

CUTS CITEE IN ACTION

APRIL-JUNE 2020



WEBINARS

Along with a huge number of losses of human lives and concomitant miseries, the ongoing global pandemic as a result of novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) is creating havoc in all walks of life. Economic, social, and political life across the world has got disrupted and is expected to unfold in the coming weeks, months, and maybe years.

It is having and will have serious ramifications across various sectors, international trade being a major one of them. Unless they are addressed in a balanced manner by taking into account all interests, such measures and counter-measures may spiral into a slippery slope of protectionism resulting in spillover effects from supply to demand-side shocks.

It is in this regard, CUTS organised a series of three webinars from May 2020 to June 2020.

COVID-19 and the Imperative of Resurrecting the Multilateral Trading System

This is the first webinar under the series organised by CUTS International on May 18, 2020. The webinar underlined the importance of the WTO's committees including its Trade Policy Review Mechanism for bringing more transparency and certainty into the system.

It also highlighted the need for close cooperation among the WTO, various bodies of the United Nations, and multilateral agencies, such as the World Bank to closely monitor the trade measures that countries are taking as a response to the COVID-19 crisis.

The speakers and moderators of the webinar were Suresh Prabhakar Prabhu Member of Parliament; Pascal Lamy Former Director-General, WTO; Sanjaya Baru Distinguished Fellow, Institute for Defence Studies & Analysis; C Raja Mohan Director, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore; and Pradeep S Mehta Secretary General, CUTS International.

Speaking on the occasion, Suresh Prabhu, said: "A new world is going to unfold and we don't know as yet how it would look like. Multilateralism *per se* is under a very serious threat. The question is how to deal with this threat when it is needed most. The WTO is on a ventilator and it has to come out of it."

According to Pascal Lamy, former Director-General of the WTO: "A multilateral, rules-based and open trading system will be even more challenged in a post-COVID world. There has to be a balance between market access needs and regulations related to ensuring safety and security for the consumers."

Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS underlined the importance of the WTO's committees including its Trade Policy Review Mechanism for bringing more transparency and certainty into the system.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_-QRoUYL5U&list=PLySmTdTepJ_dL67-MWHwCRJ_WJnysGwX&index=1





What would happen to a world without the WTO?

This is the second webinar in the series on ‘What Would Happen to a World Without the WTO?’ organised by CUTS International on June 10, 2020. The webinar discussed specific suggestions for trade multilateralism under the aegis of the WTO to reinvent itself in a new avatar.

The eminent speakers of the webinar were Supachai Panitchpakdi Former Director General, WTO, and Former Secretary-General, UNCTAD; Manickam Supperamaniam, Former Ambassador of Malaysia to the WTO; Kishore Mahbubani Distinguished Fellow, Asia Research Institute, National University of Singapore; Tanya Spisbah Director, Australia India Institute; Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International; and Bipul Chatterjee Executive Director, CUTS International.

As per Manickam Supperamaniam, former Ambassador of Malaysia to the WTO: “Participation of developing and least developed countries in various committees of the WTO is very minimum and that is primarily because of their lack of capacity. We need to re-examine what should be the functions of these committees and how we can restructure them to improve their working functions.”

As per Bipul Chatterjee, Executive Director of CUTS International: “We need to take a closer look at the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation to understand the values that it is and can bring to people’s lives.”

A consensus was that the world has to get back to collective generosity. While new geopolitical alliances are emerging either implicitly or explicitly, they are different from what they used to be in the recent past. Emerging middle powers will have to keep this in mind and maintain their strategic autonomies.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN7QviFoKM4&list=PLySmTdTepJ_dL67-](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN7QviFoKM4&list=PLySmTdTepJ_dL67-MWHwCRJ_WIjNysGwX&index=3&t=156s)

[MWHwCRJ_WIjNysGwX&index=3&t=156s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uN7QviFoKM4&list=PLySmTdTepJ_dL67-MWHwCRJ_WIjNysGwX&index=3&t=156s)

What would happen to a world without the WTO?

This is the third webinar in the series organised by CUTS International on June 24, 2020. The webinar discussed the following specific suggestions for the Multi-party Interim Appeal Arbitration Arrangement for settling trade disputes, greater transparency in the functioning of the WTO’s Committees, and Absorption of the values of the WTO Agreement on Trade Facilitation for future multilateral negotiations.

The eminent speakers of the webinar were: Erastus Mwencha Chairman, TradeMark East Africa, and Former Deputy Chairman, African Union Commission; Magda Shahin Professor and Director, School of Global Affairs and Public Policy, The American University in Cairo; Faizel Ismail Director, Nelson Mandela School of Public Governance, University of Cape Town and Former Ambassador of South Africa to the WTO; Cheikh Tidiane Dieye Executive Director, African Center for Trade, Integration and Development; Pradeep S Mehta, Secretary General, CUTS International; and Chenai Mukumba, Director, CUTS Lusaka.

