

Harvesting Consensus or Deadlock: WTO Agriculture Negotiations Ahead of MC14

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Introduction

The multilateral trading system is at a visibly transitional juncture. The World Trade Organization (WTO), once hailed as a triumph of multilateralism, now, three decades later, reflects the growing fragmentation in the global trade governance. Ironically, several developed Members that long championed multilateralism are increasingly resorting to unilateral trade measures¹, stepping back from earlier negotiated understandings and, most notably, retreating from commitments to deliver priority outcomes on the most pressing concerns of the developing

world, including food and livelihood security.

This shift is nowhere more visible than in the prolonged stalemate in agricultural negotiations. While Members continue to affirm that food security remains a central objective, the current state of play reflects deeply divergent positions, increasingly shaped by Members' commercial interests rather than shared reform priorities. A major reason for this impasse is the failure of WTO Members to deliver priority outcomes on long pending mandated issues. Despite repeated mandates and successive Ministerial reaffirmations,

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¹ UN. Multilateral trade challenged by “increasingly unilateral trade measures” at UN forum. Department of Economic and Social Affairs. Retrieved February 20, 2026, from <https://www.un.org/nl/desa/multilateral-trade-challenged-%E2%80%98increasingly-unilateral-trade-measures%E2%80%99-un-forum>

² WTO. (2025). Members review possible deliverables for MC14 at final General Council meeting. https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/news25_e/mc14_16dec25_255_e.htm

³ UN. Goal 2: Zero hunger. United Nations Sustainable Development. Retrieved February 20, 2026, from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/hunger/>

agriculture has delivered no substantial outcome since the mid 2010s, and the negotiating deadlock appears to persist into the Fourteenth Ministerial Conference (MC14), scheduled for 26 to 29 March 2026 in Yaoundé, Cameroon.²

Currently there is no consolidated negotiating text on the table, and the proposals currently under discussion do not appear to be coalescing around a viable consensus. This raises the risk that MC14 will become yet another missed opportunity, keeping agriculture negotiations trapped in a loop of empty promises and postponements.

MC14 should not be merely another Ministerial checkpoint; rather, it should be treated as a credibility test for the WTO. It will show whether Members have the political will to translate repeated commitments into concrete action, and whether they are prepared to deliver meaningful outcomes that advance United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 2 (SDG2) of zero hunger.³

In this context, the policy brief maps the current negotiating landscape, examines the key drivers of continued divergence across all pillars of the agriculture negotiations, and outlines a way forward geared towards deliverable, development-responsive outcomes.

Agricultural issues - main pillars

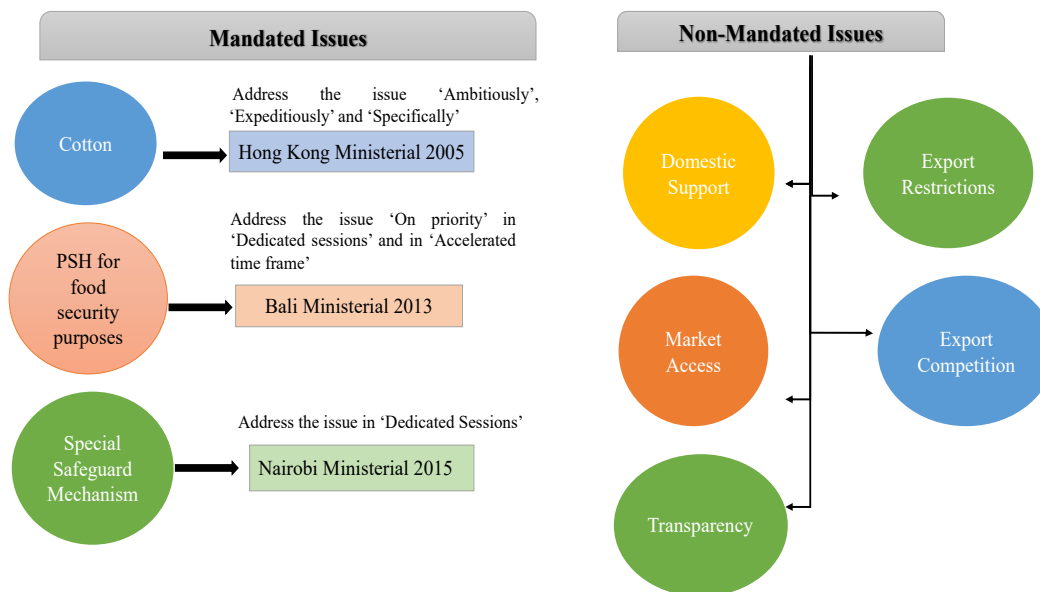
At the WTO, agriculture negotiations take place in the Special Session of the Committee on Agriculture (CoA-SS), pursuant to Article 20 of the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA). Article 20 sets out the built in agenda for continuing the reform process with the long-term objective of establishing a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system through progressive reductions in support and protection, while taking into account non trade concerns such as food security and the need for Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) for developing Members.

Article 20 of AoA: Continuation of reform process

Recognizing that the long-term objective of substantial progressive reductions in support and protection resulting in fundamental reform is an ongoing process, Members agree that negotiations for continuing the process will be initiated one year before the end of the implementation period, taking into account:

1. the experience to that date from implementing the reduction commitments;
2. the effects of the reduction commitments on world trade in agriculture
3. non-trade concerns, special and differential treatment to developing country Members, and the objective to establish a fair and market-oriented agricultural trading system, and the other objectives and concerns mentioned in the preamble to this Agreement; and
4. what further commitments are necessary to achieve the above-mentioned long-term objectives.

