



Strengthening the Multilateral Trading System to Promote Development and Inclusivity

A Webinar Series (September – November 2020)

The South Centre, Geneva; Centre for WTO Studies, Indian Institute of Foreign Trade, New Delhi; Third World Network, Geneva; Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, University of Cape Town, South Africa; and Trade & Industrial Policy Strategies, South Africa, are jointly organising a series of interactive webinars on the overall theme of ‘Strengthening the Multilateral Trading System to Promote Inclusivity and Development’. The webinars will include trade talks and panel discussions by a former minister, current and former trade negotiators and eminent experts in the field of international trade on different aspects of multilateral trading system. The collective outcome of the webinars that will run from **September to November 2020** will be a document containing an action-oriented agenda for developing countries.

Overall objective of the Interactive Webinars

Evolving an action-oriented agenda which would be in the interest of a large number of developing countries for strengthening the Multilateral Trading System so that it responds positively to their development aspirations.

Key outcomes of the Webinars

1. Identifying provisions in the WTO agreements that have proved to be significant constraints for developing countries in pursuing desirable economic policies, and recommending modifications that can realistically be achieved.

2. Identifying measures being implemented by the developed countries that provide them an unfair advantage in the market-place and recommending a framework for introducing/enhancing disciplines on such measures.
3. Despite heterogeneity of interests among many developing countries, identifying common ground among them and providing practical suggestions for building and sustaining coalitions.
4. Practical suggestions for helping developing countries to achieve their negotiating objectives, despite asymmetric economic and political power relationship between them on the one hand and the developed countries on the other.

Format of these Interactive Webinars

We will have invited speakers in each session. Thereafter, the audience will be given the opportunity to provide their inputs and also ask questions. We are looking forwards to lively discussions in these sessions.

Kindly note that this invitation is open to Geneva-based WTO delegates and also capital based officials. For others, participation will be based on invitation.

SESSIONS, DATES AND TIME

Session 1

Title: Strengthening the Multilateral Trading System to Foster Development: Prospects and Challenges

Speaker: Rob Davies, former Minister of Trade and Industry, South Africa (See https://www.southcentre.int/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Bk_2019_The-Politics-of-Trade-in-the-Era-of-Hyperglobalisation-A-Southern-African-Perspective_EN.pdf for copy of Davies' book 'The Politics of Trade in the Era of Hyperglobalisation')

Date and Time: Wednesday 2 September 2020, 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- Key challenges facing developing countries at the WTO
- Examples of a few specific provisions in WTO agreements which are constraining developing countries, and innovative suggestions for making changes in these provisions in order to help developing countries
- Issues of positive agenda for developing countries at the WTO
- Identifying common ground among developing countries despite some heterogeneity in their interests
- Risks for developing countries in some of the proposals on WTO reform

Session 2

Title: WTO Reform: What is on the table and what needs to be done

Speakers: A range of current WTO Ambassadors

Date and Time: Thursday 3 September 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What are the implications for developing countries of some of the proposals on WTO reform?
- What proposals should developing countries be making in their interest as part of WTO reform?

Session 3

Title: Institutional reform of WTO

Date and Time: Tuesday 8 September 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Speakers:

- a) Rob Howse

Lloyd C. Nelson Professor of International Law
New York University School of Law, USA

b) Nicolas Lamp

Assistant Professor of Law
Queen's University, Canada

c) Aileen Kwa

Coordinator, Trade and Development Programme
South Centre, Geneva

Issues:

- Resolving the Appellate Body deadlock: Is MPIA the only practical alternative?
- Implications of providing a greater role to the WTO Secretariat in working of WTO Committees and in trade negotiations.
- Incremental rule-making through WTO Committees.
- Continued relevance and utility of "single undertaking" and decision making by consensus for developing countries.

Session 4

Title: Equitable Agriculture Reforms

Date and Time: Tuesday 22 September 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What are some of the asymmetries and imbalances in the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA)?
- How is the playing field tilted against the developing countries under the AoA?
- What should be the key priorities for developing countries for equitable agriculture reforms?
- How should rules of the Agreement on Agriculture be modified to address food security needs of developing countries?

Session 5

Title: Relevance of Special and Differential Treatment Provisions at the WTO

Date and Time: Tuesday 29 September 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- Do S&DT provisions continue to remain relevant for developing countries?
- Why would developing countries need S&DT in future agreements?
- Implications of developing countries voluntarily renouncing S&DT in certain sectors/agreements?
- What can be a practical way forward on S&DT? Do Implementation Issues continue to remain relevant?
- Challenges in securing effective S&DT in Fisheries Subsidies negotiations.

Session 6

Title: Access to affordable medicines: Rethinking IPR protection

Date and Time: Tuesday 13 October 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What is the reality behind the supposed huge R&D expenditure of Big Pharma?
- How do developed countries support their pharmaceutical industry?
- What is the impact of stringent IPR protection laws on the costs of access to medicines?
- What are some of the ways in which rules for protecting IPRs are sought to be expanded in favour of Big Pharma?
- How can the issue of affordable access to medicines be addressed at the WTO and other relevant inter-governmental organisations? What could be some creative solutions?

Session 7

Title: Hidden hand of the State behind the Technology Edge: What can the WTO do

Date and Time: Tuesday 20 October 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What are the details of the subsidies and support measures implemented by the developed countries for creating new technologies; facilitating their dissemination; and creating and shaping markets for new products?
- How do such subsidies and support measures provide an unfair advantage to first movers in developed countries, as compared to fast followers in the developing countries?
- What disciplines can be considered at the WTO for levelling the playing field, which is otherwise tilted on account of the subsidies and support measures implemented by the developed countries to their emerging sectors?

Session 8

Title: Bio-piracy

Date and Time: Tuesday 27 October 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What is the evidence of bio-piracy of traditional knowledge of developing countries?
- What can be some of the ways of addressing the issue of bio-piracy at the WTO?
- Why has there been limited/ no movement on this issue at the WTO for the past few years? What needs to be done to revive engagement on this issue at the WTO?

Session 9

Title: Identifying common ground among developing countries

Date and Time: Tuesday 10 November 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What are the issues of common interest for many developing countries at the WTO?

Session 10

Title: Reviving the skill of coalition building

Date and Time: Tuesday 17 November 2020; Time: 1.30 – 3pm (Geneva Time)

Issues:

- What were the key factors behind the success of the agriculture G20 group at the WTO?
- What lessons can be learnt from its success?
- What factors are critical for success of any coalition of developing countries?

The list of speakers will be sent out ahead of each session.
