



### Moving Toward Modalities

Following the failure to adopt Brazil's proposed roadmap on how to advance agriculture negotiations at the July 22-23 General Council (GC) meeting, members of the Group of Cairns and the African Group have decided to work jointly to identify ripe topics on which modalities can be developed for the 14th Ministerial Conference (MC14) in Cameroon.

The African Group, which also released a similar timetable before the GC, considers its document as a plan B to be discussed at the Committee on Agriculture in Special Session (CoASS) under the leadership of its chairman, Ambassador Alparslan Acarsoy. In the meantime, the group is working on a proposal for modalities on the most mature agricultural subjects which will be presented to all Members in the coming months. Brazil, for its part, considers its proposed work program to be “expired” following opposition from India and Russia at the GC.

Ambassador Acarsoy said he was exploring alternative strategies to resume negotiations – likely through the formation of working groups on key topics such as market access, domestic support and public stockholding (PSH). Many delegations see MC14 – which will be held on African soil – as an opportunity to make significant progress in agriculture and achieve results, particularly in the area of food security, essential for many countries in development.

The Chair of the agriculture negotiations convened Members for a first informal open-ended CoASS on September 18-19 to report on the consultations he has held since the summer recess and hear their thoughts on the way forward.

### Sustainability, Climate Change and Agriculture

Although not part of the official mandate of the agricultural negotiations, Brazil is now pushing for the issue of sustainability to soon become an integral part of the negotiations. In a proposal distributed in early June to various committees – including the GC, the COASS, the Committee on Trade and Environment, the Committee on Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures and the Committee on Technical Barriers to Trade – Brazil stressed that the agriculture negotiations “should not preclude a forward-looking discussion on sustainable agriculture under the direction of the WTO GC, addressing 21st century challenges to agricultural production and trade, which seems timely and appropriate.”

In a nutshell, Brazil is looking for the WTO to tackle policies

- that support sustainable and productivity-enhancing agricultural practices.
- which facilitate innovation and the adoption of new agricultural technologies.
- that address overproduction, overuse or misallocation of resources, market distortions or other negative impacts, environmental or otherwise.
- that promote food security and support families and small farmers.
- that encourage low-carbon and climate-friendly agricultural practices.
- which provide more favorable access to agricultural products produced using more sustainable methods.

Brazil called for Members to agree on a definition of environment-related parameters for agriculture to mitigate fragmentation. It said the issues it listed are not exhaustive but represent some of the challenges and opportunities that lie at the intersection of agriculture, trade and the environment.

Although Members have not yet agreed on a clear definition of sustainability – whether it should encompass only environmental issues or include broader considerations such as inclusion, diversity and food security – it is increasingly recognized that the issue cannot be ignored, and that sustainability will likely become a major concern in the agricultural negotiations.

Some Members mentioned that sustainability could also be a way to keep countries engaged while addressing “old topics” related

to the three pillars of the Agreement on Agriculture (market access, domestic support and export competition). Many Members want to address these issues in future negotiations, but there is not yet a clear consensus on how to proceed.

With a view to engaging in a constructive dialogue on this important issue for the future of world trade, Brazil proposes that the GC organizes this fall a retreat on sustainable agriculture, in addition to identifying priorities and appointing a facilitator. It also recommends that senior officials review progress at a meeting to be convened in the second half of 2025.

## Dr Ngozi Seeks Second Term as WTO Director General

Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has officially announced her intention to seek a second term as Director-General (DG) of the WTO, according to Ismaila Dieng, spokesperson for the WTO. Her decision was officially conveyed on September 16 to Ambassador Petter Ølberg, Chair of the WTO GC, Dieng added.

With this announcement, Dr Ngozi responded positively to the request of the African Group made during the July GC and which generated broad support from Members. The African Group said it did not wish to put the appointment of the DG in competition with the preparation of MC14 in Cameroon. At the July GC, the United States remained silent on the African Group initiative.

Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala is the seventh DG of the WTO. She took office on March 1, 2021, becoming the first woman and the first African to hold the position of DG. Her term will expire on August 31, 2025. It should be noted that the Trump administration opposed her nomination, preferring her opponent, the Korean Trade Minister. Dr Ngozi, who also holds American nationality, had to wait for President Biden to win the presidential election to be confirmed as DG.

The process leading to the decision by the GC to appoint a DG will now be led by Ambassador Ølberg in consultation with Members.

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