Figure 1: AoA pillars categorization as mandated and non-mandated issues



Source: Authors' compilation based on Ministerial Decisions, WTO

Currently, the negotiations span, inter alia, Public Stockholding (PSH) for food security purposes, Domestic Support, the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM), Cotton, Export Restrictions, Market Access, Export Competition, and Transparency. While each of these subjects falls within the continuing reform process under Article 20 of the AoA, Members have, in light of specific commitments agreed and adopted at successive Ministerial Conferences, come to distinguish between “mandated” and “non-mandated” issues.

Mandated issues v/s non-mandated issues

Mandated issues are those for which Ministers, through decisions adopted at past Ministerial Conferences, have accorded priority treatment and provided specific negotiating instructions including at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference. This has resulted in dedicated priority

negotiating tracks for Cotton⁴, PSH for food security purposes⁵, and SSM⁶, conducted in special dedicated sessions distinct from, and without prejudice to, the broader agriculture negotiations under the Doha round (Figure 1).

The rationale for according these issues a distinct Ministerial mandate lies in their sensitivity and development significance. These issues have direct impact on food security and the livelihoods of millions in developing country Members, including least developed countries (LDCs). Dedicated negotiating sessions were therefore established to ensure focused engagement and to facilitate timely progress on these issues, pursued as mandated issues distinct from the Doha Work Programme under Article 20 of the AoA.

What is the real problem in reform process?

The current stalemate in agricultural negotiations at the WTO is rooted in

⁴ WTO. (2005). Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration on cotton, adopted on 22 December 2005. (WT/MIN(05)/DEC).

⁵ WTO. (2013). Bali Ministerial Decision Public Stockholding for food security purposes, adopted on 7 December 2013. (WT/MIN(13)/38).

⁶ WTO. (2015). Nairobi Ministerial Decision, adopted on 19 December 2015. (WT/MIN(15)/DEC).

⁷ WTO. (2023). Towards a strengthened negotiation framework in the domestic support pillar: building a Comprehensive approach to negotiations on domestic support. Communication by Costa Rica. (JOB/AG/243).

⁸ WTO. (2025). Draft decision on agriculture negotiations. Submission from Brazil. (JOB/AG/271).

two closely linked challenges i.e. different *approaches* to the reform process and divergent positions *within the key pillars* of agriculture. These differences have complicated consensus-building, as Members disagree not only on the substance of outcomes, but also on the process or sequencing for delivering outcomes.

Approaches for reform in agriculture negotiations: Comprehensive v/s Sequential

The first major point of contention concerns the process and sequencing, through which outcomes on specific issues in the WTO agriculture negotiations should be pursued. At present, Members are broadly divided between two competing approaches:

a) The Comprehensive approach: reform everything together

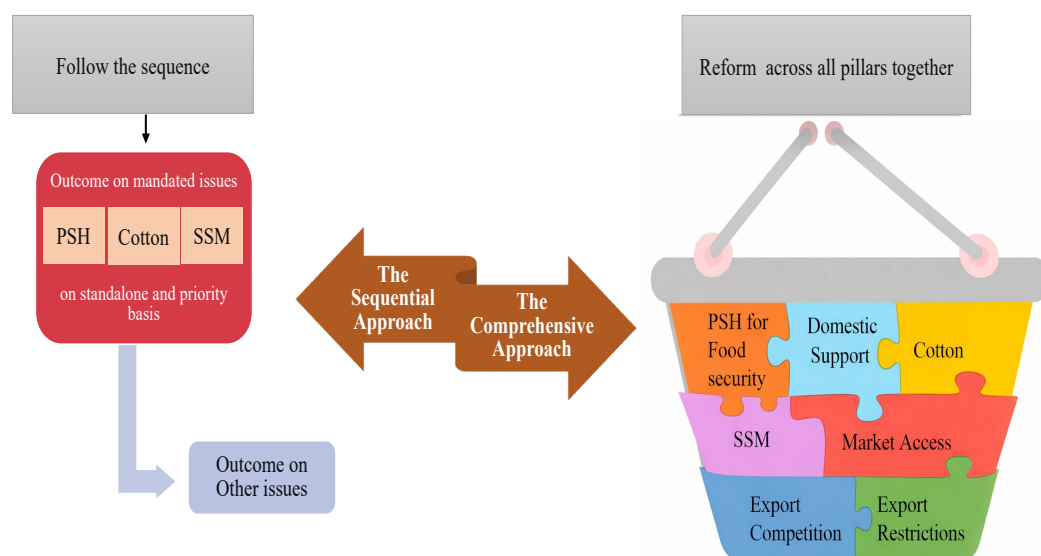
Certain Members of the Cairns Group, along with the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), advocate a Comprehensive approach⁷ that places all pillars on an equal footing and makes outcomes on one issue contingent on outcomes in other areas.

Reflecting this approach, Brazil circulated a proposal on 5th December 2025 in the lead up to the MC14.⁷ Proponents argue that this approach best reflects the reform architecture contemplated in Article 20 of the AoA and is necessary to preserve balance across pillars.

b) The Sequential approach: deliver on long pending mandated issues first

Most developing country and LDC

Figure 2: Pillars covered under the Comprehensive and Sequential approach



Source: Based on WTO Proposals and Members stance in CoA-SS negotiations

Members, including the G33, the African Group, and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) Group, have sought expedited outcomes on long-pending mandated issues, notably the Permanent Solution (PS) to PSH for food security purposes, SSM and Cotton. From this perspective, maintaining the relevance of Member-driven decision-making requires that past mandates be respected and prioritised in negotiations, for two key reasons:

- 1) Treating mandated issues at par with other issues would dilute explicit Ministerial commitments, undermining the authority and credibility of the Ministerial Conference and the institution itself.
- 2) Negotiations are at uneven levels of maturity; an all-pillars-at-once approach would overlook progress in dedicated tracks and risk reversing gains on mandated issues.

