



# Trade Hot Topics

## Embedding Development in WTO Plurilateralism: A Commonwealth Developing Country Perspective

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### 1. Introduction

Trade is widely accepted as an essential tool for economic growth and sustainable development, and has helped lift millions of people out of poverty (World Bank, 2018). It can also reduce the marginalisation of developing countries in the global economy, especially that of least developed countries (LDCs), small vulnerable economies (SVEs) and countries in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA). Most of these countries depend on trade for their growth and development, especially on exports in a narrow range of goods and services.

Yet, more than 20 years after the launch of the Doha Development Round (DDR) in 2001, negotiations on agreed development issues of interest to developing countries have made limited progress. Failure to reaffirm the DDR mandate at the 10th World Trade Organization (WTO) Ministerial Conference (MC10) in 2015 cast doubt on the future of the DDR and *de facto* put an end to the multilateral pursuit of DDR-related development issues. To date, it is uncertain whether the DDR can – or should – be concluded, because of entrenched differences among the WTO membership about the Round's continued relevance. Many WTO members,

especially developed countries, question the continued relevance of the DDR in a changing global economic and trading landscape. They argue that the WTO should meet the needs of 21st century trade, industry and supply chains. Meanwhile, many developing countries voice concern regarding an expanded negotiating agenda amid a failure to address their longstanding trade and development issues.

However, development issues can be pursued in the context of countries' evolving interests in this changing landscape (Zhuawu and Soobramanien, 2018). New negotiating areas at the WTO, most of which are taking the form of plurilateral discussions such as Joint Statement Initiatives (JSIs), provide an opportunity for LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries to advance trade-related developmental issues and shape new trade rules.

This issue of *Trade Hot Topics* reflects on some of the key trade and development issues of interest to LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries. It then highlights the need to explore possibilities for prioritising their development interests, individually and collectively, in a changing global economic and trading landscape, by transforming plurilateral

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discussions of interest to them into more open-ended and inclusive<sup>1</sup> multilateral discussions. This will help enable them to reshape the discussions and bring on board their own development issues.

## 2. Doha Round development outcomes

The 2001 Doha Ministerial Declaration was crafted to promote growth and development and alleviate poverty, with the needs and interest of developing countries placed at the centre of the Doha Work Programme (WTO, 2001). This recognition of the important role of trade was accompanied by decisions aimed at enhancing the development dimension in almost all negotiating areas, including in trade in agriculture, trade in services and trade-related aspects of intellectual property. This was to ensure that developing countries, including LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries, would obtain a fairer share of the expanding world trade, corresponding with their needs regarding economic development.

A decision was also adopted to address implementation challenges that developing countries faced in applying WTO agreements. Of significance was Paragraph 44 of the Doha Declaration. This mandated the review of special and differential treatment (S&DT) provisions in WTO agreements with the aim of creating stronger and more precise provisions to help developing countries participate more meaningfully in the multilateral trading system.

However, these decisions did not translate into tangible benefits, partly because some members abandoned the single undertaking approach and adopted a single-issue approach, especially regarding issues of interest to them, while shifting from a multilateral to a plurilateral approach (Ismail, 2016).

Historically, the single undertaking approach has been used to mean that WTO members must join all the agreements administered by the organisation. This was meant to stop members from cherry-picking and to maximise cross-linkages and possibilities for trade-offs (Sucker and Vickers, 2021). In other words, no member could enjoy the benefits of any of the new trade liberalisation rules unless it agreed to be bound by all the negotiated outcomes in a round (Bacchus, 2022). The Doha Declaration notes that 'the conduct, conclusion and

entry into force of the outcome of the negotiations shall be treated as part of a single undertaking'. It also recognised that agreements reached at an early stage could be implemented ahead of the full package on 'a provisional or definitive basis'.

However, as noted, the single undertaking approach did not lead to consensus on decisions relating to issues of interest to developing countries. At MC10 in Nairobi in 2015, there was no consensus to reaffirm the DDR mandate. At that meeting, many WTO members reaffirmed the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) and their commitment to conclude it but some did not, as they believed new approaches were required to achieve meaningful outcomes in the multilateral trade negotiations (WTO, 2015). This paved the way for some members to vigorously pursue plurilateral discussions in areas of interest to them. Consequently, there has not been meaningful progress on several development decisions of interest to LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries. Instead, the WTO agenda continues to expand to include new and emerging issues while outstanding issues of interest to these countries remain unresolved (Zhuawu and Soobramanien, 2017).

