, rice and wheat imports into Africa rose from $1.06 billion in 1996. But the value of these food imports as a percentage of the value of total exports of goods and non-factor services also increased from 3.8% in 1973 to 4.2% in 1996. Comparison, the corresponding ratio for china decreased from 14.3% in 1973 to 2.2% in 1996; while that of Indonesia fell from 12.8% to 3.3%. Much of the difference between the African trend and those of china and Indonesia can be traced to differences in export performance while Africa's real average annual export growth rate rose marginally from 2.0% in that of china increased from 12.7% to 14.8% while Indonesia's growth rate also rose markedly from 3.1% to 9.2% over same period.

III. TRADE LIBERALIZATION IN AFRICA

16. During the 1960s and the 1970s, most African countries built up, quite often in a rather haphazard manner, highly interventionist and protectionist trade regimes. The negative consequences of such trade regimes for both trade expansion and overall economic growth eventually became quite clear. Hence, beginning from the early 1980s, many African countries started the painful process of rationalizing and liberalizing their trade regimes. Although progress across the countries involved has not been even, there is clear evidence that, by the early 1990s, "protection of import substitutes by tariffs and non-tariff barriers in Sub-Saharan Africa as a whole has declined" (Nash, 1993, p. 38). It is estimated that the level of protection fell by between 30% and 50% over the period from the mid-1980s to the early 1990s. In addition, most African countries have substantially reduced the number of import subject to quantitative barriers while also moving from tightly controlled to more open importing systems. According to the World Bank (1995, p. 24), "the greatest progress has been achieved in replacing quantitative restrictions with lower and less dispersed tariff levels; more than half the countries now have average tariff rates of 15 – 20% with the highest rates set at 35-40% and the number of tariff categories reduced to 4-5".

17. Several problems remain, however. First, on the export side, Nash (1993, p. 42) indicates that "there has been little progress in establishing efficient systems to give exporters access to inputs at internationally competitive prices". Apparently, the various institutional mechanisms for achieving this objective, such as export – processing zones or duty drawback and exemption schemes have proved to be surprisingly difficult to effectively establish in many African countries. Secondly, the trade liberalization attempts in African countries have generally suffered from credibility and sustainability problems that are traceable to frequent reversals (Oyejide, Ndulu and Gunning, 1999). Many of these trade policy reversals are explicable in terms of balance-of –payments and fiscal incompatibility. These are problems that most African governments have traditionally used standard trade policy instruments to cope with. Thirdly and finally, even by the end of 1990s, African trade barriers remained much higher than those of other developing regions in Asia and Latin America and the Caribbean. Three factors suggest that this observation should not be surprising: (a) unlike Africa, other developing regions have succeeded in establishing fairly efficient, robust and export-oriented manufacturing sectors that need much less protection; (b) they are much less dependent on trade taxes for fiscal revenue; and (c) the developing-country regions of Asia and Latin America started their trade liberalization experiments much earlier than African countries and have therefore moved much further along the way.

18. There are several approaches through which countries implement their trade liberalization programmes. In the case of most African countries, trade liberalization efforts have occurred primarily through unilateral arrangements supported by structural adjustment financing from the World Bank. While many of these countries are members of one intra-African regional integration arrangement or the other, and while each of these arrangements involves specific trade liberalization commitments, there has been very little effective implementation (Oyejide, 1997).

19. Trade liberalization may also be implemented in the context of North-South type of regional integration arrangement. This type of arrangement is new to Africa. The few existing examples include the "Euro-Med" agreements that was signed with Morroco and Tunisia, as well as the EU's agreement with South Africa. In each case, the agreements are of the late-1990s vintage, and the trade liberalization commitments of the African partners are mostly back-loaded, hence, it is too early to determine the extent to which these arrangements will markedly change the current picture of trade liberalization in Africa.

20. The world's most important forum for multilaterally negotiating reductions in trade barriers is the World Trade Organization (WTO). The multilateral approach thus constitutes another mechanism through which African countries could implement their trade liberalization programmes. The Uruguay Round offered such an opportunity. The extent to which African countries took advantage of this opportunity can be measured at two levels. At one level, one may discuss the tariff reduction commitments made by the African countries during the Round. At the other level, the discussion may focus on the proportion of tariff lines and imports which African countries chose to bind before and after the Uruguay Round.

21. Evaluated in terms of tariff bindings, it can be claimed that African countries made significant trade liberalization commitments during Uruguay Round. First, with respect to industrial products, the percentage of tariff lines bound in African countries increased three-fold, from 13% pre- to 69% post-UR. This compares favourably with Asia, whose corresponding percentage increased from 16% to 68%. Latin America made higher tariff binding commitments as its percentage of bound tariff lines increased from 38% before – UR to 100% after the Round. In terms of value of industrial imports, the percentage under bound rates also increased sharply in Africa; from 26% before to 90% after the Round. Again, Africa's level of commitment was, in this respect, higher than that of the Asia region whose percentage of industrial imports under bound rates rose from 32% pre-UR to 70% post-UR. Second, with respect to agricultural products, the relative increase in Africa's level of commitment was higher than that of any other region. Before the Round, African countries had bound only 12% of their agricultural tariff lines and only 8% of their agricultural imports were under bound rates. Both percentages rose up to 199 after the Round

22. The “binding” of measures of protection represents a commitment by the governments concerned not to increase the level beyond that specified or “bound” in the schedule except through negotiations with affected trading partners. However, most African countries have specified bound rates that are well in excess of those which are actually applied. In other words, the bound tariff rates that are specified by African countries in their WTO schedules are much higher, and thus indicate higher trade barriers, than those they apply in practice. Hence, with the notable exception of the SACU countries, it can be claimed that African countries did not make significant tariff reduction commitments during the Uruguay Round (Harrold, 1995).

