



# INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**International Trade Challenges in Africa and WTO Reform:  
The Way Forward**

**Yaoundé, Cameroon  
28 and 29 November 2024**

ATG

Organised by the African Trade Group (ATG) @ WTO Chairs: Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia.

## ○ Rationale

Since its establishment in 1995, the WTO has played a prominent role in boosting international trade and investment and helping member countries to leverage the benefits of globalisation. Between 1995 and 2023, the value of world merchandise trade increased by 267 per cent and trade as a share of global GDP increased from 19.9 to 29.9 per cent. However, the multilateral trading system faces ongoing criticism for its apparent inability to drive more equitable trade and to effectively deal with the fallout from exogenous shocks, such as the recent Covid-19 pandemic and the Russian–Ukrainian war. These latter shocks have exposed the vulnerability of global food and energy supply chains and contributed to escalating cost-of-living crises around the world; Africa being the continent most severely affected by such crises.

Despite having 17 per cent of the world’s population, the African continent accounts for just 2.3 per cent of global trade. African countries often denounce the ‘unfair’ rules that underpin the multilateral trading system, which, they argue, favour developed countries and their multinational corporations. However, the WTO’s Doha Development Agenda tabled in 2001 in Doha, Qatar was intended to respond to the concerns of African countries by establishing fairer trade rules and opening up more pathways for developing countries’ growth and development. Notwithstanding its strong narrative and good intentions, the ‘Doha Agreement’ has still not been adopted, with negotiations having encountered numerous obstacles over the years. This has sparked many debates about the future of the multilateral trading system and, indeed, what the best way forward is for the developing world, and Africa in particular.

WTO Director General Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, speaking at a conference hosted by the Instituto Rio Branco (Diplomatic Academy of Brazil) in Brasilia in April 2022, emphasised that ‘multilateralism must be rethought and adapted to its purpose to meet the challenges of the 21st century’. This call is far from new but it is becoming increasingly urgent given the speed with which the world is changing – from geopolitics to trade, investment, technology, social dynamics and the natural environment. Of course, if the multilateral trading system is to be given a new sense of purpose and direction, the WTO itself needs to undergo reform.

Currently the debate about reforming the WTO is being led by developed countries. Africa’s views on the matter largely recede into the background. It is therefore imperative that Africa makes its voice heard by arriving at compelling, concrete proposals on how the evolving global trade order can and should empower and energise developing countries, not exclude them.

## ○ Objectives

The international conference targets the following objectives:

- Facilitate insightful and purposeful discussions about global trade and arrive at concrete proposals on how to achieve a fairer and more inclusive multilateral trading system, which will more readily serve the interests of developing (and especially African) countries.

- Summarise the key challenges that Africa faces in its international trade endeavours (non-tariff measures, infrastructure and logistics hurdles, informal trade in agriculture and other sectors, trade in unprocessed goods/low diversification, low participation in global value chains, the digital divide and gender issues, among others).
- Propose solutions for overcoming Africa's international trade-related challenges, with a particular focus on leveraging the collective strengths of RECs and the AfCFTA.
- Present Africa's vision of how the WTO should be reformed, against the backdrop of the current negotiation process.
- Build a framework for leading a discussion on Africa's trading future at the fourteenth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization (MC14) in Cameroon.

## ○ Themes

The topics considered may include, but are not limited to, the following:

- The multilateral trade system and policy space of Africa
- Trade and industrialisation
- Trade and environment
- Trade, gender and human rights
- Participation of African in regional and global value chains
- Trade facilitation
- Digital trade
- Agriculture and food security
- Fishing subsidies
- Special and differential treatment
- Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights etc.

## ○ Structure

- Two days conference with presentations/discussions from African WTO Chairs and other regional and international organizations
- A policy session or round table on: WTO Reform, Infrastructure & Logistics, NTMs, Statistics (data issues), Spaghetti Bowl in the AfCFTA
- African WTO Chairs academic sessions

## ○ Audience

- Economists, lawyers, trade policy analysts and policymakers
- International organisations, the business community, civil society and NGOs
- Media

## ○ Guidelines for presenters

Paper proposals (full papers only) in French or English (Word file, font Times New Roman, font size 12, line spacing 1.5) may be submitted simultaneously online to the following addresses: **chaireomc.irc@gmail.com; chaireomc.irc@yahoo.com**

Papers must include the following elements:

1. Title of the paper/presentation.
2. Last name, first name, position, affiliation and email address of the author who will be presenting at the conference.
3. Last name, first name, position, affiliation and email address of any co-authors.
4. Three to five keywords according to the JEL classification.
5. Full text of the paper with abstract (max. 7,000 words).
6. Margins: 2.5 cm (top, bottom, left and right).
7. Title: Not to exceed 180 characters, including spaces.
8. Headings and subheadings: The hierarchy of headings and subheadings should be clear and also easily distinguishable from the main text. Headings and subheadings should appear in bold, with italic also permitted if necessary.
9. Abbreviations and acronyms: Where abbreviations or acronyms are used in the text, they should be spelt out in full on first mention followed by the abbreviation/acronym in brackets, e.g. World Trade Organization (WTO). Thereafter, the abbreviation/acronym is sufficient.
10. Tables and graphs: All tables and graphs to be properly labelled and numbered, and referred to in the text, such as (see Table 1).
11. Notes: Footnotes should be linked to note calls in the text using the appropriate word-processing function. Any notes should appear at the bottom of a page, not at the end of a sentence or paragraph of text. Short notes are numbered from 1 upwards.

## ○ Calender

Call for publications date:	29 July 2024
<b><u>Deadline for submission of full papers:</u></b>	30 September 2024
Date of response to authors:	30 October 2024
Conference date:	28–29 November 2024

## ○ Organising Committee

Alain Didier Olinga (UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDÉ II); Andreas Sennekamp (WTO); Azzedine Ghoufrane (UNIVERSITY OF MOHAMMED V); Boopen Seetanah (UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS); Caiphaz Chekwoti (TRAPCA); Chahir Zaki (CAIRO AND ORLEANS UNIVERSITY); Babatoundé Charlemagne Igué (UNIVERSITY OF ABOMEY-CALAVI); Denis Yuni (NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF LESOTHO); Jonas Barayandema (UNIVERSITY OF RWANDA); Manfred Kouty (UNIVERSITY OF YAOUNDÉ II); Adama Gueye (CHEIKH ANTA DIOP UNIVERSITY, SENEGAL); Leila Baghdadi (UNIVERSITY OF TUNIS); Tabitha W. Kiriti-Nganga (UNIVERSITY OF NAIROBI); Verena Tandrayen-Ragoobur (UNIVERSITY OF MAURITIUS); Wilma Viviers (NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY).

## ○ Scientific Committee

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