## 3. The WTO agenda in a changing global trading landscape

In the past two decades, the world has experienced several significant events and emerging trends that have contributed to changes in the global trade landscape and global trade governance. Global trade tensions, especially between China and the USA, have contributed to rising trade restrictions and protectionism, and the adoption of nearshoring and reshoring of production, as some countries have sought to be more self-sufficient. The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the situation, as it led to the increased use of trade restrictions. This disrupted supply chains and added uncertainty, which negatively impacted growth in the global economy and the advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Rapid advances in technology, spearheaded by increasing digitalisation, have pushed the frontiers of trade. The advent of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) have upscaled the complexity of technological change, threatening jobs. Factories

1 Proponents of plurilateral negotiations claim that these are already open and inclusive, providing clear rules for accession by other members or eventual multilateralisation, with the benefits to be extended on a most-favoured nation (MFN) basis without obligations after building a critical mass. However, by definition, plurilateralism involves doing things in small groups involving more than two participants but fewer than under multilateralism (Goode, 2020).

are expected to have fewer workers as they will be powered by AI technology, as the 4IR age will be associated with automation – with machines going to work in factories, hotels, hospitals and homes, among others. Meanwhile, the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated digitisation globally (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2021). This has raised the need to rethink the way trade is conducted and the role of trade and investment policies in enabling far-reaching economic transformation. At the same time, it has presented companies with opportunities to make their operations international, lower production costs, speed up production and increase their trade.

The rise of global value chains (GVCs), has contributed to increasing fragmentation of production. A final product can now comprise inputs produced in several countries, often involving complex and highly integrated 'just in time' international production networks. This has contributed to the fragmentation of markets, as trade in value-added has gained momentum, creating new trading opportunities. In response, most countries are seeking to participate in GVCs. The need to do this is reinforced by the viewpoint that countries can recover quickly from the COVID-19 pandemic by deepening integration into GVCs rather than through embarking on self-sufficiency and reshoring production policies (Espitia et al., 2021).

Increased production, consumption and trade, accompanied by rapid technological advances, has created new trading opportunities but also placed new demands on the environment and depleted resources. New and innovative thinking is required to design appropriate trade rules and policies that reflect these new realities and that help ensure the attainment of the SDGs, while also protecting the environment. As countries act to combat climate change and its effects, the conflict between trade rules and climate goals escalates, exposing countries to an unfamiliar situation. This is particularly the case for LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries because of their vulnerability to climate change and their limited capacity to pursue mitigation and adaptation strategies.

These changes in the global economy and trading landscape have contributed to several alterations to the WTO negotiating terrain and agenda. Several issues are now prioritised for discussion. These include e-commerce and the digitisation of trade, trade and climate change, trade and environmental sustainability, investment facilitation for development, and the participation of micro, small

and medium enterprises (MSMEs) and women in global trade. At MC11 in Buenos Aires in December 2017, several WTO members announced the formation of plurilateral initiatives, or JSIs, on the trade-related aspects of e-commerce, services domestic regulation, investment facilitation for development and MSMEs. This appears to have dampened the priority accorded to many of the DDR development issues of interest to most developing countries, with some countries pushing for discussion on issues that they think are more relevant to contemporary business practice and trade. At MC12 in Geneva in 2022, members announced several declarations and statements on some of these issues, including a concluded agreement on services domestic regulation.

Developing countries, including many Commonwealth developing countries LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries, remain concerned about the implications of discussing these new issues and potentially devising new trade rules to govern them. For example, India and South Africa have objected to negotiating new issues that are being discussed plurilaterally until the DDR is concluded. They also think that plurilateral negotiations undermine multilateralism. For Kelsey (2022), plurilateral discussions have the potential to bring further fissures within the WTO.

Nevertheless, it could be argued that these discussions also provide an opportunity for these countries to bring on board relevant development issues of interest to them – something they cannot do without participating in these plurilateral initiatives. In addition, there could be scope for trade-off between plurilateral initiatives and between plurilateral discussions and multilateral negotiations. For example, investment promotion in areas relevant to e-commerce, such as information and communication technology, logistics, transportation and e-payments, can help create an enabling investment climate for e-commerce and develop awareness on investment opportunities in the e-commerce ecosystem. It can also help narrow remaining gaps in areas such as trade facilitation.

