



The Road to the WTO’s Twelfth Ministerial Conference (MC12)

With under two weeks to go for the Twelfth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12), global attention will soon shift to Geneva to see whether the WTO can deliver on pressing global trade issues. MC12 will be held in the backdrop of conflict, severe debt distress, rising food and oil prices and volatility in the global commodity markets.

MC12 will follow on the heels of the G20 Finance Ministers meeting, the World Bank and IMF Spring Meetings, and the recently concluded Annual Meeting of the World Economic Forum in Davos. In line with these, MC12 is expected to be a streamlined, business-like event. Further, given the challenging global situation, MC12 may turn out to be more of a stocktaking Ministerial than a negotiating one.

As far as the key issue areas are concerned, agriculture will be a top priority at MC12. A work plan is expected on domestic support disciplines. Given the looming food crisis, a decision on exemption of food purchases by the World Food Programme (WFP) from any export restrictions is also in the works. It is unclear whether the recent Joint Statement on Open and Predictable Trade in Agricultural and Food Products will take the shape of a Ministerial document.

On the fisheries subsidies negotiations, it remains to be seen whether the two “Fish Weeks” being organised by the Chair of the Negotiating Group on Rules will be able to yield any outcomes.

A WTO response to the pandemic may see a three-part outcome, if consensus can be reached. However, contentious elements of the pandemic response package, including obligations on transparency and export restrictions are yet to be resolved.

Two draft decisions are ready for adoption at MC12 – a decision on the integration of small economies into the world trading system, and a decision on TRIPS and non-violation complaints.

As she took office as WTO Director-General in March last year, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala observed that “*It cannot be business as usual.*” MC12 is a chance to carry through with that commitment.

This edition of CUTS Occasional News Wrap (ONW) captures news and developments at the WTO and perspectives on trade-related issues. This ONW is categorised into two sections:

- News & developments at the WTO
- Perspectives on trade issues

News & developments at the WTO

1.	<p><i>In Davos, DG Okonjo-Iweala calls for global solidarity in responding to crises</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 30, 2022</p>	<p>At the World Economic Forum in Davos, Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala urged government and business leaders to come together through multilateral institutions such as the WTO to address the multiple crises facing the global economy and world trade.</p>
2.	<p><i>DDG Paugam: WTO is actively participating in efforts to preserve global food security</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 24, 2022</p>	<p>Keeping trade open, monitoring governments' trade measures and reducing market distortions are the three lines of action the WTO and its members are pursuing to address a looming global food crisis, Deputy Director-General Jean-Marie Paugam said at a virtual session of the Paris Peace Forum.</p>
3.	<p><i>Plastics dialogue discusses MC12 plans, next steps to implement Ministerial Statement</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 24, 2022</p>	<p>At a meeting of the Informal Dialogue on Plastics Pollution and Environmentally Sustainable Plastics Trade (IDP) on 24 May, participants discussed plans for the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) on 12-15 June and the next steps to implement the Ministerial Statement issued in December 2021.</p>
4.	<p><i>Chair of fisheries subsidies negotiations reports on progress made during "Fish Week"</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 20, 2022</p>	<p>Members have adopted a positive tone and shown some new flexibility in the discussions, paving the way for decisions to be made to close the remaining gaps ahead of the 12th Ministerial Conference (MC12) next month, the chair said.</p>
5.	<p><i>Agriculture negotiators strive for results in final stretch to Ministerial Conference</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 19, 2022</p>	<p>WTO members have intensified work on achieving outcomes in agriculture that would respond to the looming food crisis and advance agriculture reforms, said the chair of the negotiations, Ambassador Gloria Abraham Peralta.</p>
6.	<p><i>Members deepen discussions on trade and environmental sustainability</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation May 18, 2022</p>	<p>WTO members taking part in the Trade and Environmental Sustainability Structured Discussions (TESSD) held the first round of in-depth discussions on 17-18 May on four specific issues under the TESSD heading.</p>

