



**WTO REFORM: INCREMENTAL CHANGES TO IMPROVE THE FUNCTIONING OF THE  
VARIOUS WTO BODIES**

COMMUNICATION FROM INDIA

The following communication, dated 1 May 2023, is being circulated at the request of the delegation of India.

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1. The World Trade Organization (WTO) will complete 30 years of its functioning on the 31 December 2024, post the signing of Marrakesh Agreement. Beginning next January, as we enter the thirtieth year of this organization as the central pillar of the global multilateral trading system, we have a collective opportunity to demonstrate Members' continued commitment to the work of the WTO, thereby strengthening its effectiveness.
  2. Towards this end, we propose to galvanize the collective resolve of this Organization behind an initiative we have dubbed as **"30 For 30"** - a Member-led effort to bring at least 30 operational improvements to the WTO before the Organization completes 30 years, i.e., by 1 January 2025. The organization would be able to showcase these incremental yet collectively very significant transformational changes on completing 30 years of its existence.
  3. The WTO bodies can benefit from operational efficiency improvement through interventions which may include technology adoption, cross-pollination of best practices amongst WTO bodies and adapting the working conventions in a way which benefit delegates in Geneva and in the capitals on a day-to-day basis.
  4. Furthermore, we recall paragraph 3 of the Outcome Document of the MC12 (WT/MIN(22)/24), which stated: *"The General Council and its subsidiary bodies will conduct the work, review progress, and consider decisions, as appropriate, to be submitted to the next Ministerial Conference."*
  5. In this context, we are presenting a first list of ideas to help start the "30 For 30" discussions. This is a preliminary list meant to guide the discussion. We have attempted to group these suggestions by themes and also indicated the timeframe in which each suggestion appears achievable.
  6. While deliberations on the larger WTO reform agenda are ongoing, these suggested incremental changes could be implemented quickly, as developing a common understanding on these would be easy considering the nature of these suggestions for enhancing of operational efficiency of the organization.
  7. We remain open to other ideas from Members. We welcome efforts by various Councils and Committees to review these ideas and hope that the ideas that eventually get adopted for improving the working of the various WTO bodies will have meaningful convergence.
  8. We also propose that the Council and TNC Division of the WTO Secretariat collate the list of changes implemented and communicate to the WTO Members and external stakeholders on a periodic basis on this collective initiative by the Members.
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**SUGGESTIONS GROUPED BY THEMES**

No.	Theme	Suggestion	Proposed Timeframe (in Months)		
			6	12	24
1.	<b>WTO Regular Meetings</b>	<b>WTO Meeting Calendar:</b> A yearly meeting calendar to be published, with all divisions of WTO working together to streamline meeting schedule with best-efforts attempt to avoid clashes including publishing of the dates for General Council meetings through the year by 15 January of the particular year, so that other bodies can plan meetings around it.  Additionally, the holidays on account of festivals and other events should be taken into consideration the sensitivities of all Members.	•		
2.	<b>WTO Regular Meetings</b>	<b>Annotated Agenda:</b> All WTO regular bodies to adopt a standard annotated agenda format, which remains an informal document, while taking into account the sensitivities of Members.	•		
3	<b>WTO Regular Meetings</b>	<b>WTO Committee Meeting Minutes:</b> The minutes of the WTO Committee meetings should be made available within 2 weeks of completion of a one-day meeting, 3 weeks of completion of a two-day meeting and 4 weeks of completion of meetings longer than two days.		•	
4.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>WTO Digital Tools Overview Session:</b> Conduct two overview sessions on WTO Digital Tools every year – once for the Geneva-based delegates and once for the capital-based delegates (learning from the practice set by the Committee for Market Access and the Council of Trade in Goods in 2022).	•		
5.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>WTO Website Management:</b> Ensure that all WTO regular bodies have a standardized set of information on the WTO website, and each page remains uniform (not look different) and provide time stamps to enhance the authenticity and the credibility of the website.		•	
6.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>WTO Website Management:</b> Put in place a standard content management system, improving digital asset management, content management and change control processes for managing the WTO website.			•
7.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>STC Dashboard:</b> Create a Specific Trade Concern (STC) dashboard for Members (only for registered delegates), to check how STCs raised by and against each Member have evolved over time in different WTO regular bodies.		•	
8.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>Productivity App:</b> Develop a simple productivity app (Member Delegate Directory, Secretariat Directory, Meeting Calendar, Meeting Notifications, Meeting Room Booking) which is native to mobile platforms, to help increase institutional productivity and ease of communication.			•
9.	<b>WTO Digital Tools</b>	<b>WTO Website Content:</b> Develop a system that helps user to search for Members' positions in a particular Council / Committee based on parameters like year, and agenda items and compile.			•
10.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>WTO Reports Calendar:</b> Publish a yearly calendar for reports that the WTO Secretariat intends to publish. The calendar can then be revised quarterly as required.	•		

