



International Centre for Trade
and Sustainable Development

The WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism: A Trade Court for the World

Henry Gao

April 2018

Think Piece



rtaexchange.org

Acknowledgements

Published by

International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD)
7 Chemin de Balexert, 1219 Geneva, Switzerland
Tel: +41 22 917 8492 – ictsd@ictsd.ch – www.ictsd.org
Publisher and Chief Executive: Ricardo Meléndez-Ortiz

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB)
1300 New York Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C., 20577, USA
Tel: +1 202 623 1000 – www.iadb.org

Acknowledgements

This paper has been produced under the RTA Exchange, jointly implemented by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). For more information on the RTA Exchange, please visit www.rtaexchange.org/

The RTA Exchange is managed by Marie Chamay, Director of Strategic Initiatives, and Christophe Bellmann, Senior Resident Research Associate, with the support of Emily Bloom, Project Officer, RTA Exchange at ICTSD, in collaboration with Antoni Estevadeordal, Manager, Integration and Trade Sector, Jeremy Harris, Economist and Integration and Trade Specialist, and Mayra Salazar Rivera, Consultant at the IDB.

This think piece is one of a series of papers developed by the RTA Exchange that explore dispute settlement mechanisms in RTAs. The series is managed by Yaxuan Chen, Programme Manager, International Trade Law Programme.

Henry Gao is Associate Professor of Law at Singapore Management University and Dongfang Scholar Chair Professor at Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade.

The author wishes to thank Ernst-Ulrich Petersmann (European University Institute), Amy Porges (Porges Trade Law), Stephan Schill (University of Amsterdam), Geraldo Vidigal (University of Amsterdam) and an anonymous reviewer for their helpful comments and inputs on a previous draft of this paper.

Citation: Gao, Henry. 2018. *The WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism: A Trade Court for the World*. RTA Exchange. Geneva: International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). www.rtaexchange.org/

The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of his employer, nor should they be attributed to ICTSD or IDB.

Copyright ©ICTSD and IDB, 2018. Readers are encouraged to quote and reproduce this material for educational and non-profit purposes, provided the source is acknowledged. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivates 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>

ISSN 2520-2278

Contents

ABBREVIATIONS	IV
ABSTRACT	V
1. THE PROLIFERATION OF REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENTS	1
2. THE MISSING REGIONAL TRADE AGREEMENT DISPUTES	2
3. A TRADE COURT FOR THE WORLD	3
3.1 Why the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism?	3
3.2 Main Elements	4
3.3 Possible Obstacles	6
4. THE WAY FORWARD	6
REFERENCES	8

| Abbreviations

DSM	dispute settlement mechanism
DSU	Dispute Settlement Understanding
RTA	regional trade agreement
WTO	World Trade Organization

| Abstract

This think piece examines the reasons behind the underutilisation of dispute settlement mechanisms in regional trade agreements (RTAs). It suggests that countries could use the World Trade Organization's dispute settlement mechanism for RTA disputes and illustrates the main arguments and elements behind such an approach.

1. The Proliferation of Regional Trade Agreements

The rapid proliferation of regional trade agreements (RTAs) has been one of the most prominent features of the global trading system in the past two decades. For example, according to the World Trade Organization (WTO) RTA database, the total number of RTAs notified during the era of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade was only 44. This skyrocketed more than 10-fold to 455 in 2017 (WTO 2017). RTAs cover almost all WTO members, and their scopes extend not only to traditional trade issues, but also to new issues such as competition, investment, and electronic commerce.

There have long been debates in both academic and policy circles on whether RTAs are good or bad for the multilateral trading system. Some argue that RTAs are building blocks, as they promote trade liberalisation among smaller groups of countries, which can then be expanded to all WTO members at the multilateral level. Others, however, view RTAs as stumbling blocks that simply divert trade from existing trade partners without generating new trade. This would create “protectionist structures behind enlarged closed markets” that in turn “might distract attention from multilateral processes” (WTO 2007).