7.	<p><i>WTO launches new WTO data portal</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>May 17, 2022</p>	<p>The WTO has launched a new WTO data portal to provide easy access to key databases offering trade statistics and information on WTO members' trade-related measures.</p>
8.	<p><i>Members discuss e-commerce, trade concerns and LDCs' participation in services trade</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>May 16, 2022</p>	<p>WTO members addressed implementation of the services waiver for least-developed countries (LDCs), which seeks to boost their participation in services trade, at a meeting of the Council for Trade in Services on 16 May.</p>
9.	<p><i>STDF, Asian Development Bank champion "smart" regulations to promote safe food trade</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>May 10, 2022</p>	<p>Sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) experts shared how they use Good Regulatory Practices (GRPs) in Bhutan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka to strengthen SPS measures and facilitate safe trade, at a webinar on 10 May hosted by the Asian Development Bank and the Standards and Trade Development Facility (STDF).</p>
10.	<p><i>Members welcome Quad document as basis for text-based negotiations on pandemic IP response</i></p> <p>World Trade Organisation</p> <p>May 10, 2022</p>	<p>At a General Council meeting on 10 May, WTO members agreed that the outcome document emerging from the informal process conducted with the Quad (European Union, India, South Africa and the United States) opens the prospect for text-based negotiations on an intellectual property response to COVID-19.</p>
Perspectives on trade issues		
1.	<p><i>Excluding Taiwan from the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework is a mistake</i></p> <p>Marc L. Busch</p> <p>The Hill</p> <p>May 29, 2022</p>	<p>Like China, Taiwan has applied to join CPTPP. Malaysia and Vietnam are not going to quit CPTPP or RCEP if Taiwan is in IPEF. Let's stop talking about IPEF in a vacuum. The queues to join CPTPP and RCEP are long and growing. IPEF isn't going to change that. To get attention in a region that has CPTPP and RCEP, IPEF, which doesn't compare on binding commitments, really has only one card to play: Let Taiwan in.</p>
2.	<p><i>Global insecurity is no reason to divest from the WTO</i></p> <p>Aranca González Laya</p> <p>Financial Times</p> <p>May 19, 2022</p>	<p>This is not the moment to divest from the WTO - quite the opposite. The WTO system was never about liberalisation for its own sake. It was about creating predictable rules and a framework for managing disputes and spillovers. It is clear that international progress will be difficult over the next few years.</p>

3.	<p><i>India needs a nodal point for developing a comprehensive trade strategy</i></p> <p>Pranab Dhal Samanta The Economic Times May 17, 2022</p>	<p>GoI's oscillation between extremes on wheat exports is a pointer to why India urgently needs a systemic overhaul in the way it conducts trade. Just two years ago, India banned the export of onions in a similar fashion after domestic prices shot up while exports had grown at a healthy clip.</p>
4.	<p><i>India's Export Story: Expedient regulatory clearance coping with the logistics of uncertainty</i></p> <p>Vijay Singh Chauhan and Nikita Singla Financial Express May 16, 2022</p>	<p>Though export promotion has been a priority for the Government of India for many years, facilitation of export, aimed at simplification, modernization, and harmonization of export processes, acquired greater focus and urgency since India ratified the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) of the World Trade Organization in April 2016.</p>
5.	<p><i>Upcoming trade meeting a chance for WTO to prove it's still relevant</i></p> <p>Marc L. Busch The Hill May 14, 2022</p>	<p>There's no turning back now. On June 12, trade ministers will meet in Geneva for a long-anticipated meeting, dubbed the 12th Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization. The point of the meeting, which had been delayed by COVID-19, is to chalk up some wins to show that the institution is still relevant in today's global trading system. Wins wouldn't have been easy in the best of times, but these aren't those.</p>
6.	<p><i>Wheat export ban is a knee jerk reaction</i></p> <p>Ashok Gulati and Sanchit Gupta The Indian Express May 14, 2022</p>	<p>In a knee jerk reaction, the government has banned wheat exports with effect from May 13, with some minor exceptions for those who have irrevocable letters of credit or where the governments of importing countries request the Indian government for food security purposes. This comes as a shock.</p>
7.	<p><i>New trade deals: A positive movement</i></p> <p>Biswajit Dhar Hindustan Times May 09, 2022</p>	<p>In the past, India had failed to increase its exports to the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), Korea, and Japan, its major FTA partners, triggering downbeat sentiments against FTAs in general. Hopefully, lessons would be learnt from the past failings.</p>

8.	<p><i>The world needs a 12-step programme for better trade</i> Financial Times Rana Faroohar May 08, 2022</p>	<p>To use another 12-step metaphor, it would be nice if all the wrangling could simply be turned over to a higher power. But that’s the problem - there isn’t one (including the WTO) that has shown itself capable of managing the breakdown of the global trade paradigm. Indeed, we are still struggling with step one - acknowledging the problem.</p>
9.	<p><i>India must seize the trade opportunity opening now</i> Sachchidanand Shukla The Indian Express May 06, 2022</p>	<p>If India were to tap export opportunities in developed markets, it must do the following. One, work on non-tariff barriers for agricultural trade with a special focus on harmonising the sanitary and phytosanitary (SPS) requirements.</p>
10.	<p><i>All eyes on the new trade policy</i> A S Mittal The Hindu Business Line May 04, 2022</p>	<p>Given the economic hardship caused by the pandemic, exporters are hoping that the new FTP will work in a phased manner to address export constraints, review the regulatory and operational framework to reduce the transit costs and create a low-cost operating environment through developed logistics and utility infrastructure.</p>