

pivotal agriculture talks looming. Nonetheless, even in these issue areas, there seems to be general agreement to move things as far as possible to allow Ministers to crystallize the agenda at Cancun. The key, from the perspective of the negotiators, is to be able to advise Ministers what should be in and what should be out and how much progress has been made on the former.

Important factors shaping the negotiations include the front-end-loaded nature of the development agenda (including the provision of technical assistance to support participation of developing countries in the negotiations) and the "soft launch" of the Singapore Issues.² Perhaps the biggest challenges, however, are to reconcile the differing levels of ambition amongst the Members and to resolve the difficult issues of Special and Differential measures and Uruguay Round implementation, discussions on which have become largely dysfunctional in part because the issues have become blurred.

Not unusually for the early stage of a round, the negotiating parties are still far apart on many issues. The big question is whether industrialized countries can translate their desire to support development by granting market access in areas where developing countries are competitive. And here, clearly, the core economic agenda is centered on agricultural trade. The expectation is that negotiating modalities in this key area will be

interpretation of paragraph 44 of the Doha Declaration, which states that "all special and differential treatment provisions shall be reviewed with a view to strengthening them". Developing countries see this as opening up the text of the WTO Agreements; developed countries are of the view that the basic texts can only be changed through new negotiations involving an exchange of concessions. The criteria for differentiation and graduation (providing different levels of flexibility for countries that are in different stages of development) are also proving to be a sticking point in the negotiations.

² Editors' note: The Doha Declaration did not formally launch negotiations on the "Singapore Issues" (investment, competition policy, trade facilitation, and transparency in government procurement), leaving that decision to be taken, by explicit consensus, at the 5th Ministerial Meeting in Mexico. The term "soft launch" reflects the differing views on the nature of the decision to be taken at Cancun—an up or down vote on formal inclusion in the negotiations, or automatic inclusion.