#### 4. Transformation of the WTO negotiating terrain

Unequal power relationships have characterised the history of the WTO. Capacity-constrained countries continue to face challenges to meaningfully participating in and influencing the decision-making process (Zhuawu and Soobramanien, 2017). In recent years, informal Heads of Delegation

meetings have been conducted in an attempt to make breakthroughs in the negotiations (Sucker and Vickers, 2021). However, the mushrooming of coalition activities and the participation of coalition co-ordinators in these informal meetings on behalf of their members has not delivered a breakthrough in decision-making to advance the interests of disadvantaged countries.

The rapid rise of emerging economies<sup>2</sup> in the past decade has rebalanced the global economy, previously dominated by the USA and a few other advanced economies, such as Canada, Japan and the EU countries. This has significantly changed the WTO negotiating terrain. Countries such as Brazil, China, India and Russia now play an increased role in the global economy – a phenomenon that has been mirrored at the WTO (Ismail, 2016). These emerging economies can now influence major WTO decisions to advance their own interests and similar interests of other developing countries. This has been evident in both the Geneva process and in the 2013 and 2015 Ministerial Conferences, at which some decisions were made in favour of emerging economies and developing countries, such as the Bali decision on food security and the Nairobi decision on eliminating export subsidies. Developed countries have responded by seeking alternative approaches, including plurilateral discussions to advance liberalisation and rule-making in areas of interest to them, primarily within the framework of single-issue discussions.

The rebalancing of the power relationship between developed and emerging countries has, however, entailed tougher negotiations at the WTO for most other developing countries, notably LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries, which find themselves caught between the two major spheres of power. As Sucker and Vickers (2021) argue, differences in economic and political power affect the weight of a country's view in negotiations. With their increased economic and political power, emerging economies are likely to focus mainly on bargaining for outcomes that suit their own interests, which may not necessarily be in line with those of LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries. In addition, they now hold the potential to block deals, even if the decisions might be beneficial to other developing countries. For example, China, has cherry-picked negotiating areas and outcomes and avoided concessions

that are not in its interests while at the same time asserting its development status (Kelsey, 2022). However, given the changing interests of emerging economies, in line with the fast-changing needs of the global economy, there is a chance of some of their demands coalescing with those of developed countries, further marginalising developing countries (see Table 6.1). As such, it is only when the interests of LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries coalesce with those of emerging powers or developed countries that they can obtain a favourable outcome.

## 5. Plurilateral agreements

Some countries see plurilateral discussions as a way of pushing a common agenda on issues of interest to a particular group of countries. Such discussions allow a subset of WTO members to develop new rules on a particular subject matter of interest to them (Kelsey, 2022). Plurilateral trade agreements among WTO members assume one of two different forms – either an 'exclusive' or an 'open' variant (Adlung and Mamdouh, 2017). While the former is restricted to signatories of the agreement, the latter is implemented on a most-favoured nation (MFN) basis and so will also benefit non-members. To avoid free-riding, the coming into force of open variant plurilateral agreements is subject to the participation of a 'critical mass'. Because the benchmark for critical mass is usually a market share of 80 per cent or above, which might be difficult to achieve without the participation of most developing countries, free-riding might be impossible in some areas where some developing countries might have an interest. As such, these plurilateral agreements are envisaged to eventually translate into the multilateral realm.

The final relationship between plurilateral agreements and the WTO framework remains unclear. Open variant plurilateral agreements come into force only through consensus at the WTO in accordance with Article X:9 of the WTO Agreement.<sup>3</sup> Reaching a consensus is challenging, considering that some WTO members are opposed to plurilateral discussions, and especially that to them DDA outstanding issues of interest remain unresolved. In addition, the Nairobi Ministerial Declaration stipulates that decisions to launch discussions on non-DDA issues need to be agreed by all members (WTO, 2015). This raises the

2 These countries include Argentina, Brazil, Chile, China, Colombia, Egypt, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, Mexico, the Philippines, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Thailand, Turkey and United Arab Emirates (Dutttagupta and Pazarbasioglu, 2021).

3 According to which, the Ministerial Conference 'may decide exclusively by consensus' to add a plurilateral agreement to Annex 4 or delete a plurilateral agreement from Annex 4.