According to Erastus Mwencha, Chairman, TradeMark East Africa, and former Deputy Chairman of the African Union Commission: “We need to interrogate the whole process of the functioning of the WTO. That will help us have a better understanding of why there are so many systemic challenges.”

Cheikh Tidiane Dieye, Executive Director of Dakar-based African Center for Trade, Integration, and Development said, “We should recognise that the challenges faced by the multilateral trading system are not new. While they may not be in the same form from the beginning, they have evolved with changing geo-economic and geo-strategic developments.”

The discussions highlighted the need for creating necessary space for a more inclusive development within and between countries. Countries need to re-industrialise through embedded liberalisation. Regionalisation or localisation should be looked at more from the angles of addressing non-traditional aspects of security, particularly health and food security.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OR1Lw1ftCXE&list=PLySmTdTepJ_dL67-MWHwCRJ_WIjNysGwX&index=3



PARTICIPATION IN WEBINARS

- Chetna Rathore participated in the webinar ‘Empowering The Greater 50%’ on June 19, 2020. This is an initiative by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) and FICCI Ladies Organisation. The virtual launch ceremony was endeavoured by Smriti Irani, Minister for Women and Child Development, Government of India.
- Chetna Rathore participated in the webinar ‘Pandemic-Era Trade Policies in Food and Medical Products and International Cooperation’ by Global Economics, Global Governance Programme, EUI on June 05, 2020. The speakers shed light on the trade front of export restrictions and import liberalisations to understand the implications of the world, further the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on Food and Medical products trade.
- Deepmala Ghosh participated in the webinar ‘India-Bangladesh Trade and Investment: Stakeholder Interaction’ organised by FICCI on June 22, 2020. The objective of the webinar was to diversify Bangladesh’s routes for importing more goods.
- Saurabh Kumar participated in the webinar ‘Are we staring at a Global Financial Crisis? Preparing for Ensuring International Financial Stability’, was organised by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations on May 19, 2020. The webinar discussed and deliberated on impending issues that hold global importance and areas that require attention by the G20 forum.
- Saurabh Kumar participated in the webinar ‘G20 in the time of COVID-19’ organised by the German Development Institute and the South African Institute of International Affairs on June 23, 2020. The objective was to focus on the G20’s response to the current COVID-19 pandemic as global health, economic, and geopolitical crisis.
- Muvafaq Sheeshaikh attended the webinar ‘ASEAN India Trade and Value Chains in COVID-19 Era’ on May 22, 2020. The discussions highlighted the relevance of ASEAN India trade, the associated value chains, impact of COVID on the value chains and the way forward.



Fostering Indo-Bangla trade relations, connectivity is the ‘mantra’

Economic Times, May 30, 2020

By Bipul Chatterjee and Kishan S Rana

We have to first grasp the basics of trade and also keep in mind that talking about trade possibilities is rather different from making trade possible. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on cross-border trade between India and Bangladesh has, once again, underlined this simple fact. For a large number of basic necessities, including commodities such as onions or salt, Bangladesh is dependent on India. Nothing wrong with that as nobody can or should produce everything. However, due to legitimate health-related concerns, during this global pandemic, land borders, through which bulk of Indo-Bangla cross-border trade takes place, are firmly closed.

<https://cuts-citee.org/fostering-indo-bangla-trade-relations-connectivity-is-the-mantra/>

Community-run tourism can help Sundarbans cyclone recovery

The Third Pole, June 15, 2020

By Bipul Chatterjee and Arnab Ganguly

The governments of West Bengal and Bangladesh are still busy providing relief to the victims of Cyclone Amphan, which devastated the Sundarbans. The loss of homes, farmland and freshwater ponds to the wind and saline wave surges has left millions impoverished. While governments move to repair embankments, roads, electricity and communications infrastructure, it is time to start thinking of an alternate means of income. This is where community-run ecotourism in the world’s largest mangrove forest can play a big role.

<https://cuts-citee.org/community-run-tourism-can-help-sundarbans-cyclone-recovery/>

India-Bangladesh expanded river trade opens up opportunities for locals

The Third Pole, July 4, 2020

By Bipul Chatterjee, Veena Vidyadharan and Jyotiraj Patra

India and Bangladesh recently signed the second addendum to the Protocol of Inland Water Transit and Trade (PIWTT). The agreement adds an additional route between Sonamura, in India’s Tripura state, and Daudkandi in Bangladesh to the existing eight protocol routes – along which vessels can travel across international borders. With 54 shared rivers, India and Bangladesh have significant possibilities to harness the trade and economic benefits of inland waterways. The extension of the routes and new ports should open up the waterways to smaller traders, bringing agricultural goods and other materials between Bangladesh and India’s landlocked northeastern states.

<https://cuts-citee.org/india-bangladesh-expanded-river-trade-opens-up-opportunities-for-locals/>