Accordingly, proponents of this approach contend that outcomes on the PS to PSH, SSM and cotton should be pursued on an expedited timeline, ahead of, and not contingent upon, progress in other negotiating areas.

Divergent position within key pillars

Beyond disagreements over sequencing and priority, Members remain deeply divided on the substance of reforms within each pillar. This is because agriculture remains a highly sensitive sector, with Members seeking to preserve maximum policy space while negotiating specific modalities. These positions are shaped by starkly different domestic socio-economic realities. For many developing Members, the central imperatives are safeguarding farmers'

WTO Negotiating Groups (Agriculture)

- ❖ **C4 (5 Members)** - Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Côte d'Ivoire.
- ❖ **G-10 (10 Members)** - Iceland, Israel, Japan, Korea, Republic of, Liechtenstein, Mauritius, Norway, Switzerland, Chinese Taipei.
- ❖ **G33 (47 Members)**- Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Bolivia, Plurinational State of, Botswana, China, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, India, Indonesia, Jamaica, Kenya, Korea, Republic of, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mongolia, Mozambique, Nicaragua, Nigeria, Pakistan, Panama, Philippines, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Senegal, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Chinese Taipei, Tanzania, Trinidad and Tobago, Türkiye, Uganda, Venezuela, Bolivarian Republic of, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
- ❖ **Cairns Group (19 Members)** - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Indonesia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Paraguay, Peru, Philippines, South Africa, Thailand, Uruguay, Vietnam.

- ❖ **African Group (45 Members)** - Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Egypt, Eswatini, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Comoros.
- ❖ **LDCs (37 Members)**-Afghanistan, Angola, Bangladesh, Benin, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cambodia, Central African Republic, Chad, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Gambia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Haiti, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Myanmar, Nepal, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Solomon Islands, Tanzania, Togo, Uganda, Yemen, Zambia, Comoros, Timor-Leste.
- ❖ **African, Caribbean and Pacific countries (ACP) (64 Members)**-Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Belize, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Cuba, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Eswatini, Fiji, Gabon, Gambia, Ghana, Grenada, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, Niger, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Samoa, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Seychelles, Solomon Islands, South Africa, Suriname, Tanzania, Togo, Tonga, Trinidad and Tobago, Uganda, Vanuatu, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Comoros, Timor-Leste.

Source: WTO https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/whatis_e/tif_e/org6_e.htm

livelihoods and ensuring food security, whereas for many developed Members the emphasis is on expanding market access and securing trade gains. These competing priorities and sensitivities make consensus-building particularly challenging. The following section examines these divergences in greater detail.

State of play in agriculture negotiations: divergent position within the issues

a) Domestic support

Disciplining agricultural domestic support remains among the most contested aspects of the negotiations. While Members broadly agree on the need to address trade-distorting support, there is no convergence on how such support should be defined, nor on

the modalities through which reforms should be implemented.

Domestic support under the AoA is generally grouped into four categories: the Green Box, Blue Box, Development Box, and Amber Box. The Green Box (Annex 2, AoA) covers measures deemed to have no, or at most minimal, trade-distorting effects. The Blue Box (Article 6.5, AoA) permits certain direct payments linked to production-limiting programmes. The Development Box (Article 6.2, AoA) reflects Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) for developing country Members, allowing investment subsidies and input subsidies for low-income or resource-poor producers. These three categories are not subject to monetary caps under the AoA.

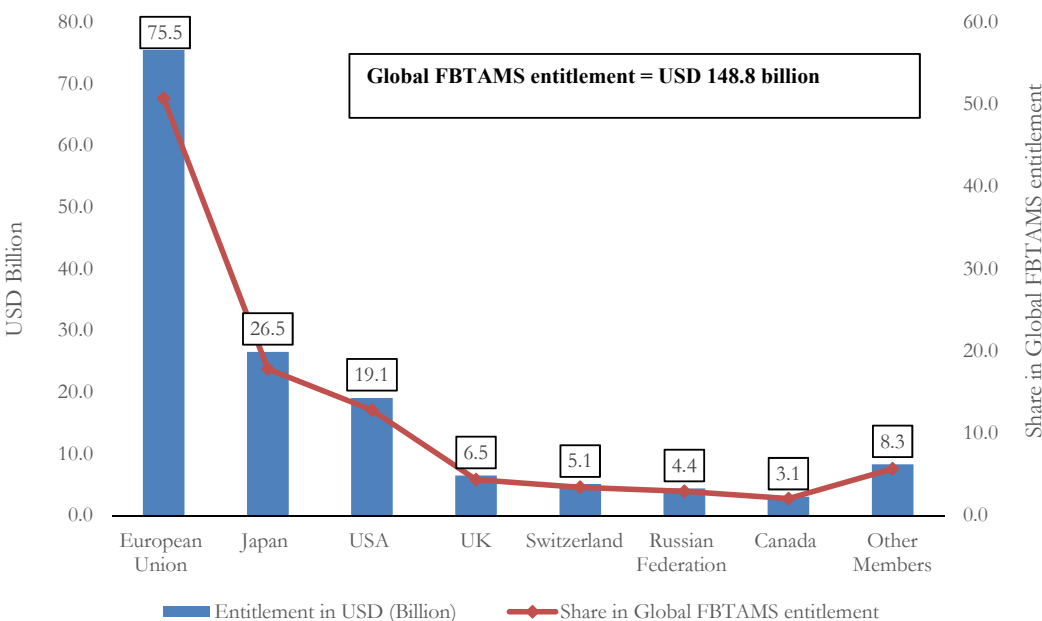
In contrast, the Amber Box measures cover the most trade-distorting forms of domestic support and thus subject to

