

CUTS INTERNATIONAL, GENEVA

# **Strategy 2021-2022**

# Introduction

## Background

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CUTS International, Geneva (hereinafter referred to as CUTS Geneva), is part of the family of CUTS that has three thematic centres in India and six overseas centres and is the fulfilment of the dream of CUTS founder and Secretary General, Pradeep S Mehta.

Since our last strategy, the world has witnessed fast paced changes in global political, economic, social, environmental and health spheres, many of which being underpinned by technological breakthroughs across diverse fields. Besides the impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, recent economic changes have included dramatic transformation in the production and trade blurring distinction between goods and services, and data-driven new business models among others. Environmental challenges are also formidable, with threats on ecosystems and biodiversity; scarcer natural resources, energy and drinking water; and worsening effects of climate change including on agriculture and food security in developing countries. Collective action by all is needed, based on differentiated responsibilities as well as coherent and inclusive policy approaches supported by multi-stakeholder consultations and engagement. Many of these aspects have been made part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with which the present strategy is aligned.

## Objectives

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The purpose of this Strategy 2021-2022 is to articulate the short-term direction and priorities for CUTS Geneva in line with CUTS@50 Vision Document ([http://cuts-international.org/pdf/CUTS@50-A\\_VISION\\_DOCUMENT.pdf](http://cuts-international.org/pdf/CUTS@50-A_VISION_DOCUMENT.pdf)). The objectives and strategies described in this document will guide CUTS Geneva's work this year.

# Our Identity

## Vision

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To pursue social justice and economic equity within and across borders by persuading governments and empowering people.

## Mission

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To establish and promote a pro-trade, pro-equity credible Southern NGO voice as well as the means to achieve this in the policy-making circles working on trade and development and other related issues at the multilateral, regional and national levels .

## Values

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CUTS' vision and ideology combined with its experience of more than 35 years, along with the implementation of its agenda in the pursuit of its objectives are all guided by the following core values:

- Respect and promotion of Human Rights
- Adhering to high standards of transparency, conduct and accountability.
- The adoption of sustainable and environmental-friendly practices
- The adoption of a “Centrist Approach” in research, advocacy, networking and capacity building.
- Ensuring outcomes rather than just outputs.
- Focusing on subject, stakeholders and geographical areas where a vacuum and need exist.
- Responsible in enhancing the capacity of various stakeholders and partner organisations across the developing world.
- Continuous strengthening of human resources within the organisation to ensure consistency and the timely delivery of good and high-quality work.

# Our Environment

## External Environment

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### Health, Technological, Economic, Social, Environmental and Political Changes

These are times of fast paced changes in global political, economic, social, environmental and health spheres. Besides the impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, many of the changes are underpinned by technological breakthroughs across diverse fields. Digitalisation of goods, services, tasks, enterprises, sectors, economies and even societies is taking place though the magnitude can vary greatly based on context and location. Going even beyond digitalisation, the 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution is characterized by a fusion of multiple technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, the Internet of Things, 3-D printing, nanotechnology, biotechnology, materials science, energy storage, and quantum computing. The impact is blurring the lines between the physical, digital, and biological spheres and transforming the entire systems of production, exchange, and governance. The 4<sup>th</sup> Industrial Revolution, and digitalisation in particular, offer tremendous opportunities to those who are in a position to take advantage. On the other hand, it can also greatly exacerbate existing inequalities as well as create new ones between countries, regions and communities. Building deeper understanding and comprehensive dialogue among all relevant stakeholders is urgently needed to develop and implement the right mix of policies, regulations and actions to harness its potential for the good of all and to minimise the negative impacts.

Environmental challenges are formidable. Ecosystems and biodiversity are under threat, the oceans are at risk from waste, and farmland and fish stocks are becoming depleted. Natural resources, energy and drinking water are becoming scarcer. Climate change, desertification, depletion of ozone layer, hazardous waste, extreme weather conditions, the list goes on, demonstrating the critical need to urgently address the environmental imperative which will hit the developing countries the hardest. The World Bank has warned of tens of millions of people in Sub-Saharan Africa being forced to move from their homes due to climate change and severe rise in temperatures in the Middle East and North Africa, making large areas practically uninhabitable. The business as usual approach will not work. Collective action by all, based on differentiated responsibilities and respective capacities, is needed.