**Table 6.1. Examples of coalescing interests between countries at different levels of development as at 26 April 2021**

Negotiating issue	Number of developed members involved	Number of emerging economy members involved	Number of developing country members involved (excluding emerging economies)	Number of Commonwealth SVE, LDC and SSA members involved
Informal Working Group on MSMEs – Members of the Group, 14 January 2022 (INF/MSME/2/Rev.6)	11	12	34	10
Declaration on Micro, Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises (MSMEs), 14 December 2020 (INF/MSME/4)				
Fossil Fuel Subsidies Ministerial Statement, 18 November 2021 (JOB/GC/264/Rev.3)	7	1	5	3
Sanitary and Phytosanitary Declaration, 13 July 2021 (G/SPS/GEN/1758/Rev.7)	5	5	16	3
Joint Statement on Electronic Commerce, 13 December 2017 (WT/MIN(17)/60)	11	8	25	1
Joint Ministerial Statement on Investment Facilitation for Development, 10 December 2021 (WT/L/130)	9	13	49	15
Declaration on the Conclusion of the Negotiations on Services Domestic Regulation, 2 December 2021 (WT/L/1129)	12	11	18	2
Informal Dialogues on Plastic Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastic Trade (IDP), 10 December 2021 (WT/MIN(21)/8/Rev.2)	9	6	18	7
Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions, 14 December 2021 (WT/MIN(21)/6/Rev.2)	12	7	20	5

Note: \* The EU is considered to be a single member. The EU membership currently stands at 27.

Source: Commonwealth compilation from WTO submissions by members.

possibility of members focusing on their entrenched positions relating to the DDA, which will make it hard to reach consensus on plurilateral agreements (Adlung and Mamdouh, 2017). According to Kelsey (2022), plurilateral discussions challenge the WTO core principles of multilateralism, decision-making by consensus and S&DT, as well as side-lining the WTO's role to mandate negotiations and its existing bodies. However, some of these hurdles can be overcome with the broad participation of members on particular issues under discussion in plurilateral arrangements in an open-ended and inclusive manner, as discussed below.

## 6. Developing country interests in plurilateral discussions

Changes in the global trade landscape and global trade governance have contributed to changes in the trade interests of LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries, leading to some of their interests coalescing with those of developed countries and emerging economies. This has led to issue-based alliances. Table 6.1 shows examples of the coalescence of these interests as reflected in several ministerial statements/declarations since MC11. It demonstrates that some LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries have adopted interests or positions similar to those of developed countries in digital trade, including e-commerce, MSMEs, and trade and the environment. For example, 15 Commonwealth SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries have shown an interest in discussions on investment facilitation for development.

On the other hand, parties involved in some plurilateral discussions recognise the relevance of development issues, especially if they are to attract the participation of developing countries and build the required critical mass. For example, the recently completed Reference Paper on Services Domestic Regulation contains a development component<sup>4</sup> to benefit 18 of its developing country members, including one Commonwealth SVE, Mauritius (WTO, 2021). Commonwealth SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries that decide to join the completed Reference Paper on Services Domestic Regulation will benefit from the development component despite not having contributed to its making. For instance, the development component has a provision on LDCs – even though WTO LDC

members did not participate in the negotiations. This also means that, if Commonwealth LDCs decide to join this Reference Paper, they cannot do so on their own terms.

Some JSIs that are still under discussion, such as those on investment facilitation for development, also recognise the importance of supporting developing countries and LDCs by addressing their identified needs through S&DT. In this regard, it is important for Commonwealth SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries to assess their evolving development interests against the limited scope for WTO negotiations to deliver on the DDR development outcomes. This assessment must be linked to their evolving development interests, which must be packaged in the context of a changing negotiating terrain. Given the uncertain future of the DDR, Commonwealth SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries may wish to explore the possibilities of participating in plurilateral discussions that are of interest to them and make them multilateral, open-ended and inclusive. This will help them realise development outcomes that meet their needs, as was the case in the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA).

## 7. Making plurilateral discussions bottom-up and inclusive

Given the above backdrop, it is important for LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries to consider a different approach to WTO negotiations. The successful negotiations for the TFA (a single-issue discussion) under the Geneva process could provide an alternative negotiating model, as it offers a 'precedent and possible blueprint' (WTO, 2018). In any case, the founders of the WTO envisaged singular negotiations on individual issues or sectors in developing new rules in response to new demands in the future, rather than pursuing omnibus packages like the Uruguay Round (Bacchus, 2022), thus providing the flexibility to deviate from the single undertaking. For Sucker and Vickers (2021), the TFA did indeed represent a deviation from the single undertaking approach. Negotiations for the TFA changed the Geneva negotiation process from the traditional top-down approach, to involve full membership in an open-ended inclusive manner (Neufeld, 2014).<sup>5</sup> The open-ended approach, which is contrary to the customary way of doing things, challenged the conventional wisdom on how to

4 The issues covered under the development component include (i) transitional periods for developing country members, (ii) participation of LDC members and (iii) technical assistance and capacity-building.