IV. **PROMOTING SHD THROUGH TRADE POLICY**

23. Key elements of SHD such as poverty alleviation and food security are affected by trade liberalization and rationalization of import barriers, as well as measures to promote exports. In other words, promoting these two components of SHD in Africa involves seeking an optimal mix of import liberalization measures and those aimed at enhancing the region’s export access to both regional and international markets.

24. As argued earlier, poverty alleviation is more likely to occur when rapid economic growth is associated with high levels of employment creation, particularly for the poorer segments of the population. To the extent that it fosters greater efficiency in resource use and promotes trade in accordance with comparative advantage, unilateral import liberalization can be expected to promote both economic growth and trade in Africa. As argued earlier, however, both the depth and speed of import liberalization are subject to the significant constraints imposed by the need for fiscal revenue and for strengthening the productive capacity. Hence, the challenge for many African countries may be to rationalize their trade regimes, keep their protection and revenue tariffs at moderate levels and improve the transparency of their import control systems.

25. More open intra-African regionalism should also be consistent with the poverty alleviation objective. Virtually all of Africa’s many regional integration arrangements contain specific trade liberalization commitments; most of which have not been implemented (Oyejide, 1997). This may be part of the reason why intra-African regionalism has not been associated with significant improvement in intra-regional trade, especially when this is measured as a proportion of total trade and comes to an average of 10%. However, emerging new evidence points in the direction of a surge in intra-African trade Yeats (1998) identifies intra-regional trade in foods and feeds as part of the new dynamism. A series of country case studies whose main findings are summarized in

Oyejide (200) suggests that regional markets are becoming important export destinations for products from many African countries. Some examples illustrate this point. During the 1980-96 period, over 80% of Kenya's exports to Africa was accounted for by its regional integration partners, particularly in the East African Cooperation. In the same way, the ECOWAS has become Cote d''voire'' second most important export destination with its share rising from 13% in 1986 to 19% in 1996. The UEMOA (which is a subset of ECOWAS) accounts for 90% of Ivorian exports, to ECOWAS. In addition, the share of Nigeria's non-oil exports to Africa (mainly ECOWAS) increased from 3% in 1980 to about 13% in 1995.

26. Regional markets for African exports share a second common feature; they are providing an important destination for non-traditional exports. Thus, between 1992 and 1996, ECOWAS received 35% - 45% of Ivorian exports of petroleum products, 26%-48% of its processed coffee exports, and more than 56% of its export of footwear. In the same way, as much as 20% of Ghana's non-traditional exports went to its regional partners in Africa. South Africa is clearly the most aggressive and successful exploiter of the regional market avenue for the expansion of non-traditional exports. About 40% of this country's manufactured exports are sold in Africa, particularly in the neighnouring markets of Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Zambia. The rate of growth of South Africa's exports to African markets exceeds by far that of the country's other export destinations.

27. Increasing intra-regional trade can be linked directly to economic growth and, to the extent that this increases income, it should have an effect on poverty alleviation. This effect could be significantly magnified if the expanding trade is essentially labour-intensive and, hence, creates employment opportunities for the poor. The non-traditional exports, especially processed agricultural, food and feed products, that are showing significant dynamism in Africa's export basket tend to be labour-intensive and may therefore constitute a significant contributor to poverty alleviation. Further and substantial across-the-board reductions in intra-African trade barriers could rapidly increase this trade (as well as its desirable effect on SHD through poverty alleviation and food security) without markedly and negatively affecting the fiscal revenue position of many individual African countries.

28. In spite of the Uruguay Round, exports of non-traditional products from Africa continue to face significant market access problems outside Africa. In particular, peak tariffs and tariff escalation in DECD markets constitute significant inhibiting factors against the development of African processed and semi processed non-traditional exports. In addition, African exports of processed agricultural and food products are confronting difficulties arising from inability to meet increasingly stringent sanitary and phytosanitary measures, technical regulations and product standards in the markets of the developed countries (Oyejide, Ogunkola and Bankole, 2000). Several examples can be cited, in this

context. A 1997EU directive which imposed a temporary ban on the export of fish and fish products form several countries in Eastern and Southern Africa was based on the claim that these countries lacked a credible system to safeguard the products from possible contamination. The effect of a similar EU directive, which requires that fish processing establishments must meet specific standards of hygiene, has been a drastic reduction in the number of Ghanaian fish processing businesses that can export to the EU market and the incurring of substantial additional cost to upgrade their facilities.

29. The rising tide of SPS measures could thus constitute significant threats to the precise segments of African exports that are beginning to show dynamism and therefore deserves urgent attention. The WTO Agreement on SPS measures recognizes, of course, that certain low-income countries could experience difficulties in coping with its demand. It therefore contains offers of technical assistance, especially in the areas of processing technologies, research and training as well as infrastructure. Moving these offers from a mere statement of good intentions remains a real challenge for Africa in the multilateral trading system.

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