financial cap up to a certain limit called the de minimis limit. It is broadly divided into product-specific support (PSS) and non-product specific support (NPS). PSS refers to the measures that are targeted towards specific products such as rice, wheat, milk etc. in the form of price support, deficiency payments, and budgetary support. Any general trade-distorting support such as input subsidies falls under NPS as these are not targeted to producers of a specific product. A developed Member can provide at least 5 percent of the value of production (VoP) of a concerned product as PSS, and 5 percent of the VoP of total agriculture as NPS during a relevant year, whereas for the developing Members this de minimis limit is 10 percent of the VoP.⁸ In addition, 33 Members, predominantly developed Members, have Final Bound Total Aggregate Measurement of Support (FBTAMS)

⁹ Sharma, S.K., Shajahan, A.A., Goswami, A. (2024). Navigating agricultural domestic support, fisheries subsidies, and food security: A critical examination of the WTO rules. CRIT/CWS Working paper series no. 71, Centre for WTO Studies, New Delhi. Available at: https://wtocentre.iift.ac.in/workingpaper/Working_paper_71.pdf.

¹⁰ Sharma, S.K., Lahiri, T., Neogi, S. & Akhter, R. (2021). Revisiting domestic support to agriculture at the WTO: Ensuring a level playing field. *Journal of International Trade & Economic Development*, 31(3) 358-374.

Figure 3: Members with FBTAMS entitlement (2025)



Source: Authors' calculation based on (1) WTO domestic support Notifications; (2) Exchange rate extracted from IMF.
 Note: AMS entitlement converted into USD by using 2025 exchange rate.

entitlements. These entitlements reflect support notified above *de minimis* in the 1986-1988 base period or through accession commitments, providing additional policy space to provide support beyond *de minimis* limits.⁹

At present, around 95% of global FBTAMS entitlements are held by developed country Members, including the EU, the US, Japan and the United Kingdom (UK) which gives them the policy space to sustain significant high levels of trade-distorting support (Figure 3). While Members without such entitlements, mostly developing Members, remain constrained by tight *de minimis* limits.

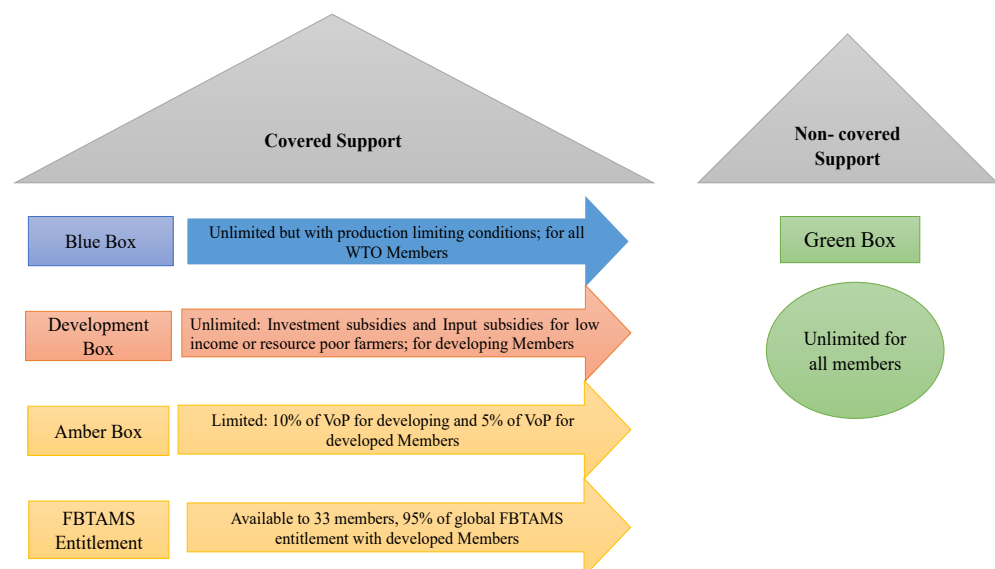
In recent years, certain Cairns Group Members have advanced a “proportionate reduction” approach under which global trade distorting domestic support (TDDS) would be capped and reduced by half over a defined period. This requires Members to undertake reductions proportional

to the size of their respective current support in the base year, including support available under Article 6.2 of AoA¹⁰ within the overall cap. For most developing Members, this is a red line. India, Indonesia, and certain G33 Members have opposed the approach on the ground that it would shrink already limited policy space, dilute treaty embedded S&DT, and, in practice, could force developing Members to undertake deeper cuts than those who hold the largest historical entitlements.

Thus, several developing Members have pressed for reforms that confront the system’s inherited asymmetries and imbalances.¹¹ They advocate phasing out FBTAMS entitlements first to ensure level playing field. Moreover, they argue that any cuts in domestic support should be based on a per farmer or per capita basis, while ensuring that S&DT under the AoA is not diluted.