5 At the WTO, open-ended meetings are usually informal and open to all members, unlike green room meeting. Such meetings can be instrumental in facilitating consensus-building among members with diverse interests.

approach multilateral negotiating processes. This could provide a model for arriving at decisions on some negotiating issues, including non-DDA issues, and at the same time capture the developmental issues of interest to LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries.

The open-ended approach heralded a departure from decisions being made by a few developed countries that had the economic clout to impose their decisions on other countries (Bacchus, 2022) – a process that sidelined the interests of most developing countries. This departure meant that developed countries could not dictate outcomes in their direct self-interest (Kelsey, 2022).

Given the success of the TFA discussions, then, LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries must consider participating in specific plurilateral discussions of interest to them with a view to making them multilateral, more open-ended and inclusive. Doing so will transform plurilateral discussions into multilateral discussions on single issues of interest to most members. As was the case with the TFA, this could increase the possibility of decisions on single issues that do not require single undertaking. This is very important because, by its nature, 'the WTO Agreement favours a multilateral approach to trade issues' (WTO, 1998). The preamble to the WTO Agreement underscores the importance of members to 'further the objectives underlying the multilateral trading system' (WTO, 1994).

Participating in the discussions of interest to them will help LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries reshape the negotiations and bring on board their own development issues. A move to more open-ended and inclusive discussions will help change the existing uneven negotiating terrain that could favour developed countries and emerging economies without special treatment of issues of interest to LDCs, SVEs and countries in SSA. As in the case of the TFA, a deviation from the single undertaking will not preclude developing countries from bringing their development interests to the negotiating table. Instead, it will recognise the need for flexibility for development purposes, thus acknowledging that one size does not fit all and that different countries cannot benefit from the same level of flexibility (WTO, 2018). As such, by participating in plurilateral discussions, poorer

countries can bring development dimensions back to the centre of multilateral trade negotiations.

This idea is strengthened by the significant shifts that have occurred in the power dynamics in the WTO negotiating process and in the coalescence of interests, which offer a chance for SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries to vigorously pursue co-operation with both developed and emerging economies based not solely on previous or future power relations but also on common interests, in a more open-ended and inclusive manner. In this regard, LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries would be able to participate in redefining the parameters of the WTO negotiating process as they would have the ability to co-operate with different powers on different negotiating issues of interest to them. In addition, if plurilateral agreements cannot be integrated in the WTO as implied in the EU paper on the WTO reform (European Commission, 2021), there is a risk that the major powers will negotiate these issues outside of the WTO, which could fragment the multilateral trading system (Wolfe, 2022).

In addition, a more open-ended and inclusive approach will enable delegations from SVEs, LDCs and SSA countries to be in the driving seat throughout the negotiating process as it involves a bottom-up approach,<sup>6</sup> with the chair functioning mainly as a facilitator, brokering a compromise based on delegations' wishes (Neufeld, 2014). For instance, S&DT in the TFA was assessed based on the implementation capacity of individual countries rather than the traditional approach of granting flexibilities based on the group to which the countries belonged. Such an open-ended and inclusive approach will allow LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries to co-operate with both developed and emerging economies on common interests and demand the flexibilities they require. The approach provides a workable and tested model that ensures their participation in both the ministerial and the Geneva processes. By following it, LDCs, SVEs and countries in SSA will be able to mitigate the possibility of plurilateral decisions being imposed on them.<sup>7</sup> Such co-operation will also remove the threat of being forced to join agreements in the future. In addition, it will help allay the concerns of developing countries that plurilateral negotiations on non-DDA issues will be centred around major

6 Unlike the top-down approach, which gives preference for trade negotiations to define an overall agenda before considering how to deal with the individual components, the bottom-up approach involves preparing the agenda for trade negotiations by agreeing on the negotiating issue items and gradually shaping the final agenda as members reach agreement on each item (Goode, 2020).

7 In plurilateral agreements, a few countries design rules and regulations that will operate between them. If other countries are to join the agreements, they must accept the conditions set out in the agreements.

trading powers' interests that would not be available for trade-offs (Draper and Dube, 2013).<sup>8</sup>

## 8. Conclusion

The WTO is far from perfect but it continues to provide the best forum for pursuing the trade-related development issues of interest to LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries. Some of the trade and development interests of these countries have evolved within the rapidly changing economic and trading landscape and negotiating terrain. They now have an opportunity to repack their development priorities and pursue these evolving interests within this changing context. They also have a chance to shape new trade rules to govern the changing nature of trade and promote their development objectives. They can do this by tailoring their negotiating position to suit their evolving interests in plurilateral discussions of interest to them and transforming the nature of these discussions from plurilateral into multilateral, open-ended and inclusive.