Initially, the WTO tried to fight the onslaught of RTAs. For example, the 2005 report on the future of the WTO commissioned by the WTO Director-General talked disparagingly about the “spaghetti bowl” of RTAs that had reduced most-favoured nation treatment to least-favoured nation treatment (WTO 2004, para. 60). Quoting Keynes, the report concluded that “it is surely crazy to prefer” the “separate blocs” over the multilateral trading system (WTO 2004, paras 106–107).

However, with the slow progress and subsequent stalling of the Doha Round, more people realised that it is futile to try to fight the unstoppable proliferation of RTAs. If you can’t beat them, join them. Thus, in 2007, then WTO Director-General Pascal Lamy admitted that the question is no longer “why so many regional agreements have sprung up” but “what forces and interests” might “generate an interest in multilateralizing regional arrangements, in expanding them ... into larger entities that bring us much closer to a multilateral system of trade arrangements” (WTO 2007).

What is more interesting than this tacit admission of defeat is the underlying recognition that RTAs are no longer imitations of the WTO on a smaller scale. Instead, these agreements have increasingly started to tap into areas previously deemed beyond the scope of international trade agreements, such as investment, competition, labour, and electronic commerce. Currently, the agendas on these new issues are largely set by RTAs, and the WTO has been playing catch-up.

On the other hand, with the Doha Round virtually abandoned by WTO members, most commentators seem to agree that the WTO is now in decline. This is especially true when it comes to making new rules for the world trading system, where RTAs have largely taken over the role of rule-maker on a host of new issues, ranging from trade to investment and even social policy issues. However, notwithstanding their rapid ascendance, RTAs still lag behind the WTO in one very important area: dispute settlement. While the WTO has successfully adjudicated hundreds of trade disputes, most RTA dispute settlement mechanisms (DSMs) remain largely underused. Paradoxically, however, this challenge could generate a unique opportunity for fruitful collaboration between the WTO and RTAs, which could in turn reinvigorate the multilateral trading system for the new era.

2. The Missing Regional Trade Agreement Disputes

The proliferation of RTAs has given rise to a plethora of DSMs. Broadly speaking, RTA DSMs can be divided into two models: political and legal. Also known as the diplomatic model, the political model relies on bilateral negotiations between the disputing parties without the involvement of third parties. Therefore, the process is often heavily influenced by political or diplomatic considerations rather than purely legal arguments. In contrast, the legal or juridical model uses third-party arbitration to solve trade disputes. As such, the result of the dispute is normally determined by the merits of the legal positions and arguments of the parties.

In a recent study, the WTO Secretariat traced the evolution of DSMs in RTAs (Chase et al. 2013). According to this study, when the WTO was first established in 1995, the political model was the dominant model, accounting for 28 of the 43 RTAs in force at the time. In the post-WTO world, however, the trend has reversed, with an increasing number of RTAs adopting the legal model. For example, of the 226 active RTAs in 2013, more than three-quarters, or 157, used the legal model. The study noted several reasons for the switch, with the most important being the successful example set by the WTO's highly legalised Dispute Settlement Understanding (DSU), which inspired and encouraged countries around the world to adopt similar dispute settlement mechanisms in their RTAs.

As they are modelled after the DSU, these RTA DSMs largely follow the WTO dispute settlement procedure. The process usually starts with a bilateral consultation between the disputing parties, followed by adjudication by a panel of experts composed on an ad hoc basis. At the same time, many RTAs have also made modifications to the DSU rules, with the main ones as follows:

- As prescribed by Article 23 of the DSU, the jurisdiction of the WTO DSM is not only compulsory but also exclusive. In contrast, most RTAs with forum-related provisions do not mandate the exclusive use of the RTA DSM. Instead, the parties are given the freedom to pursue a dispute under the WTO DSM or the RTA forum. Moreover, many RTAs even go so far as to explicitly direct the parties to use the WTO DSM for certain disputes, especially those relating to sanitary and phytosanitary, technical barriers to trade, and trade remedies measures.
- Under the DSU, the panellists shall be agreed by the disputing parties, and their own citizens normally may not serve on the panel. Most RTAs, however, allow each party to select one panellist, who is often their own national, while the chair is a non-national agreed by both parties.
- Unlike the DSU, most RTAs do not allow the participation of non-disputing parties as third parties.
- The DSU provides six to nine months for the panel to complete its work. The timeframe for the panel process is much shorter under most RTAs, with 120 days (or 4 months) being most common.
- With a few exceptions, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and MERCOSUR, most RTAs do not have appellate mechanisms like the WTO Appellate Body. Instead, the parties are allowed only one level of adjudication by the panel. Moreover, most RTAs do not have dedicated secretariat to assist panels like the WTO's Legal Affairs Division and the Appellate Body Secretariat.
- In the WTO, the functioning of the DSM is funded by the general budget, which in turn is supported by contributions from members. Most RTAs, however, do not have such a contributions system. Thus, many RTAs provide for the sharing of costs of the ad hoc panel by the disputing parties.