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11.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Disclaimer in WTO Reports/ Publications:</b> All WTO Secretariat reports prepared in partnership with external stakeholders should carry a disclaimer that the report is not endorsed by WTO Members and is authored on the responsibility of the Secretariat. WTO digital media communication on the reports should carry the same disclaimer.	•		
12.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Public Forum Schedule:</b> Move the Public Forum dates to early July. So as to free up and utilize ~2-3 weeks end September / early October for WTO regular meetings (for widening the calendar window for regular meetings).	•		
13.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Review of Regular WTO Reports:</b> WTO should institute a process to review the structure of all regular reports (Aid for Trade, Trade Forecast etc.) in a Member driven process. This will help Members in re-evaluating the underlying assumptions and methodology, and also keep them relevant and non-partisan.		•	
14.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Social Media:</b> The WTO actively uses and harnesses the reach provided by social media platforms. With the proliferation of the number of platforms and their wide use by WTO Secretariat staff, the content disseminated and presented through these platform needs to be neutral, objective, non-partisan, taking cognizance of diverse views of Members. Formulate a policy for the officials of the Secretariat with regard to their engagement on the social media especially in their capacity as WTO Secretariat staff.		•	
15.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>WTO News Scrutiny before Publishing:</b> News items at times provide information that are factually inaccurate, and partisan not reflecting the discussions in the Council / Committees in entirety. Therefore, there must be a proper procedure for ensuring balanced and factual drafting and accountability for the items reported.		•	
16.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Transparency in WTO News Items:</b> WTO news items published in media or on own website make statements like 'some Members agreed' or 'some Members disagreed'. Such news items should clearly state the number of Members agreeing and disagreeing, rather than editorializing the text.		•	
17.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>LDC Experience Sharing:</b> Institute an annual LDC Experience Sharing day, where LDCs can present their gain made from trade and the problems faced, so that they become inputs to ongoing improvements of the multilateral trading system.		•	
18.	<b>WTO External Communication</b>	<b>Member Driven Process for Identification of Studies Carried by WTO with International Organizations:</b> WTO collaborates with other international organizations for various studies. However, Members do not play any role in either selecting such topics, or identification of agencies for study, or need for any such study or analysis of studies. These studies, report often contain only select views and are released as <i>fait accompli</i> , thus creating distortion.		•	
19.	<b>WTO Rules and Procedures</b>	<b>Geneva Hiring Cooling-Off Period:</b> WTO should institute a cooling-off period of 12 months before hiring any Ambassador and PR to the WTO in any permanent or consulting roles in the WTO and for any consulting roles through third party organizations.	•		