These countries' evolving trade interests provide an opportunity to forge alliances with developed countries and emerging economies that hold similar interests. This will help bring development back to the heart of the multilateral trading system. Therefore, by participating in plurilateral discussions of interest to them, LDCs, SVEs and SSA countries can promote their interests through both jointly creating new global trade rules and insisting on agreements that advance their development objectives.

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8 The 'single undertaking' principle allows trade-off concessions in one area from gains in another.



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# International Trade Policy Section at the Commonwealth Secretariat

This Trade Hot Topic is brought out by the International Trade Policy (ITP) Section of the Trade Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which is the main intergovernmental agency of the Commonwealth – an association of 54 independent countries, comprising large and small, developed and developing, landlocked and island economies – facilitating consultation and co-operation among member governments and countries in the common interest of their peoples and in the promotion of international consensus-building.

ITP is entrusted with the responsibilities of undertaking policy-oriented research and advocacy on trade and development issues and providing informed inputs into the related discourses involving Commonwealth members. The ITP approach is to scan the trade and development landscape for areas where orthodox approaches are ineffective or where there are public policy failures or gaps, and to seek heterodox approaches to address those. Its work plan is flexible to enable quick response to emerging issues in the international trading environment that impact particularly on highly vulnerable Commonwealth constituencies – least developed countries (LDCs), small states and sub-Saharan Africa.

## Scope of ITP Work

ITP undertakes activities principally in three broad areas:

- It supports Commonwealth developing members in their negotiation of multilateral and regional trade agreements that promote development friendly outcomes, notably their economic growth through expanded trade.
- It conducts policy research, consultations and advocacy to increase understanding of the changing international trading environment and of policy options for successful adaptation.
- It contributes to the processes involving the multilateral and bilateral trade regimes that advance more beneficial participation of Commonwealth developing country members, particularly, small states and LDCs and sub-Saharan Africa.

## ITP Recent Activities

ITP's most recent activities focus on assisting member countries in their negotiations in the World Trade Organization and various regional trading arrangements, undertaking analytical research on a range of trade policy, emerging trade-related development issues, and supporting workshops/dialogues for facilitating exchange of ideas, disseminating informed inputs, and consensus-building on issues of interest to Commonwealth members.

## Selected Recent Meetings/Workshops Supported by ITP

29 July 2021: Revitalising Commonwealth Trade Post-COVID: Leveraging Maritime Trade and Shipping. The webinar discussed the findings of our recent study on the impact of COVID-19 on maritime trade. It explored the maritime trade landscape in the Commonwealth and demonstrated how maritime trade and shipping can help revitalise Commonwealth trade post-COVID.

13 July 2021: Launch of the *Commonwealth Trade Review*. The 2021 Review presents new empirical findings on the impact of the pandemic on Commonwealth trade and outlined practical recommendations to boost trade recovery and build resilience, including harnessing digital technologies, utilising post-Brexit trading opportunities and promoting more sustainable green and blue economies.

21–23 October 2020: Recovery from COVID-19 – Tackling Vulnerabilities and Leveraging Scarce Resources, organised in the framework of the LDC IV Monitor and held virtually on the road to the Fifth UN Conference on Least Developed Countries (LDC5) in collaboration with the OECD Development Centre, UN-OHRLS and FERDI.

29 January 2020: Looking to LDC V: A Critical Reflection by the LDV IV Monitor (in partnership with the OECD Development Centre and the Centre for Policy Dialogue, Bangladesh) held at Marlborough House, London, United Kingdom.

28 January 2020: Roundtable Discussion on Trade Shocks in the Commonwealth: Natural Disasters and LDC Graduation (in partnership with the Enhanced Integrated Framework) held at Marlborough House, London, United Kingdom.

11 October 2019: Tapping the Tourism Potential of Small Economies: A Transformative and Inclusive Approach (WTO Public Forum) held in Geneva, Switzerland in collaboration with the WTO and the UNWTO.

## Previous Ten Issues of the Commonwealth Trade Hot Topics Series

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- Issue 181: Beyond the Pandemic: Commonwealth Trade and Investment Prospects
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