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Making Plurilateral Negotiations Support the Multilateral Trading System

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Why do we need plurilaterals?



Obviously multilateral negotiations have stalled and the system is in trouble

How else to progress new rules and retain the WTO's relevance?

Not everyone has to sign up, nor should anyone be excluded – WTO *à la carte*

The challenge is to meaningfully incorporate as many members as possible without compromising their interests

Do we need to ‘multilateralise’ plurilaterals? Depends on the design...

“Exclusive” means benefits only available to signatory

- Requires all WTO members consensus
- E.g: Government Procurement Agreement
- By definition not multilateralisable
- Also almost impossible to conclude in today’s circumstances

“Inclusive” means MFN, or benefits available to all

- Requires “critical mass” to minimise free-riding problem
- Probably no legal impediment, notwithstanding India-South Africa objections, although clarifying this would be useful
- JSIs take this form, even those that don’t involve traditional tariff concessions, eg services domestic regulation
- Anyone can join, so these can in principle be multilateralised

Who participates in plurilaterals?

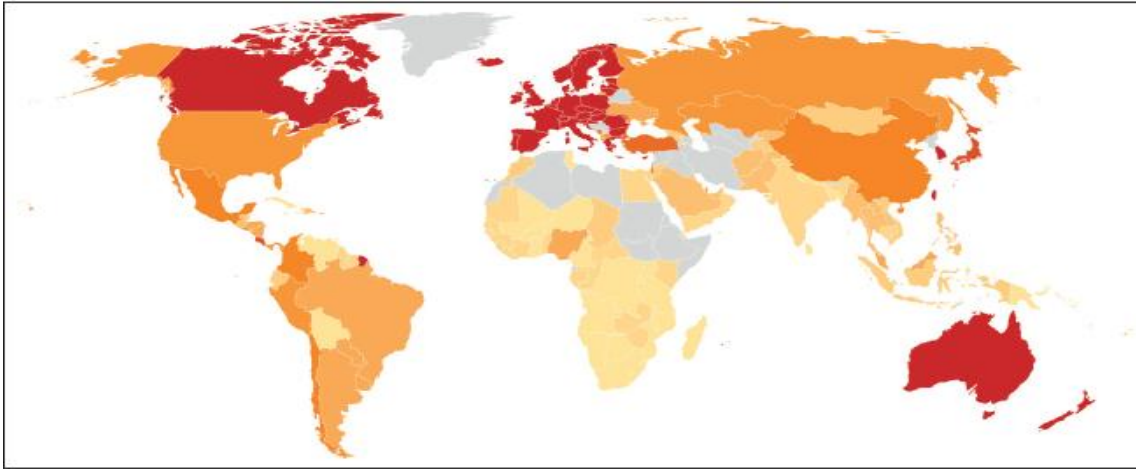


Figure 2: Participation in plurilateral agreements and ongoing negotiations per member

