

# Africa's Role in Shaping WTO Reform

For a Sustainable and Inclusive Future



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25<sup>th</sup> – 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2026  
Star Land Hotel, Yaoundé

Thirty years after its establishment, the World Trade Organization (WTO) faces mounting pressures from geopolitical fragmentation, climate change, technological transformation, and persistent development asymmetries. While the multilateral trading system remains indispensable, its credibility and effectiveness increasingly depend on meaningful reform. This reality has been acknowledged by WTO Members through the structured reform process leading toward the Fourteenth WTO Ministerial Conference (MC14).

The December 2025 Report of the Facilitator on WTO Reform identifies three interlinked reform pillars: (i) governance and institutional reform, (ii) fairness and the level playing field, and (iii) issues of our time, including climate change, supply-chain resilience, digital trade, and artificial intelligence. Together, these pillars frame the choices Members will confront in shaping a trade system that is fit for contemporary economic, environmental, and development realities.

While the reform process must include all 166 WTO members, Africa stands at the center of these debates. With the world's youngest population, vast renewable energy potential, critical mineral reserves, and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), the continent is both deeply affected by global trade rules and essential to their future evolution. Yet Africa's perspectives remain underrepresented in global reform conversations. This workshop responds to this gap by positioning Africa not as a rule-taker, but as a co-author of WTO reform.

The Yaoundé convening is a high-level, Africa-led strategic dialogue designed to contribute constructively to WTO reform discussions. It is not a negotiating forum, but a space for reflection, agenda-setting, and coalition-building among African policymakers, WTO officials, experts, and development partners.

The Trade Negotiations and Investment Forum is pleased to convene this session in partnership with the Remaking Trade Project, ODI Global, the International Relations Institute of Cameroon, South African Institute of International Affairs and the Forum on Trade, Environment and the SDGs (TESS).

### **Thematic Focus**

The workshop will be structured around the three WTO reform pillars:

1. Governance and Institutional Reform: Enhancing inclusiveness, decision-making effectiveness, and legitimacy; restoring dispute settlement; and ensuring governance reforms strengthen participation and predictability for developing and least-developed Members.
2. Fairness and the Level Playing Field: Re-examining Special and Differential Treatment as an operational, needs-based tool; addressing subsidy asymmetries, policy space, agricultural support, and transparency gaps; and embedding development and sustainability as structural features of the system.
3. Issues of Our Time: Addressing climate-related trade measures, supply-chain resilience, digital trade and AI, and critical minerals through an equity- and development-informed lens that promotes coherence between climate ambition and trade disciplines.

### ***Our partners***