Further, the African Group argues that any credible reform must also

Figure 4: Coverage under the Cairns Group’s proportionate reduction approach



Source: Based on WTO (2023) Cairns Group Proposal (Job/Ag/243/Rev.2).

¹¹ WTO.(2023).Towards a strengthened negotiation framework in the domestic support pillar: building a Comprehensive approach to negotiations on domestic support. (JOB/AG/243/Rev.2).

¹² WTO. (2018). Elimination of AMS beyond de minimis to reduce distortions in global agricultural trade - some incremental steps. Submission by China and India. (JOB/AG/137).

¹³ WTO. (2023). Domestic support. Communication from the African Group and Pakistan. (JOB/AG/242/Rev.1).

cap direct payments by developed Members under the Green Box, and therefore calls for disciplines on such support.¹² The EU rejects this premise, maintaining that Green Box payments are, by definition, minimally or non-trade distorting and should remain outside reduction commitments. Importantly, the US strongly opposes S&DT and supports the Comprehensive approach.¹³

With Members pulling in opposite directions on both the diagnosis and the remedy, domestic support has remained a structural impasse since the AoA entered into force, and MC14 would be no exception.

b) Permanent Solution to Public Stockholding for food security purposes

Price-Support backed PSH programmes are the backbone for developing countries to ensure food security and support farmers' incomes as governments procure

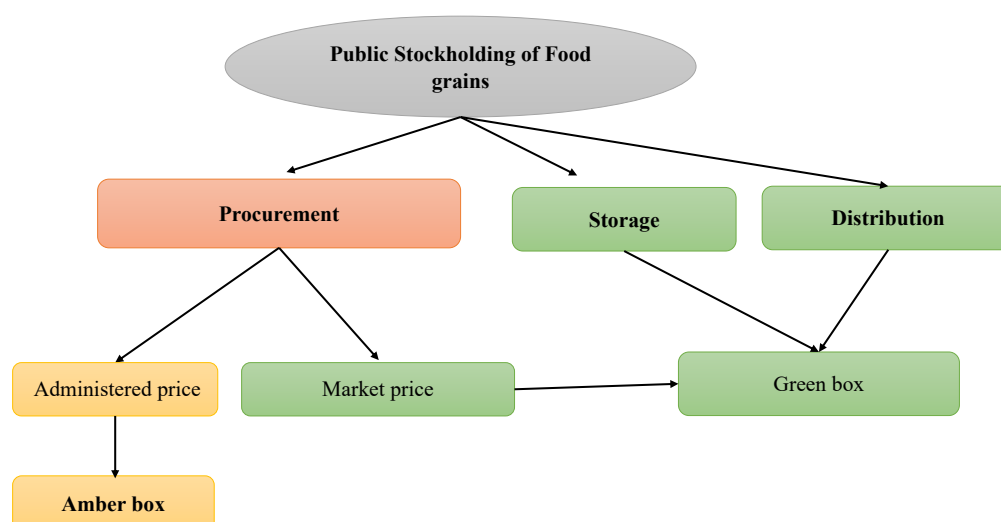
food at administered prices, maintain public stocks, and distribute food to vulnerable populations at subsidised rates. Most developing Members demand policy space to implement such price-support backed PSH programmes to ensure domestic food security and safeguard farmers' livelihoods.

Yet the AoA draws an artificial line. Storage and distribution can be notified under the Green Box, but procurement at administered prices is treated as market price support (MPS) under the Amber Box, constrained by the *de minimis* cap and calculated using fixed external reference prices (FERP) of 1986-1988. The result is a rules mismatch: today's food security procurement is judged through a late 1980s price lens, compressing developing Members flexibility precisely where it matters most.

In this context, most developing Members have long sought either an amendment or a carve out to safeguard

¹⁴ WTO. (2023). The World Trade Organization's role in enhancing food security. Communication from the United States. (JOB/AG/241).

Figure 5: Categorisation of support provided for PSH programmes as per AoA



Source: Authors' compilation based on AoA, WTO

their price-support backed PSH programmes from legal challenges under the AoA domestic support disciplines, particularly MPS calculation. At MC9 in Bali, Members secured an interim “peace clause” together with a Ministerial mandate to negotiate a Permanent Solution. This interim protection was made perpetual until a Permanent Solution is agreed and adopted through the 2014 General Council Decision, which was later reaffirmed at MC10 in Nairobi.

Successive Ministerial Conferences from MC11 to MC13, however, failed to deliver a Permanent Solution. The result, however, has produced a mismatch between the mandate and the outcome: the underlying problem required surgery, yet what was delivered was a painkiller and an assurance that the operation would follow.

Against this backdrop, in 2022, more than 75 Members, including the African Group, the ACP Group, and G33, tabled a joint proposal to put a negotiating text on the table for a Permanent Solution.¹⁴ The proposal seeks key improvements to the temporary Bali Peace Clause, including legal certainty, broader product and programme coverage. Further, the proponents are also proposing to revise the 1986-88 FERP used to calculate MPS, either by using a more current ERP or by adjusting the FERP for inflation, so that food security support is not penalised by an outdated methodology.¹⁵

Opposition to PS to PSH is led by the US, the EU, the UK, and certain Cairns Group Members. Their central claim is that a Permanent Solution, particularly along the lines of the joint

proposal, would create open ended flexibility for developing Members to subsidise procurement at administered prices, with spillover effects that could distort international trade. Thus, they resist a standalone outcome and instead seek linking the issue of PSH with the broader Comprehensive approach while also proposing conditions based on export or import performance.