- Primarily OECD economies
- LDCs, Africa, South Asia notably absent

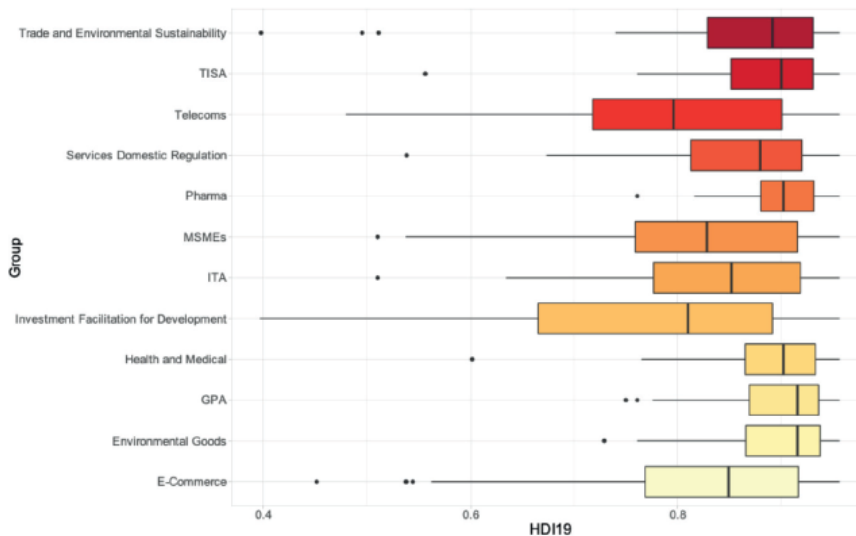
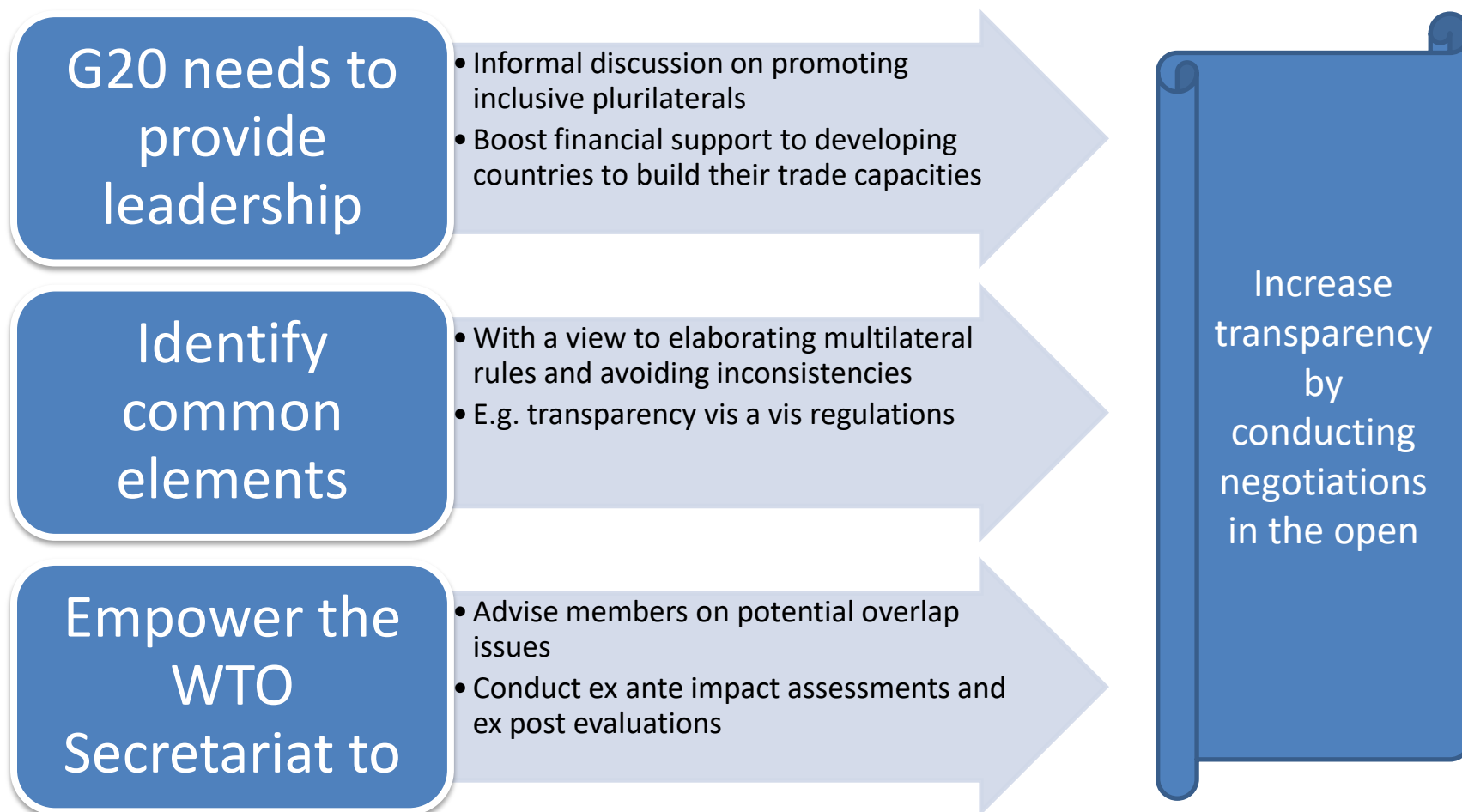


Figure 3: Distribution of members according to their HDI across plurilaterals

- Lower income economies primarily interested in Investment Facilitation for Development
- Yet not in related services domestic regulation, health and medical, or MSMEs
- Capacity problem? Suspicion? These JSIs are very much in those countries economic and social interests

So how to promote inclusivity and effectiveness without losing momentum?



For more analysis see:

