

CUTS Geneva International Conference

1 October 2009

Fostering Equity and Accountability in the Trading System (FEATS) Project

CUTS is organising an international conference in Geneva on 1 October 2009 under its FEATS project. This high level international conference will be attended by representatives of FEATS countries (i.e. Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia) from the governments, private sector and CSOs and Geneva based intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations.

CUTS International pursues its vision of consumer sovereignty with social justice and equality, within and across borders through work in diverse fields such as international trade and development, competition, investment and regulation, human development, consumer safety, and consumer protection. CUTS believes in research based advocacy and all its activities are organically interlinked. It has five programme centres and one advocacy centre in India, and five overseas resource centres in Lusaka, Zambia; London, UK; Nairobi, Kenya; Hanoi, Vietnam; and Geneva, Switzerland.

CUTS Geneva Resource Centre started in July 2008 with the mission of establishing and promoting a pro-trade pro-equity credible Southern NGO voice, especially in the policy making circles working on trade and development and related issues in Geneva. Within the short span of a year, it has undertaken a number of activities pertaining to trade and development. Two of its projects, FEATS and BIEAC, focus on Africa but it also reaches out to other developing countries including South Asian developing countries.

CUTS believes that international trade can and will foster economic development and reduce poverty in developing countries provided necessary flanking policies are in place and trade is used as an engine of employment generation – for instance, through the promotion of labour intensive agriculture and agri-business. Fulfilment of these pre-conditions requires demand driven and need based capacity building in developing countries, particularly in Africa, with a focus on developing a better understanding of the issues and the ability to take advantage of the opportunities offered by international trade, as well as promoting the use of wider stakeholder consultations in the development and implementation of trade policies.

It is in this context that CUTS is undertaking the FEATS Project with funding support from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation of the US. The project consists of three sets of interlinked activities: policy research, advocacy, and networking. Policy research aims to present analysis and inputs to the trade policy community and civil society organisations in Geneva and national capitals of project countries; advocacy seeks to promote equity and accountability in the trading system; and networking activities aim to connect all participants in the trade policy arena in Geneva and project countries. These activities will contribute significantly to stakeholder capacity especially that of governments to develop and implement better trade and related policies through consultative processes, and to better understand, participate in and derive benefits from the international trading system.

The FEATS project has been divided into two phases. In the first phase (from April 2008 till September 2009), an analysis of trade policy making in project countries has been undertaken, with emphasis on understanding the roles of different stakeholders and the resulting dynamics of the domestic policy making environment.

The results of the research provide several important lessons. First, while agriculture continues to be important in terms of employment, incomes and foreign exchange generation, it is plagued by high poverty and unemployment which can be significantly alleviated through the formulation and negotiation

of better trade policies for better outcomes. Second, existing consultative mechanisms to develop and implement trade policies should be improved through involvement of hitherto neglected stakeholder groups (e.g. consumers and the informal sector), regular information flows to all stakeholders, provision of clear mandates and financial resources, and improvement of coordination among all relevant government ministries and agencies. Third, such improvement will be critical for the creation of local buy-in for national trade policies.

Finally, research has developed a qualitative tool to evaluate the inclusiveness of trade policy making in regard to stakeholder groups within and across countries and thereby generate recommendations for improvement.

Research studies in the second phase (October 2009 till March 2011) would build on the first phase, and study the interaction of supply side constraints and demand side factors keeping in mind the latest developments in the arena of international trade. The objective is to provide policy recommendations for improvement in livelihoods through employment generation and poverty reduction. ToRs for the second phase research studies have been developed through extensive consultations with researchers and stakeholders from FEATS countries.

The Geneva International Conference marks the end of phase one and the start of phase two of the project. The high level gathering will deliberate on the results of the first phase research studies and provide substantive inputs for the second phase.

Objectives

- a. To launch the publication capturing research studies of FEATS phase 1 and discuss the main findings and lessons emerging from these
- b. To finalise the ToRs for FEATS phase 2 through discussion
- c. To strengthen the connection between capitals of project countries and Geneva established through the FEATS Inception Meeting in July 2008
- d. To facilitate networking among various stakeholder groups and generate key advocacy messages

Expected Outcomes

- Wider dissemination in trade policy communities of key messages from FEATS phase 1
- Strengthening of networks involving national and international stakeholders, and
- Recognition of the positive role of trade in development under specific conditions.

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