Tackling the fears of small developing countries in world trade talks

What is holding up progress in the Doha Round? The conundrum of the small developing countries is part of the problem. Past trade rounds have advanced through quid pro quos. Yet, apart from the perceived downside of liberalizing, small developing countries generally have privileged access to their main markets and see little upside in trade “concessions” by their partners. Perhaps a broader development focus is necessary to break the deadlock. Poorer countries will need support if they are to overcome their fears, cope with adjustment, and take full advantage of the opportunities of open trade. That, in turn, might mean stepped-up financial and technical assistance from the richer economies. And some rules may be inappropriate from a development perspective and should not be foisted upon countries that can ill afford them.

The following articles examine the concerns of small developing countries—a group that has, for the first time in global trade talks, found its voice and is emerging as a powerful negotiating force. We begin with a debate by WTO experts on why weak and poor developing countries should engage in the multilateral trading system.

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