With MC14 approaching, the lines are hardening rather than converging. The African Group submission of 29th January 2026¹⁶ seeks an outcome anchored in past mandates and aligned with joint proposal of G33, ACP and African Group (JOB/AG/229), while the Jamaican proposal¹⁷ focuses on trade and global food security without addressing an outcome on long pending mandated issue of PS to PSH. Brazil proposes a Comprehensive approach, that in effect, makes PS to PSH compete for negotiating oxygen with every other pillar. The proposal by Gambia on behalf of the LDCs Group¹⁸ advocates PS to PSH particularly for LDCs and within the broader reform process under Article 20 of the AoA.

The result is a familiar pattern. The supposed temporary shelter risks becoming permanent, given that no substantive outcome has been achieved since 2015.

c) Cotton

Developing countries, particularly the C4 Group (Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad, and Mali) along with Côte d’Ivoire (hereafter C4+), have consistently called for substantial reductions in trade-distorting

¹⁵ WTO. (2022). Public Stockholding for food security purposes. Proposal by the African Group, the ACP, and G33. (JOB/AG/229).

¹⁶ Sharma, S. K., & Shajahan, A. A. (2024). WTO and a Permanent Solution for food security: striving for a hunger-free world. *Food Security*, 16, 321–337.

¹⁷ WTO. (2026). Unofficial room document. Communication by the African Group. (RD/AG/149).

¹⁸ WTO. (2025). Ministerial Declaration on Trade and Global food security. Communication from Jamaica. (JOB/AG/270).

¹⁹ WTO. (2025). Draft Proposal on food security and Resilience. Communication from Gambia on behalf on the LDC Group. (WT/GC/W/980/Rev.1; TN/AG/W/13).

²⁰ WTO. (2019). Agriculture negotiations at the WTO. Communication from the co-sponsors of the sectoral initiative on cotton (C4). (TN/AG/GEN/49/Rev.1).

domestic support, especially under the Amber Box and Blue Box, and for limiting such support to *de minimis* levels.¹⁹ They emphasize the developmental impact of subsidies on cotton, which depress world prices and undermine the livelihoods of smallholder cotton farmers. Moreover, they also seek to reduce market access barriers, for LDCs that produce and export cotton.

Despite clear Ministerial mandate, cotton remains trapped in a broader bargaining game. The mandate to treat cotton “ambitiously, expeditiously and specifically” was set in motion through the General Council decision of 1st August 2004 and later reaffirmed at Hong Kong Ministerial Conference (2005), yet key developed Members, most notably the US, have resisted any approach that delinks cotton from wider domestic support reform.²⁰ The resultant impasse is predictable. When cotton is made to wait for an all pillars deal, it does not move at all.

Against this backdrop, the C4+ countries submitted a proposal ahead of MC14, on 4th December 2025, reiterating their demands and calling for a concrete outcome on cotton.²¹ The proposal keeps the spotlight on a simple truth. Cotton cannot remain a perpetual mandate with no material payoff. Yet given the US’s position, a meaningful MC14 outcome on this mandated issue appears unlikely.

d) Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM)

Alongside PSH and cotton, SSM has emerged as the third mandated pillar

that remains stalled in the agriculture negotiations. The SSM is designed to give developing Members a practical shock absorber. It would permit a temporary tariff increase on agricultural products in response to import surges or price declines, without requiring to meet stringent injury tests. Additionally it is a critical policy instrument for developing countries to shield their small and marginal farmers from the destabilizing effects of volatile global markets.

The equity argument is equally blunt. A limited set of Members, largely developed, already retain access to the Special Safeguard (SSG) under the AoA. Hence, SSM is the missing counterpart. In that sense, SSM is restoring symmetry, not seeking special privilege.

Therefore, the G33 and African Group along with other developing countries, seek an effective and operable SSM in accordance with the mandate reaffirmed at the Nairobi Ministerial Conference (2015).²² However, opponents prefer a different script. Brazil, Paraguay, Uruguay and Argentina²³ link SSM to the broader market access reform track. The US supports this linkage. For proponents, this linkage dilutes the mandate by turning a dedicated developing country Members instrument into a negotiating chip in tariff reciprocity.

The African Group’s draft decision text for MC14 (29th January, 2026)²⁴, keeps SSM on the agenda but places the anticipated outcome at MC15, signalling both the persistence of the mandate and the continuing inability to deliver it now. The negotiating picture, once again, is

²¹ Sharma, S.K., Sawant, A., Vats, P., Naik, S., and Lahiri, T. (2020). Disciplining trade-distorting support to cotton in the US: An unresolved issue at the WTO. *Agricultural Economics Research Review*, 33(2), 119-134.

²² WTO. (2025). Negotiations on cotton at the WTO. Communication by the co-sponsors of the sectoral initiative in favour of cotton and Côte d’Ivoire. (TN/AG/GEN/57).

²³ Das, A., Sharma, S. K., Akhter, R. Lahiri, T., (2020). Special Safeguard Mechanism for agriculture: Implications for developing Members at the WTO. Working Paper No. CWS/WP/200/59. Centre For WTO Studies, Delhi. Available at: Special Safeguard Mechanism for Agriculture: Implications for Developing Members at the WTO.

²⁴ WTO. (2025). Reform of agricultural trade in terms of market access. Communication from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. (JOB/AG/255/Rev.1).