While some of these differences are sensible adaptations of the DSM in a RTA setting, the other differences, such as the rules on panel composition and lack of appeal, might make it harder for RTA DSMs to develop coherent jurisprudence.

People may debate whether these modifications are good or bad, but the fact that the parties took so much trouble to adapt the DSU to the RTAs is at least a testament to the importance RTA parties attach to their DSMs. A careful review of the actual use rate reveals, however, that such importance might be more illusory than real. According to the WTO study, most RTA DSMs see little or no activity, with the exception of selected RTAs in Europe, the Americas, and Africa (Chase et al. 2013). This, of course, does not mean there are no disputes among RTA parties. However, instead of using the DSMs under their own RTAs, RTA parties often chose to litigate the disputes in the WTO. According to the World Trade Report 2011, disputes between RTA parties account for about 19 percent of all disputes brought in the WTO, and many of these RTA disputes could well have been brought under the RTA DSMs (WTO 2011).

It seems puzzling that RTA parties do not make use of their DSMs despite the effort put in designing them. Many explanations have been offered. Some point to practical considerations, such as the higher costs for the RTA DSMs and more familiarity with the WTO DSM (see Porges 2011). Others, however, argue that the preference for the WTO DSM is due to institutional and jurisprudential reasons, such as the richer jurisprudence accumulated in the WTO, the wider precedent-setting powers of the WTO panel and Appellate Body, and the higher enforceability of WTO decisions (see Busch 2007; and Kolsky Lewis and Van den Bossche 2014).

In my view, the low utilisation rate not only provides a testament to the problems identified above, but also reveals deeper systemic problems with most of the RTA DSMs. On the one hand, several design flaws make it quite costly for RTA parties to use their DSMs. For example, as many RTAs fail to specify the default rule for panel composition in case of delay or

blockage by a party, it is very difficult to even start the panel process. Moreover, as many RTAs do not have a pool of experienced panellists or a secretariat, it is hard to get a good-quality panel report. Because there is no appeal mechanism, the parties might have to live with bad panel reports even if both parties find the reports unsatisfactory, albeit in different aspects. After the issuance of the panel report, the parties often have problems enforcing the decision due to the lack of implementation and monitoring mechanisms. On the other hand, even if the process works well, any benefit that the parties may gain from a RTA DSM is limited to the narrow confines of that particular RTA. All these factors combined make the RTA DSM much less desirable compared with the WTO DSM.

3. A Trade Court for the World

As the RTA DSMs do not work well, a new approach is needed to handle RTA disputes. Ideally, such a system should avoid existing problems with the RTA DSMs, while expanding their benefits to a wider group. Some of the suggestions include establishing a new global dispute settlement mechanism for RTA disputes, or using existing institutions such as the International Court of Justice or the Permanent Court of Arbitration. I would argue, however, that the best tribunal is the existing DSM under the WTO.

3.1. Why the WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism?

Compared with the other institutions suggested earlier, the WTO DSM has an obvious advantage, as it already has rich experience in solving trade disputes. Thus, by choosing the WTO DSM, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. Moreover, making the WTO DSM the tribunal of choice will bring added benefits to all parties involved. RTA parties will no longer have to face problems in having the panel established, getting a good-quality panel decision,

and enforcing the rulings. Non-RTA parties also do not need to worry about being kept in the dark about RTA disputes that could harm their interests. The most important benefits are the systemic benefits, as a unified DSM will help ensure the consistency of trade law jurisprudence and maintain the relevancy of the multilateral trading system.

