

# TRADE BRIDGES BRINGING THE WTO TO YOU

Special Guest



Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala  
Director General, WTO

## SUMMARY REPORT

DISCUSSIONS WITH INDUSTRY LEADERS FROM AROUND THE  
GLOBE ON SOME OF THE ISSUES THAT WILL INFLUENCE FUTURE  
DISCUSSIONS AT THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION

– JUNE 30, 2021 –



## Introduction

We were incredibly pleased that Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was able to join a group of industry, business, and trade leaders from around the world on June 30, 2021, for a dialogue on some of the issues that will influence future discussions at the WTO. As discussed, we are submitting this report to Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala and her team which summarizes panel discussions and provides recommendations from event participants on how the WTO can better connect with its various constituents. We believe these ideas support WTO modernization efforts, will help it reestablish itself at the forefront of the global trading system and, most importantly, ensure global trade plays a pivotal role in driving post-pandemic economic growth and recovery.

## Trade Dialogue # 1: SMEs, Businesses and Trade Development

### Participants

- Carole Kariuki, Kenya Private Sector Alliance
- Deodat Maharaj, Caribbean Export Development Agency
- John Murphy, US Chamber of Commerce
- Mark Agnew, Canadian Chamber of Commerce
- Moderated by Luisa Santos, Business Europe

### Key question

*The workings of the WTO are often very abstract for small and medium sized businesses. This is a function of both the time it takes to make a consensus amongst WTO members and the difficulty for SMEs to understand how issues impact them. What can the WTO do concretely to deliver on assisting SMEs to take advantage of international trade?*

### Summary

- Amongst SME's there is low awareness about what the WTO is, why it is important and why its functions benefit trading businesses.
- However, businesses do understand the need for making trade easier by reducing red tape and other costly burdens, as well as continuing to innovate and modernize their operations. For example, it was noted that digital transformation is occurring in most industries yet not in merchandise trade where documents still need to be in paper format.
- Businesses also understand that trade financing is necessary to grow and increase competitiveness in global markets. In fact, most panelists cited trade financing as one of the biggest obstacles facing SME's wanting to pursue commercial opportunities around the world.
- For smaller countries, there needs to be better visibility into WTO activities and a sense that the concerns of developing and smaller states are being considered by WTO policy- and decision-makers.
- Overall, there was a sense that the WTO can play a significant role in pushing and encouraging national governments on a variety of fronts.

### Key Recommendations

- ✓ Ensure the WTO is at the forefront of pushing national governments toward digital transformation in global trade. Similarly, the WTO should play a leading role in ensuring e-commerce and digital trade is a driving force in negotiating future trade and trade-related agreements.
- ✓ The WTO should work with national governments to ensure SME's have better access to trade financing and other supports that will better enable them to expand and succeed in global markets.

- ✓ The WTO should encourage its members to adopt an 'SME lens' when negotiating, developing and implementing trade policies. For example, this could be in the form of an impact statement or an analysis of how a particular policy affects SMEs.

## Trade Dialogue #2: Agriculture, Food Security and Supply Chain Resilience

### Participants

- Alanna Koch, Global Institute for Food Security, Saskatchewan farmer
- Marcel van der Vliet, President of the European Liaison Committee for Agriculture and Agri-Food
- Gerald Masila, Eastern Africa Grain Council (EAGC)
- Moderated by Claire Citeau, Canadian Agri-Food Trade Alliance

### Key question

*Just a few months ago, the FAO stated in a report supported by the WTO, OECD and others that international trade is the future of global agriculture and food. More trade is needed, not less. Since its entry into force in 1994, world exports of agricultural products have tripled and agri-food systems around the world have evolved significantly. The WTO's Agreement on Agriculture remains the only instrument that exists at the international level to govern global trade in agricultural products, but its rules have not changed, and we remain far from DOHA aspirations. Urgent action is required. What is the one area where there needs to be progress?*

### Summary

- As one of the most trade-sensitive sectors, agriculture remains a challenging industry to secure meaningful outcome in both developing and developed countries.
- For farmers and agribusinesses, Geneva is far away and seems very detached from the challenges agriculture and agri-food exporters face across the board in virtually all countries.
- Many believe it is too easy for WTO members to renege on rules they have committed to and their overall trade obligations.
- Specifically, many countries need to abide by not just the letter of the law of the rules but also the spirit in which they were undertaken and committed to in the first place.
- Greater clarity on trade rules rooted in science, coupled with adopting new technology would increase the value of many commodities, especially those from developing countries.

### Recommendations

- ✓ The WTO must ensure trade rules are understood by all its members and that robust dispute settlement systems are in place to enforce them.
- ✓ The WTO needs to show greater transparency in how it monitors and implements rules and obligations made by its members.
- ✓ The WTO needs to be leading the global conversation on removing non-tariff barriers across jurisdictions. Increasingly, these are the barriers that are most harmful to agriculture and agri-food businesses from developing and developed countries alike.

## Trade Dialogue #3: Inclusive Trade

### Participants

- Elizabeth Vazquez, WEConnect International
- Risa Schwartz, Risa Schwartz International Law
- Valerie Hughes, Bennett Jones LLP
- Moderated by Nadia Theodore, Maple Leaf Foods

## Key question

*There is growing consensus that promoting equality in global trade is an important element of an inclusive trade agenda. But we know that certain groups face challenges that are amplified by rules, institutions, and laws that limit their participation, access to markets, and economic opportunities. As a result, there is untapped economic potential in all countries. How can we use international trade rules and trade promotion to help create a win-win for equality and economic growth?*

## Summary

- Women remain vastly under-represented in global business and trade policy in general is not gender neutral.
- Similarly, Indigenous peoples are largely left out of the global trading conversation, which leaves a significant amount of talent and opportunity for wealth creation – both at a micro and macro level – on the table.
- Trade rules need to be developed in a way that will empower inclusive trade.
- As a starting point, soft rules can serve as an effective building block toward a more robust trade system that puts issues related to inclusion at its core.
- More needs to be done to bring under-represented and under-utilized groups into the mainstream global trading system.

## Recommendations

- ✓ The WTO should host a Trade and Indigenous Peoples Symposium which will bring together Indigenous business leaders, academics and policy makers in an open dialogue with WTO members. The symposium could include a focus on expanding areas of effective participation for Indigenous peoples in the multilateral trading system and providing better access to opportunities in global markets for under-represented groups.
- ✓ The WTO should use its tools and networks to ensure various issues related to inclusive trade are given a platform for information sharing, capacity building and ongoing dialogue.
- ✓ The WTO should push a trade and gender agenda forward by ensuring these issues are reflected in various multilateral trade and trade-related agreements.

## Conclusion

As industry and business leaders, we feel a sense of renewed optimism that a genuine opportunity awaits the WTO as it seeks to reestablish its relevance and credibility in the global trading system while better connecting to its members and the workers and businesses within those countries.

We also believe that under its new high-energy leadership, meaningful outcomes across a variety of fronts can *finally* be achieved.

As economic recovery becomes the dominant focus of public policy makers around the world in the post-pandemic period, international trade can be a powerful force in helping economies get back to full steam. We believe the WTO can play a leading role in helping build back a more prosperous and inclusive global trading system provided it makes the deliberate choice to do so. The main purpose of our event was to start a conversation that will hopefully lead to concrete actions taken.

We believe the ideas we have proposed are achievable, long overdue and will help ensure the WTO remains the driving force of the global trading system. We know that with the right vision and ability to execute, the best is yet to come for the WTO and for the people it serves. We look forward to discussing these ideas with you and your team further and answering any questions you may have.