²⁵ WTO. (2026). Unofficial room document. Communication by the African Group. (RD/AG/149).

familiar. Developing Members seek a usable safety valve. Others insist it must be paid for elsewhere. And in the gap between the two, the mandate keeps ageing.

e) Market access and Export competition

The negotiating weight has not been evenly distributed across pillars. Market access has seen little traction in recent years because the talks have not matured to the point where Members are prepared to engage on concrete modalities. Export competition has seen even less engagement since the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition eliminated export subsidies there by leaving limited scope for further negotiation on this pillar.

Members including the US, Brazil, Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay are pushing for an outcome on market access reforms. They argue that market access is critical for maintaining overall balance in the negotiations, with clear implications for food security and export opportunities. On the same lines, proponents submitted a proposal on 5th December 2025, seeking simplification and reduction of tariffs.²⁵ However, MC14 should not be held hostage to areas that are not yet ripe, especially when long standing mandated issues remain unresolved.

f) Export restrictions and Transparency

Export restrictions refer to measures imposed by governments to limit or control the export of agricultural products and include various forms, including export bans, quotas, tariffs, or

other regulatory measures.²⁶ WTO rules leave Members policy space to impose temporary, targeted and transparent export restrictions in order to ensure domestic food security. However, such measures are often criticised for raising international prices, disrupting supply chains, and affecting food-importing countries.

This divide has recently deepened. Some G10 Members, together with the UK, have called for stricter disciplines and stronger advance notification requirements, arguing that existing rules are inadequate to prevent market disruption and price volatility and threaten food security in food importing countries.²⁷

Most developing Members, by contrast, view export restrictions not as trade weapons but as safety nets, a tool of last resort to stabilise domestic markets, manage shortages, and protect vulnerable consumers. They counter the demand for new (or modifications of existing) rules by highlighting that the existing rules are sufficiently balanced for both exporters and importers, and any modification of existing rules or introduction of new rules may result in disturbing this delicate balance.²⁸

As MC14 approaches, G10 Members and the UK are again pushing for an outcome on export restrictions in the CoA-SS. The political ask is packaged as food security and predictability. The developing country response is equally direct. A rule set that cannot accommodate domestic food security

²⁶ WTO. (2025). Reform of agricultural trade in terms of Market access. Communication from Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay. (JOB/AG/255/Rev.1).

²⁷ Sharma, S.K., Ganti, S.L., Mathur, P. (2024). Trade and agriculture: A discourse on cross cutting issues. CRIT/CWS working paper series no. 73, Centre for WTO Studies, New Delhi. Available at: https://wtocentre.iift.ac.in/workingpaper/WP.73%20Cross%20Cutting%20Issues%20in%20Agriculture_Final.pdf

²⁸ WTO. (2021). Proposal on Export Prohibitions or Restrictions. Submission by Japan, Israel, Republic of Korea, Liechtenstein, Switzerland and the separate customs territory of Taiwan, Penghu, Kinmen and Matsu. (JOB/AG/207).

²⁹ Sharma, S.K, Goswami, A., Lahiri, T. (2024), Export Restrictions: Balancing Global and Domestic Food Security, News 18. Available at: <https://www.news18.com/opinion/opinion-export-restrictions-balancing-global-and-domestic-food-security-8778870.html>

Table 1: Export prohibition imposed by WTO Members on agricultural products³⁰ since 2021

Member	Products
European Union	Cereals (wheat, rye, barley, oat, corn, soy beans and sunflower seeds)
Georgia	Wheat, Barley
India	Wheat
	Sugar
	Onion
	Non-basmati white rice (Semi-milled or wholly milled rice, whether or not polished or glazed: other)
	Broken Rice
Kazakhstan	Hay, silage, seed and other oats, seed and other rye
	Potatoes and carrots
	Sunflower seeds; sunflower oil
	Potatoes
	Wheat and meslin, Wheat or meslin flour
Thailand	Sugar, raw and refined
Ukraine	Buckwheat; buckwheat grain (uncoated)
	Sugar

Source: Authors' compilation based on Export Restriction Notifications, AGIMS, WTO

shocks is not reform; it is fragility by design.

Beyond the issues discussed above, transparency cuts across all pillars of the agriculture negotiations. While some Members favour stronger transparency and monitoring disciplines, including by streamlining existing notification requirements, others have cautioned against creating overly burdensome obligations. In particular, the African Group, India, Cuba, and Oman have stressed that any discipline on transparency must remain mindful of the institutional and technical issues and resource constraints faced by developing countries and LDCs, and should not impose disproportionate compliance burdens.³¹

Way forward

The way forward lies in coalition building among developing Members to lock in a clear and credible reform agenda ahead of MC14. Given that a shared landing zone on agriculture at MC14 remains difficult and expectations for a decisive outcome are subdued, the priority should be to consolidate positions and insist that outcomes, even if incremental, first deliver on long standing mandated issues such as a PS to PSH and progress on the SSM, alongside cotton, rather than diverting attention to other non-mandated issues.

At the systemic level, this also requires preserving S&DT as an integral part of WTO rules. The developing countries must treat diluting S&DT as a red line.

³⁰ Live Animal and Animal based products are not included.

³¹ Sharma, S.K., Ganti, S.L., Mathur, P. (2024). Trade and Agriculture: A Discourse on Cross Cutting Issues. CRIT/ CWS working paper series no. 73, Centre for WTO Studies, New Delhi. Available at: https://wtocentre.iift.ac.in/workingpaper/WP.73%20Cross%20Cutting%20Issues%20in%20Agriculture_Final.pdf

S&DT is not a charity; it is a hard-earned outcome of years of negotiations. The current WTO reform push, led by several developed Members including the US and the EU, increasingly seeks to narrow or condition these flexibilities, even as those same Members continue to operate with the benefit of historical asymmetries embedded in the rulebook and decades of accumulated policy space. Any reform effort that now seeks to tighten disciplines for developing Members, without first addressing those legacy imbalances, risks becoming yet

another instance of rules being reshaped for developed Members' convenience.