3.2. Main Elements

As the WTO DSM is already well developed, we do not need to make major modifications to the DSM except some minor twists.¹ First, RTAs should include a clause to adopt the WTO DSM, with the following as an example:

The Parties agree to refer all relevant disputes under this agreement to the WTO Dispute Settlement Body. The WTO Dispute Settlement Body shall have the exclusive competence to decide whether a dispute constitutes a relevant dispute for the purposes of the present provision. A ruling on a relevant dispute by the WTO Dispute Settlement Body shall be considered binding before any arbitral or other dispute settlement body or procedure established pursuant to the present Agreement.

Correspondingly, Appendix 1 of the DSU could be amended to include the following:

(D) Regional Trade Agreements

The applicability of this Understanding to the Regional Trade Agreements of Members (“the individual agreement”) shall be subject to the adoption of a decision by the parties to the individual agreement setting out the terms for the application of this Understanding to such agreements, including any special or additional rules or procedures for inclusion in Appendix 2, as notified to the DSB.

Of course, in the short to medium term, it might be difficult to have the DSU amended, due to the paralysis of the WTO decision-making mechanism. In such a case, the RTA parties could consider using the WTO DSM as a plurilateral initiative. More specifically, the RTA parties could use the shadow WTO DSM as explained in detail later. This will avail the RTA parties the benefits of the WTO DSM without worrying about amendment of the DSU. When more RTA parties start to see the benefit of a unified DSM, there will be less resistance to amending the DSU to bring RTA disputes within the system.

Second, under the WTO DSM, we can choose either the normal panel procedure or the arbitration procedure under Article 25 of the DSU.² I believe the normal panel procedure is the better option, because Article 25 arbitration has too many variables. For example, both parties have to agree to the arbitration and the procedures to be followed; the agreement of disputing parties for the addition of third parties is always required no matter whether they are parties themselves; and there is no possibility of appeal. Of course, this does not mean the normal panel and appellate procedures are adopted in their entirety. Instead, in view of the special characteristics of the RTAs, we still need to fine-tune some of the procedural issues, with the main ones as follows:

- Parties to the dispute: in normal cases, only parties to a specific dispute can be parties of a case. In cases involving substantive rules in the RTA that affect all members of the RTA, the other RTA members not parties to the dispute should have the right to join in the dispute settlement proceeding. Even in cases that involve only the substantive rights of the parties to a particular dispute, non-party members should be allowed to join as third parties if the main parties to the dispute agree. In cases involving the substantive rights of non-RTA members, such non-RTA members should also have the right to join in

¹ Some of these suggestions are adapted from Gao and Lim (2008).

² This option has been suggested by Cottier (2015).

the dispute settlement proceeding. Even in cases that involve only the substantive rights of RTA members, non-RTA members can join as third parties if all the members of the RTA agree. Such an arrangement will ensure that the interests of all parties, RTA members and non-members alike, are adequately represented in dispute settlement proceedings. This will ensure not only the highest degree of support among all parties who might have an interest in such cases, but also the highest degree of uniformity between different cases.

