

WTO PUBLIC FORUM 2012

“Plurilateralism against Multilateralism?
A Multi-stakeholder Perspective”

THE CONTEXT

- Plurilateralism is not new or completely strange – countries always come together in small groups to formulate, influence or negotiate in or outside multilateral frameworks.
- An approach for countries willing to move forward with the liberalisation process.
- Conversely, plurilateralism represents a reaction to the failure of multilateralism – some countries not willing to move forward with the liberalisation process.

The Context ...

- Different approaches to plurilaterals:
 - Outside the WTO – RTAs or FTAs or PTAs
 - Inside the WTO – Tokyo “Codes”, GPA, ITA
 - Benefits extended to all Members (MFN), whether or not they participate (“free riders”?) while obligations bind only the initial members and others as they join.
 - Benefits accrue only to participants who also undertake binding commitments.

THE PARADOX

- Plurilateralism supports the international free trade regime
- AND
- Plurilateralism not only hurts traditional multilateral principles but also the international free trade system (Oyane, 2001)
- On the basis of this paradox, my intervention will focus on only two of the perspectives framed by the organisers— implications of plurilaterals for the MTS; and strategies and tactics for developing countries and LDCs, due to their systemic nature.

The Paradox ...

- The other questions on how to “multilaterlise” plurilateralism; “options” to negotiate plurilateral agreements; and areas to be negotiated through plurilateral approaches are issues of consensus by WTO Members, and I do not wish to speculate on them.

IMPLICATIONS OF PLURILATERAL AGREEMENTS

- Plurilateralism fragments and disrupts the larger multilateral process, including multilateral cooperation on different issues.
- Plurilaterals can violate the multilateral principles of universality, inclusiveness and transparency.
- A threat to the conclusion of DDA, “single undertaking” principle.
- Consolidation of RTA commitments and policy harmonisation beyond the needs of some members

STRATEGIES AND TACTICS FOR DEVELOPING COUNTRIES AND LDCs

- Plurilaterals must preserve the multilateral character of the WTO.
- Plurilaterals cannot modify existing multilateral rules and disciplines, or introduce new obligations in any sector or agreement.
- MFN application of all benefits.
- “Opt in” and “opt out” approach.
- Plurilateral agreement to include favourable accession conditions

THANK YOU FOR YOUR
ATTENTION

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