

Study on Comparative Analysis of WTO Ministerial Conferences in 21st Century

Himanshu Sood

PCTE Group of Institutes, Ludhiana, Punjab, India

Abstract

The research paper is focused towards making a significant analysis of various ministerial conferences that were held since beginning of 21st century till now. The paper will highlight various issues raised by various countries across the globe on the basis of its commercial and economic trade between member countries. The research is conducted only through secondary study and qualitative analysis is accomplished.

Keywords

Ministerial Conferences, Doha Development Agenda, WTO and Trade.

I. Introduction to World Trade Organization

WTO is multinational organization that deals with formulating, maintaining and sustaining international norms of cross border trade between various countries across the globe. It is the pioneer organization that defines the rules between countries and trading pattern amongst them. Every country has to follow the norms defined by WTO. The main motive is to facilitate producers of various goods and services who conduct cross border outsourcing and also the traders who facilitate the business of off shoring by taking into consideration the international regulations direct by World Trade Organization. It is also considered as the forum for negotiating various trade agreements between member countries. This is considered as the organization of trade opening. Also, it is such a platform where the governments try to find out solutions of various problems and trade relations conflicts that happen between member nations. Various decisions in this organization are taken by member countries. This is one such platform where ministers of various countries dealing in commercial departments of respective countries meet after every two years and put forward their concern in favor or against of any other country. Many a times, the ambassadors and delegates meet in Geneva Switzerland, which is also the headquarter of WTO and discuss upon various contentious global issues of bilateral and multilateral trade. Apart from it, it's not the organization that facilitates only trade and help countries to negotiate over trade barriers or its allied activities, but also act as a defender for protection of consumers and protect the environment by regulating norms for cross border spread of epidemics with the movement of plants and animals across the borders.

WTO officially came into existence as on 1st January, 1995 during Marrakesh round of Ministerial Conference. It was replaced by earlier established GATT in 1948 after World War 2 when GATT was the need of the hour to establish world trade after economic and commercial devastation of various developed and developing countries. World Trade Organization has many objectives which are as follows:

1. To reduce the cost of living and improve the living standard of the people.
2. The establishment of World Trade Organization is to settle cross border trade disputes between various countries and act as intermediate to reduce economic tensions between the countries.

3. To act as stimulus for economic growth and generate employment opportunities by boosting world trade.
4. To reduce the cost of doing business at the international level.
5. WTO is a platform that acts as an encouragement for other institution to demonstrate good governance.
6. One of the objectives is to help underdeveloped and least developed economies to grow and develop their potential.
7. WTO creates good fortune for its member countries irrespective of their economic state as even it's a platform for underdeveloped and least developed economies to put forward their trade related concern and to put a request if any developing or developed country is doing any unfair trade practice.
8. WTO doesn't define rules only for trade but it is also the platform to support environment, health and safety.
9. The WTO is such organization which takes all necessary measure to maintain peace and economic stability among the member countries.
10. WTO has one of the objectives to serve the purpose without hitting the headlines.

II. Bali Ministerial Conference (2013)

Bali Ministerial Conference better known as Bali package was held during first week of December, 2013 in Indonesia. The fundamental aim of this conference was to reduce trade barriers and facilitate developing and under developed economies with fair subsidies on staple food. The prime focus of this accord was to reduce trade tariffs and agricultural subsidies. This is one way to make it easy for developing economies to trade with developed world in global markets. Under this ministerial conference it was decided that developed countries would eliminate hard import quotas on all kinds of agricultural products coming from developing countries and instead would only be allowed to charge tariffs on amounts of all agricultural imports that exceeds specific limit. Also, the major focus of the conference was to facilitate with various custom formalities and bureaucracies for facilitating trade.

Various member countries had a very strong reaction out of Bali package. There were many negotiations that took place in this agreement. Being a developing and struggling economy, Indian farmers are getting subsidies from the government which is being closely monitored by the developed countries. Developed countries raised their concern against the ordinance passed by Indian government regarding food security bill through which public in large who are below the poverty line can get the subsidized food grains which is against the norms of western world. The bone of contention for Indian government was the capping of subsidies which was regulated by World Trade Organization. According to this regulation, any member country cannot subsidies to its farmers beyond 10% of the total value of the agricultural production which is based on the prices of 1986 – 88 as a base year. Developing countries complain that the base year is outdated and that they need to be given leeway to stock enough grains for the food security of millions of their poor. This ninth ministerial conference of World

Trade Organization has three components, first is regular work under General Council where the members take care of routine tasks. Another point of consideration is Doha development agenda which takes into consideration the developments under trade facilitation, public stockholding of the goods, also the solution to issues about least developed countries were arrived at. As India took a stand against developed world then other countries also followed India and took a stand in favor of India and against developed countries that themselves follow protectionism and restrict these developing countries to go against WTO norms. This in any case is taken as supremacy by the developing countries.

