

Building Trust and Convergence towards Strengthening the Multilateral Trading System

A Joint Initiative of CUTS International Geneva and FES Geneva Office

These are critical years for the multilateral trading system as WTO members try to get the negotiating back on track while the regional and plurilateral trade-related negotiations seem to take the centre stage. Both developing and developed countries must confront the core issues that have divided them so far and build the necessary trust to find creative solutions for the multilateral trading system to remain relevant. Through monthly informal meetings, this CUTS' initiative strives to positively contribute towards convergence on a balanced WTO Work Programme, as WTO negotiators from both developing and developed countries would build greater trust with each other and increase their capacities through exchanges and technical inputs, thus leading to a successful MC 11 next year.

About the initiative

Since early 2015, CUTS International Geneva has facilitated the establishment and functioning of an informal, small caucus of World Trade Organisation (WTO) negotiators representing smaller developing and developed countries with a view to building trust among them as well as convergence towards the development of a balanced WTO Work Programme. More specifically, the initiative helps developed and developing country members to:

- Improve communications and interactions with each other, thus **reducing the trust deficit**
- Identify issues where **convergence** is possible
- Discuss **realistic ways forward** for building convergence

This initiative has been developed keeping in mind existing efforts by other IGOs and NGOs and with a view to complementing them by filling important gaps.

Proposed Approach

Convergence-building among developing and developed country negotiators under this initiative is a continuous process organised around monthly informal lunch meetings. Discussions focus on a specific issue of relevance to the WTO Work Programme and will be backed by CUTS' technical support.

● Issue identification

Identification of issues for discussions is demand-driven, including through follow-up discussions after

each informal meeting. The issue coverage is focussed but wide-ranging enough so as to address possible trade-offs across issues

● Short backgrounders

Short backgrounders (2-4 pages) are occasionally prepared and circulated in advance of a meeting to participants to facilitate discussions in the meeting.

● Informal meeting

The group meets informally once a month over a lunch meeting. The Chatham house rules apply so as to encourage sharing of information and open debate while considering **possible landing zones** on the issue.

● Informal reports

Informal, summary reports of the meetings are prepared to keep track of the discussions on a non-attributable basis.

● Follow-up technical support

CUTS strives to address the follow-up questions and actions raised by participants during the meeting. For instance, further technical/analytical papers may be developed on participants' request where the issue requires deeper analysis.

● Diplomatic work

CUTS maintains regular contact with delegates, bilaterally discuss important issues to clarify, and undertake diplomatic work to facilitate bridging the gaps among positions towards acceptable convergence. This work continues throughout.