The message from coalitions of the developing world should be simple and firm: we are ready to engage, but development priorities are non-negotiable. The developing world is watching, and its patience is being tested. Credibility is earned through delivery, not rhetoric. WTO's credibility will ultimately be judged by its ability to translate repeated reaffirmations into concrete outcomes.

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MC14 should address two types of challenges. One is the set of challenges that are inherent from the Uruguay Round in the AoA. Second, with experience, issues have emerged regarding the kinds of difficulties countries face in domestic and trade policy when they liberalise trade regimes.

-Prof. Ramesh Chand, Member Niti Aayog



Agriculture and the issue of food security is very important for most WTO Member countries, particularly developing Members. At MC14, Members should affirm relevant Ministerial Decision, Article 20 and after MC 14 work towards bridging the gap between the divergent positions.

***-Dr. Edwini Kessie, Director of the
Agriculture and Commodities Division (WTO)***



With MC14 approaching, developing countries must build strategic alliances, and press collectively for credible outcomes on food security and other mandated agricultural issues, ensuring that development priorities remain at the centre of the multilateral agenda.

Mr. J. S. Deepak, Former Ambassador to the WTO



Developing countries need to build strong coalitions to secure outcomes on the mandated issues - Permanent Solution on Public Stockholding, Special Safeguard Mechanism, and Cotton- remain firmly on the WTO negotiating agenda. Any agriculture outcome must prioritise delivering results on these issues before taking up market access or domestic support.

Mr. Abhijit Das, International Trade Policy and WTO Expert



At MC 14, it is important and urgent need for a Permanent Solution on the issue of food security given its importance for all developing countries.

Ms. R. V. Anuradha, Partner, Clarus Law Associates (CLA)



There is need to preserve Special and Differential Treatment (S&DT) while strengthening coalitions among developing countries to secure meaningful outcomes on mandated issues.

Ms. Ranja Sengupta, Senior Researcher, Third World Network



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RIS specialises in issues related to international economic development, trade, investment and technology. It is envisioned as a forum for fostering effective policy dialogue and capacity-building among developing countries on global and regional economic issues. The focus of the work programme of RIS is to promote South-South Cooperation and collaborate with developing countries in multilateral negotiations in various forums. Through its following centres/forums, RIS promotes policy dialogue and coherence on regional and international economic issues.



The word “DAKSHIN” (दक्षिण) is of Sanskrit origin, meaning “South.” The Hon’ble Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi, inaugurated DAKSHIN – Global South Centre of Excellence in November 2023. The initiative was inspired by the deliberations of Global South leaders during the Voice of the Global South Summits. DAKSHIN stands for Development and Knowledge Sharing Initiative. Hosted at the RIS, DAKSHIN has established linkages with leading think tanks and universities across the Global South and is building a dynamic network of scholars working on Global South issues.



AIC at RIS has been working to strengthen India’s strategic partnership with ASEAN in its realisation of the ASEAN Community. AIC at RIS undertakes research, policy advocacy and regular networking activities with relevant organisations and think-tanks in India and ASEAN countries, with the aim of providing policy inputs, up-to-date information, data resources and sustained interaction, for strengthening ASEAN-India partnership.



CMEC has been established at RIS under the aegis of the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPS&W), Government of India. CMEC is a collaboration between RIS and Indian Ports Association (IPA). It has been mandated to act as an advisory/technological arm of MoPSW to provide the analytical support on policies and their implementation.



FITM is a joint initiative by the Ministry of Ayush and RIS. It has been established with the objective of undertaking policy research on economy, intellectual property rights (IPRs) trade, sustainability and international cooperation in traditional medicines. FITM provides analytical support to the Ministry of Ayush on policy and strategy responses on emerging national and global developments.



BEF aims to serve as a dedicated platform for fostering dialogue on promoting the concept in the Indian Ocean and other regions. The forum focuses on conducting studies on the potential, prospects and challenges of blue economy; providing regular inputs to practitioners in the government and the private sectors; and promoting advocacy for its smooth adoption in national economic policies.



FIDC, has been engaged in exploring nuances of India’s development cooperation programme, keeping in view the wider perspective of South-South Cooperation in the backdrop of international development cooperation scenario. It is a tripartite initiative of the Development Partnership Administration (DPA) of the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, academia and civil society organisations.



FISD aims to harness the full potential and synergy between science and technology, diplomacy, foreign policy and development cooperation in order to meet India’s development and security needs. It is also engaged in strengthening India’s engagement with the international system and on key global issues involving science and technology.



As part of its work programme, RIS has been deeply involved in strengthening economic integration in the South Asia region. In this context, the role of the South Asia Centre for Policy Studies (SACEPS) is very important. SACEPS is a network organisation engaged in addressing regional issues of common concerns in South Asia.



Knowledge generated endogenously among the Southern partners can help in consolidation of stronger common issues at different global policy fora. The purpose of NeST is to provide a global platform for Southern Think-Tanks for collaboratively generating, systematising, consolidating and sharing knowledge on South South Cooperation approaches for international development.



DST-Satellite Centre for Policy Research on STI Diplomacy at RIS aims to advance policy research at the intersection of science, technology, innovation (STI) and diplomacy, in alignment with India’s developmental priorities and foreign policy objectives.

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