The political landscape is also changing rapidly. Populist rhetoric is on the ascendancy, blaming globalisation, trade and migrants for all the economic and social ills being faced by a country. Individuals and parties advocating an inward-looking agenda are often triumphing in referendums and elections. And governments across the world are finding it hard to resist the lure of the protectionist policies. Taking the podium to preach the benefits of globalisation and trade will not be enough to counter that. Public suspicion and even mistrust needs more than lectures. It needs a counter narrative. A narrative that is balanced, honest, and convincing. A narrative that admits that trade produces both winners and losers; that technological changes are bringing about both opportunities and marginalisation; and that the final outcome is not preordained but will depend on our policies and actions. The narrative should also include a menu of those policies and actions that can lead to inclusive and sustainable development.

The onset of Covid 19 pandemic since early last year has added a further layer of complexity to the on-going technological, economic, environmental and political changes. The health crisis has already become an economic and social crisis. The impacts of the pandemic and response measures are far reaching and testing the resilience of our institutions, from the national to international levels, to face the challenges successfully. While responding to this unprecedented crisis will remain a priority for all in the near future, we can and should also use this shock as an opportunity to build better, inclusive and more resilient economic and political systems for the common future of humanity.

## Internal Environment

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The internal environment of CUTS Geneva consists of three elements: governance, staff, and resources. The organisation is governed by its General Assembly that meets at least once every year to approve work plan, budget,

audit reports and to debate and take decisions on all issues. The Executive Committee, appointed by the General Assembly meets at least twice every year to implement the GA decisions and to direct the activities of the secretariat.

CUTS Geneva is proud of its small but competent staff that brings together a rich and diverse set of academic, professional and geographical backgrounds. The gender parity and ethnic and cultural diversity of this staff ensures a vibrant work place where ideas and competencies fuse to generate team work with outstanding productivity and performance.

The physical resources of CUTS Geneva are not extravagant and yet adequate to ensure smooth and efficient functioning. It has a well-located office premise close to the UN, WTO, ITC and other international organisations in Geneva, equipped with all the necessary office facilities, and with a small conference room.

The combination of effective governance, motivated and competent staff, and productivity-oriented physical resources provides for a lean but results-oriented internal environment.

## **Our Stakeholders**

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CUTS Geneva defines the larger group of its stakeholders as beneficiaries, partners and donors. Beneficiaries are those whose expressed needs for information, analysis, negotiating and implementation support are addressed through work by CUTS Geneva. Partners are those with whom CUTS Geneva works to carry out its Mission and implement its work programme. Donors are also stakeholders of CUTS Geneva by providing it the financial means and thus reposing trust in its ability to create impact.

Potential beneficiaries of the work of CUTS Geneva include all the key stakeholders in and from developing countries: governments and inter-governmental organizations, parliamentarians, civil society organizations, private sector, labour, and the consumers. Some key sub-groups that are particularly targeted to create lasting impact are: policy makers, negotiators, women, and youth.

CUTS Geneva welcomes partners based on the commonality of interest to further its Mission. Potential partners include governments, inter-governmental organisations, non-governmental organisations, businesses, media and academia from both the developing and the developed world.

The past and current donors of CUTS Geneva include governments, development agencies, international organisations, non-governmental organisations and philanthropic foundations, mostly from the developed world. The relationship with this group of stakeholders is based on transparency, mutual respect, trust, and shared belief in the sought outcomes.

# Strategic Work Priorities This Year

## Horizontal: Health, and Human Rights

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### Building Back Better

The impacts of Covid 19 pandemic and response measures will continue to be felt this year. Comprehensive, coherent and coordinated approaches will be needed to face this unprecedented challenge and to turn this into an opportunity to build back better. The building back should have a rights-based approach at its centre to ensure that all are better able to know and exercise their economic, social and political rights, including the right to development. The humanity should aim to emerge more united, better-off and more resilient from this crisis.

These horizontal objectives will be mainstreamed in all CUTS' activities, as well as pursued through specific activities, as appropriate. For example, CUTS will endeavour to promote gender dimension and trade and health initiative in the WTO under Goal 1, competition and consumer protection in the digital sphere and for access to medical products and services under Goal 2, integration of environmental and climate change consideration in the re-building process under Goal 3, and resilient agro and food value chains under Goal 4. Moreover, rights-based approaches will be pursued across all the four Goals.

CUTS will also endeavour to seek resources and undertake activities to promote decent jobs, better working conditions, and capacity building of all relevant stakeholders on these matters. It will further strengthen its participation in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) where it has an observer status since 2010 as well as follow the relevant debates in ILO more regularly.

## Goal 1: Trading System

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### Balanced and Fair Rules for All

The international trading system, with the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at its centre, and a web of bilateral, regional, plurilateral and preferential agreements and arrangements, is a valuable public good. It has the potential to unleash the forces of growth for the benefit of all by setting rules and conditions that are fair, balanced and equitable.

Not all are able to equally and effectively participate in and benefit from the international trading system. This includes smaller developing and least-developed countries as well as the marginalised groups and communities and MSMEs within countries. The solution is not to abandon the system but rather to build capacity to improve participation and derive benefits. CUTS Geneva work will aim to do that by providing **need-based, demand-driven, and targeted capacity building assistance** to developing and least-developed countries and their relevant groups of stakeholders for their better and more **effective participation in the work and negotiations at the multilateral, plurilateral and regional levels** while keeping into account **appropriate special and differential treatment provisions** for them. This work will also encompass the **special needs of LDCs, including those that achieve graduation** from LDC status.

## Goal 2: Functioning Markets

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### Inclusive and Progressive Structural Transformation

Markets are key for efficient allocation of resources across economic activities and sectors. Well-functioning markets cannot only improve production and reduce waste, they can also reduce poverty, protect environment and promote inclusive development. But ensuring well-functioning markets demand actions and policies across a number of areas. Moreover, such actions and policies, like the markets themselves, cannot always be viewed in isolation or within

geographical borders of single countries. They are often a function of both domestic conditions and capacities and the international rules and cooperation.

Developing and Least Developed Countries need well-functioning markets to fully exploit their comparative and competitive advantages, to benefit from international production networks and exchange, and to meet their developmental challenges through structural transformation. The needed policies and tools include those related to **competition, investment, consumer protection, services, technology and innovation, e-commerce, standards, value-added industrialisation, facilitation, and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs)**.

CUTS Geneva will work in these policy areas with a view to **assisting developing and least-developed countries** identify the right mix and approach based on their **domestic needs and conditions** as well as relevant international rules and negotiations. The emphasis will be on learning from **best practices** and taking advantage of the collaborative opportunities through **South-South and North-South cooperation**. It will also provide help for developing and least-developed country **participation in regional and international negotiations** related to these as well as to **implement the outcome of such negotiations**.

## Goal 3: Environment

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### Growth with Sustainable and Climate-Resilient Economies

Economic development and progress can support environmental sustainability. Protecting environment can equate protecting productive forces. We have made impressive progress towards better understanding environmental challenges and finding collaborative solutions. The conclusion of the Paris Agreement to deal with climate change, and the positive outcome of the implementation of the Montreal Protocol to protect the ozone layer are but two examples of such endeavours. But environmental issues and challenges are many and myriad and the efforts to find and implement collaborative solutions still has a long way to go.

Developing and least-developed countries are particularly vulnerable to environmental shocks given their limited capacities and weak mechanisms. A single storm can wipe out a significant proportion of the GDP in an island economy, setting back years of growth. While their role in the current state of environmental degradation is minimal, they are facing the devastating consequences nevertheless. Their urgent needs are to be able to deal with these consequences effectively in their march towards economic growth and development while working together with developed countries partners towards medium and long-term environmental protection and sustainability.

CUTS Geneva is fully conscious of the need for win-win-win solutions. The solutions that lead towards economic development, social progress and environmental protection. Its work under this Goal will focus on **assisting developing and least-developed countries find and implement** such **solutions** through appropriate **international negotiations and agreements** as well as **national/regional policies and actions**. While increasing its engagement in **climate change and UNFCCC matters**, this work will also encompass other issues of interest such as **fisheries subsidies, fossil fuel subsidies**, to name a few.

## Goal 4: Food and Agriculture

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### Food Security and Sustainable Agricultural Systems

Agriculture remains the key sector for both developed and developing countries due to its contribution to economic, social and environmental objectives. Agriculture and food security are also critical issues for the international trading and climate change regimes under the UNFCCC and WTO respectively. At the same time, agriculture is faced with a number of challenges due to the current multilateral regime governing agricultural subsidisation, effects of climate change, growing populations, concerns about food safety leading to greater use of sanitary and phyto-sanitary (SPS) standards, and the need for effective means to ensure food security for all at all times.

Developing and least-developed countries in particular depend on agriculture for a large share of employment, inputs for industrialisation, exports, and food security. Their agriculture is often based on subsistence farming and the poverty incidence is much higher in the agriculture/rural sector. Sustainable development of agriculture can play a critical role in meeting their development objectives.