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20.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Binding Constraints:</b> For the reform process to progress, binding constraints must first be identified and addressed under each pillar. The binding constraint is that constraint which has the predominant role to play if any outcome has to be achieved.		•	
21.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>One Step Backwards to Take Two Steps Forward:</b> Outstanding issues are not resolved but new issues are added. Need to pause resolve old issues before adding new ones.		•	
22.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Organization of Ministerial Conferences (MC):</b> This format needs to be streamlined, taking into account the experiences gained from the previous MCs including MC12.  Delegations had flagged a number of process and procedural issues with respect to MC12 organization and the WTO Secretariat was collating those suggestions. That collation could form the basis for preparing a standard and streamlined guidance document for organization of the future MCs. The Secretariat could consider placing the same before the Membership for discussion and adoption.		•	
23.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Reforming Green Room Meetings:</b> The meetings held in the Green Rooms have come in for criticism for exclusivity. Process and modalities for Green Room have to be reformed.		•	
24.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Text based negotiation:</b> There are two ways in which text-based negotiations are conducted, the texts are either proposed by Member/Groups of Members or by the Chair (which reflects common position/views), which is negotiated.  In the former, if the text is not stabilized, the positions of Members are attributed to them. Therefore, there is transparency of what a particular Member's position is. The latter, however, does not reflect the position of Members and therefore is a non-transparent process. Transparency in text-based negotiations is <i>sine quo non</i> and therefore positions attributable to Members always need to be reflected, whether in text based or Chair's text.		•	
25.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Adopt UN Accounting Practices:</b> Align WTO accounting and audit practices to the UN system in terms of auditor selections, procedures and reporting.		•	
26.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>WTO Bodies - Rules and Procedures:</b> The WTO should undertake a one-time study to harmonize rules and procedures of the WTO regular bodies, so that a common code of behaviour and conduct emerges for the WTO Chairs. This will help reduce time and effort for Members to understand operational differences between different WTO bodies.			•
27.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Review Work of "Facilitative" WTO Bodies:</b> Undertake a one-time review of the work of "facilitative" WTO regular bodies and explore opportunities for the re-invigoration of their work - e.g., Committee on Balance of Payments, Working Group on Trade, Debt and Finance, Working Group on Trade and Transfer of Technology.			•
28.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>WTO Documents:</b> Undertake a one-time project to harmonize WTO document series across WTO regular bodies (e.g., M for Meeting Minutes, N for Notification etc.). Assign a revised symbol to old WTO documents where required and ensure that the search facility works for old as well as new symbols for a transition period - maybe 5 years - after which the new symbols should be used exclusively.			•

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29.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Ethics- Refining Conduct Rules:</b> Eliminating conflict of interest is a core element of ethical code conduct across all corporate and government organizations. This needs immediate attention in the WTO, both in Committee's Chair's appointments and staff position appointments.			•
30.	WTO Rules and Procedures	<b>Efficient Chairs Selection:</b> Publish appropriately a list of chairs of all WTO bodies since inception, so that an evidence-based decision-making process may be facilitated for Chairs selection in the future.	•		
31.	WTO Committee-Specific Suggestions	<b>Time Bound Work Program on Making Dispute Settlement Accessible:</b> Constitute a time-bound work programme - say 3 years - via a General Council declaration on specific steps required to make dispute settlement more accessible for the developing countries, including the LDCs.	•		
32.	WTO Committee-Specific Suggestions	<b>Committee on Budget Finance &amp; Administration:</b> WTO, unlike other national governments and International Organizations, does not have a contingency measure to handle the situation when the WTO regular budget is not timely approved by the Members. There are proposals which have been under discussion to address this issue, but no decision has been taken yet. It is important that WTO Membership addressed this important housekeeping issue at the earliest, by adopting a provision that will keep the organization running, whenever there is a delay in adoption of the WTO regular budget.		•	
33.	WTO Committee-Specific Suggestions	<b>Capacity Building and legal assistance in Dispute Settlement:</b> Capacity building in WTO law and dispute settlement procedures for national lawyer should be increased. For instance, there could be a separate component for dispute settlement in the WTO's technical assistance and training program and after recommencing of the Dispute Settlement Body a system of hiring legal assistants can be introduced. The intention is to provide high-quality, independent legal advice to panelists and Appellate Body Members. There can be various models which can be considered. For instance, a panelist can have the option to select her own law clerk, or, the WTO can have a panel of law clerks who can be allotted to various panels.		•	
34.	WTO Committee-Specific Suggestions	<b>Trade Policy Review Mechanism:</b> The current TPRM should be reformed in such a way that its revised format becomes an enabler for developing countries to frame and better implement trade policies, than merely as a forum to criticize Members policies.  This can be done by utilizing the intervening day between the TPR meetings to organize informal discussions between the Reviewed Member and other WTO Members, for a free and frank exchange on issues that the Reviewed Member wishes to take it up with other Members, with a view to learn from others' best practices in the area of Trade Policy. The use of digital tools in the TPRM process needs to be enhanced, especially with respect to handling of the Advance Written Questions by Members.			•