

Trade Facilitation: Identifying and addressing SMEs and consumers' needs and considerations

*Side Event by CUTS International, Geneva
WTO NGO Centre, Bali
1100 – 1230, 4 December 2013*

As the WTO Bali Ministerial approaches, expectations regarding a potential Trade Facilitation (TF) outcome are starting to build up. While such a potential outcome is expected to complement efforts to reduce transaction cost of trading across borders, the specific interests of certain key stakeholders, such as SMEs and consumers, remain largely unaddressed.

Facilitated flows of goods and relevant supporting services can improve the variety, quality and quantity of the offer, push down prices, and increase levels of competition thus benefitting consumers at all levels. SMEs are the “traders” that have less capacity to overcome customs, documentation and infrastructure barriers while remaining the larger employer in both developed and developing countries.

These stakeholders have specific needs and considerations that still need to be addressed, whether in a future WTO TF deal or in the national implementation phase. Some of these needs have already been identified by CUTS in several multilateral and regional events. However options to respond to these needs and considerations may greatly vary from country to country, among regions and according to levels of development.

The main objective of this side event is to identify what are the key issues of interest to consumers and SMEs in TF in light of the experience of Members, international cooperation agencies and other key stakeholders. It will also seek to explore regulatory and institutional options to respond to those needs and considerations and on how a potential WTO TF outcome could contribute to consumer welfare and SMEs competitiveness.

Invited speakers will address the following questions in their introductory presentations that will be followed by an interactive debate among all participants.

- How can TF contribute to SMEs and consumer welfare in light of your country, regional or institutional experience?
- What are the main needs and concerns of SMEs and consumers regarding a potential WTO TF outcome?
- Which of the trade facilitation standards in the draft WTO TF Agreement text will have a higher impact on SMEs and consumers?
- How can SMEs and consumers groups be better involved in the design and implementation of TF standards, technical assistance needs assessments, national strategies and implementation plans?

Programme

Introduction by moderator

Rashid S Kaukab, Director CUTS International, Geneva

Presentations by

Rajesh Aggarwal, Chief, Business and Trade Policy, ITC

Ricardo James, Head of the OECS Secretariat's Technical Mission in Geneva (invited)

Stephen Dietz, Australian Permanent Mission to the WTO, Geneva

Open discussion

Conclusion