CUTS Geneva work under this goal will be guided by a holistic perspective on agriculture and food that aims at building and maintaining agricultural systems that **ensure food security** and are sustainable. With a focus on the **needs of developing and least-developed countries** at the **national, regional and international levels**, the work will include **agricultural trade rules, agriculture and climate change, food security, agro-industrialisation, and SPS measures**.

# Operational Strategies

## Partnerships

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CUTS Geneva's programmatic activities often cover a wide range of countries where it has no physical presence. Further, given the range of issues mandated under CUTS' work programme, building partnerships is essential for the effective implementation of programmes.

Specifically, the objectives include: (i) Establish implementation partners in the programme beneficiary country to coordinate and assist in implementation of activities, as well as building their capacity to take programme objectives beyond its implementation period; (ii) Build partnerships with specialised institutions so as to access knowledge and expertise; and (iii) Build partnerships with regional bodies that often provide a facilitative role, and draw synergies from similar programmes.

## Communications

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Strategic communications is about linking the right message with the right target audience in the right manner, to ensure intended strategic goals are effectively achieved. The main inter-linked components of communications include: (i) Awareness-raising; (ii) Advocacy; (iii) Mobilising people; and (v) Corporate visibility.

In order to effectively contribute to achieving the goals of the present strategy, our communications will focus on the following objectives: (i) Informing policy-makers and partners, for them to be aware of policy options relevant to sustainable development; (ii) Influencing policy-makers to take action for improved policies based on evidence; (iii) Connecting experts and vulnerable groups to policy dialogue, where their voices get heard; and (iv) Convincing donors to trust us and fund CUTS' efforts in achieving its strategic objectives.

## Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

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As detailed in this CUTS' standard strategy dedicated to this operational area, available at <https://bit.ly/33RfZYY>, CUTS' approach to Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) is based on clear results frameworks (LFA) with SMART indicators<sup>1</sup>, targets and risk assumptions.

During each project, operationalisation of the framework will consist of the routine collection, analysis and structured recording of information with the aim to: (i) monitoring progress against logframe targets; (ii) timely identification of challenges as well as opportunities to achieve the targets and putting in place immediate action plans to face the challenges and harness opportunities; (iii) ensuring timely and quality delivery of all outputs; (iv) providing inputs for various reports; and (v) monitoring risks to identify and undertake remedial actions, including amendments to deliverables in consultation with the donor.

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<sup>1</sup> Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant and Time-bound

## Quality Management and Assurance

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As detailed in this CUTS' standard strategy dedicated to this operational area, available at <https://bit.ly/2LnEsyV>, CUTS' approach to Quality Management for each project aims to ensure that, *inter alia*: (i) needs and requirements of beneficiaries are fully addressed by the project; (ii) research is rigorous, comprehensive, and technically sound; (iii) beneficiaries and stakeholders are involved in project implementation; and (iv) deliverables are quality controlled before official submission.

## Risk and Accountability Management

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The Risk Management approach will be based on CUTS' standard strategy dedicated to this operational area, available at <https://bit.ly/36YZfkx>. As detailed in this strategy, CUTS' risk approach for each project is inspired by the principles, framework and processes provided by the ISO 31000 Standard. The approach evaluates risks by: (i) identifying and categorising risks which could negatively impact the achievement of project objectives; (ii) assessing the size or degree of each risk by taking into consideration the potential impact; and (iii) ranking risks in a common and consistent manner.

For each risk identified, mitigation actions are defined in adequation with the rating level: (i) Low: Effectively manage through routine procedures and appropriate internal controls; (ii) Medium: regular monitoring to ensure risk exposure is managed effectively, disruptions minimised and outcomes monitored; and (iii) High: Immediate action to actively manage risk, limit exposure and reduce risk rating from "High" to "Medium". The residual risk level after mitigation actions should be "Medium" at most.

## Staff and Skills Development

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In the context of CUTS Geneva, this refers to facilitating an enabling mechanism through which staff are highly motivated to engage in their work and optimise their productivity. This entails training programmes, participation and exposure in relevant events and conferences, research and publication on relevant programmatic issues, as well as sharing and diffusion of intellectual capital within the organization.

CUTS Geneva aims at ensuring that staff are continuously abreast with developments in their area of work, acquire the necessary knowledge and technical knowhow, as well as optimally deliver quality work outputs. In doing so, the organization specifically aims to ensure that: (i) Staff are knowledgeable and have the requisite skills to perform programme tasks; (ii) Staff are highly motivated and optimally perform their duties.