



The Estey Centre Journal of
**International Law
and Trade Policy**

Abstract

The SPS Agreement: Barrier or Catalyst?

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This article aims at assessing whether the World Trade Organisation Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) Agreement is acting as a barrier or a catalyst to agro-food exports from developing countries. It is based on a literature review. The findings indicate that there is evidence of mostly negative effects of the SPS Agreement on developing countries. Areas where difficulties have been met include the development capacity of developing countries, access to dispute settlement, and the risk assessment and equivalency provisions. In many cases, the costs for developing countries of implementing the SPS Agreement are very high compared to their development budgets, and this acts as a barrier and affects their ability to export. Clauses that have been useful to developing countries, thus indirectly facilitating trade, are the regionalisation and transparency principles. Thus, the requirement for more transparency has allowed the establishment of WTO enquiry points and notifications of new measures. Some developing countries have also benefited from technical assistance, and this has enhanced their trade opportunities.

Keywords: agro-food exports, developing country, SPS Agreement