III. Geneva Ministerial Conference (2011)

This ministerial conference took place in Geneva Switzerland and considered as very crucial because of the decision of the member countries regarding accession of Russia in World Trade Organisation. Two more countries Samoa and Montenegro were amongst two more countries which also joined this multinational platform. The Geneva Ministerial Conference worked upon three fundamentals which were Importance of the Multilateral Trading System and the WTO followed by Trade and Development and Doha Development Agenda. The agenda was closely monitored by all the member countries. This conference came with the proposal regarding adoption of waiver to enable all the developed and developing countries to provide service and service treatments to the suppliers of least developed countries. There are total approximately 35 least developed countries which can get benefit of this proposal if its implication goes in appropriate way by developed countries. Also Parties to the Plurilateral Government Procurement Agreement (GPA) reached a historic deal to improve the disciplines for this key sector of the economy and expand the market access coverage valued at between 80 to 100 billion dollars a year. The WTO platform has executed one Integrated Trade Intelligence Portal. So WTO has developed a new application that will facilitate all the member countries with its new portal that allow users to access all trade related information which is disseminated by various countries to WTO. A general discussion on TRIPS and its non violation was also discussed by member countries. So over all Geneva Convention brought lots of opportunities for member countries.

IV. Geneva Ministerial Conference (2009)

In year 2009, the Ministerial Conference took place in the headquarter of WTO i.e. Geneva, Switzerland. This conference was just a meeting point for all the world leaders with little strategic dialogues and more of discussion based environment on various issues which include the most significant Doha Development Agenda. The whole emphasis of this negotiating forum is to have transparency within member countries and trade activities done by all the member countries. Also, the members in this conference proceeded with open discussion rather than on small group processes and informal negotiating structure. The theme for this ministerial conference was "The WTO, the Multilateral Trading System and the Current Global Economic Environment". The major outcome of this conference was doing a push factor over implicating Doha Development Agenda. Also the governments of various countries agreed upon need of stock taking that should be taking place on regular intervals. On the occasion of the Ministerial Conference, the Trade Minister had bilateral meetings to discuss outstanding trade issues with the ministers of various countries, including Canada, Turkey and India. The Trade Minister also participated in the Enhanced

Integrated Framework (EIF) meeting to raise the effectiveness in supporting the trade developments of the least-developed countries. He also attended the luncheons and dinners hosted by the EU, Japan and Singapore to discuss the progress of the DDA negotiations with WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy and the trade ministers of other countries.

V. Hong Kong Ministerial Conference (2005)

In year 2005, the 6th ministerial conference took place in Hong Kong. There were number of matters that attracted the attention of all the member countries. WTO took a pledge to extend its assistance to various countries for establishing its rural based economies. Developing economies are considering developing economies as their significant market place where they want to take access by asking developed world, especially Europe and North America, to reduce or eliminate various tariff and non tariff barriers. Another major milestone established under this conference was to work for fulfilling the objectives under Doha Development Agenda.

VI. Cancun Ministerial Conference (2003)

This ministerial conference took place in Cancun, Mexico in year 2003. The major challenge at this was to focus on taking market access by developing countries from the developed countries. The major focus of this conference is to have qualitative discussion on Agricultural trade between member countries followed by taking up free market access by developing and least developed countries, trade in services and its allied industries and to proliferate the trade in services. Apart from it the major contention is about extending special treatment of developing countries. Another core issue which is eternal part of discussion of WTO is Doha Development Agenda which is of significant importance to developing countries.

VII. Doha Ministerial Conference (2001)

In Year 2001, the 4th ministerial conference took place in Doha, Qatar which is significantly known as Doha Development Agenda in the international platform. It is very significant as the developing countries lead by India took stand in favor of other developing countries and against developed world to have fair trade practices with member countries. The agenda consist of one of the most prominent sector i.e. Agriculture which is key for survival of many developing economies. So the discussion over this conference is about facilitating developing economies to get access of developed economies in agriculture and to negotiate with developed countries for minimizing their subsidizing plans for their own farmers which can have detrimental impact in trade of developing and least developed economies in these markets. The subsidy clause was raised by India in special reference to United States. Another issue is about TRIPS in medicine industry. This agenda is of issues involved in balance of interest between various pharmaceutical companies that held patents on medicine and public health. Another major concern is about Special treatment to be extended to developing countries for uplifting the standard of living of their people. Also the developing countries had an issue about implementation of various policies that were decided in previous rounds. So these were issues of discussion in Doha Development Agenda.

VIII. Conclusion

By taking into consideration the various Ministerial Conferences, we can identify that the major concern for every country is about

execution of Doha Development Agenda which is of significant importance as it gives support to under develop and least developed countries to get access to the markets of developed countries. Also, it is of prime significance that the trade that takes place in the World market should be transparent and there should not be any unfair trade practices to be followed by member countries.

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