- Composition of the panel: to ensure the familiarity of the panellists with the situations or problems facing the members of an RTA, most RTAs require the panellists to be nominated by the disputing parties or even their nationals. This rationale, however, is rather weak, considering that the panel's main job is dealing with the legal issues and its role on fact-finding is mainly limited to the information gathered from the parties' submissions. Moreover, for RTAs between countries with weak WTO capacities, limiting panellists to their own nationals would significantly limit the pool of potential panellists. On the other hand, as the experiences of some RTAs and other agreements, such as the investor-state arbitration mechanisms, have shown, arbitration panels with nationals of disputing parties as panellists could work. Also, some RTA parties might find it politically difficult to agree to an arbitration panel composed entirely of foreigners. In any event, any possible biases from national panellists could be remedied by the appellate mechanism. On balance, it is probably better to leave discretion to the parties of the specific RTA to decide whether the panellists should be nominated by parties or be their nationals. If a panel with no nationals is composed, the gap the panel might have in understanding the special situations of that particular RTA should be filled by submissions by the disputing parties, just like in a domestic court.
- The proceedings of the panel shall normally be kept confidential and limited only to the disputing parties. If all the parties to the dispute agree, however, the proceedings may be open to the general public. The reports of the panel should generally be made available to WTO members and the general public, so that such reports can gradually build up a body of "common law."
- The meetings of the panel may be held either in Geneva or at another mutually agreed location, such as in the territory of an RTA member or in a third country.
- While the findings and recommendations of the panel in a particular dispute shall only be binding upon the parties to the dispute, the analysis by the panel on substantive rules in an RTA should ideally also apply to future cases between members of the same RTA. In cases that involve standard provisions, which are copied across many RTAs, the relevant analysis by the panel shall also be of persuasive value for future disputes involving similar provisions between the members of other RTAs.
- If a party to a dispute is not satisfied with the ruling of the panel, it shall have the right to appeal the report. It has been suggested to use the procedure under DSU Article 25 to handle such disputes (Andersen et al. 2017). However, as I argued earlier, there are many problems with the Article 25 procedure. Thus, the better option would be having the appeal handled by the Appellate Body, or the shadow Appellate Body as elaborated below.
- To avoid the diversion of resources from the current responsibilities and functions of WTO panels and the Appellate Body, the expenses for a dispute from an RTA should be funded by the RTA members involved. Special and differential treatment could be provided to RTA members that are developing countries.

3.3. Possible Obstacles

While the details of the procedural rules of the new mechanism might take a while to iron out, they are still much easier to handle than the political obstacles. In particular, as mentioned earlier, many developing countries are reluctant to include binding DSMs in their RTAs. The RTAs concluded by the developed countries and larger emerging economies are more receptive to DSMs in general, but even they choose to exclude certain issues from RTA DSMs from time to time. If they are unwilling to accept even weak DSMs in RTAs, it will be harder for them to accept the strong DSM in the WTO. Nonetheless, all these obstacles might turn out not to be a problem in view of the turn of the United States of America from multilateralism and regionalism to bilateralism and even unilateralism. As bilateral RTAs could easily be manipulated by the United States, more countries will come to realise their best defence is getting back to the multilateral institutions, including the WTO DSM.

In addition to the political obstacle, another potential obstacle is the institutional challenges the new DSM might face. As the WTO Legal Affairs Division and Appellate Body Secretariat are already overworked, it would likely be difficult for them to provide assistance to the new DSM. To solve the problem, I would suggest the creation of a shadow secretariat staffed by former WTO lawyers, private lawyers, and WTO academics to assist the panel, while the appeals could be heard by a shadow Appellate Body composed of former Appellate Body members. As these experts are familiar with WTO jurisprudence and have rich experience in dealing with WTO disputes, the consistency of WTO jurisprudence would be maintained.

4. The Way Forward

At first, the proposal made in this paper might sound radical. As the analyses above have shown, however, using the WTO DSM for RTA disputes is much better than the fragmented system that currently exists. Nonetheless, the inertia from existing institutions can still make it difficult to adopt the more sensible approach. Thus, to maximise the chance of success, we need to be strategic and choose the path of least resistance. In particular, I would suggest the following:

First, as with any new initiative, a proposal like this may not garner sufficient support overnight, and an incremental approach should be taken. Thus, the proposal should start as a plurilateral initiative among like-minded countries and gradually expand to the rest of the WTO membership. Who, then, should we choose as the first recruits for the initiative? I would suggest starting with those with a strong leaning toward multilateral institutions. Among WTO members, the most likely candidates are the European Union, Canada, and the Republic of Korea. As more countries start to buy in to the idea, we could expand the initiative to the most frequent users of RTA DSMs, especially European and Latin American countries.

Another advantage of the plurilateral approach is its flexibility. There are plurilateral agreements within the WTO system, such as the Government Procurement Agreement and the Trade Facilitation Agreement. There are also such initiatives beyond the WTO framework, such as the Trade in Services Agreement currently under negotiation. One of the biggest potential obstacles for the current proposal is the difficulty of amending the DSU, especially given the current controversies surrounding the WTO DSM. However, as I mentioned earlier, if the proposal starts out as a plurilateral initiative outside the formal WTO framework, there will be no need to amend the DSU, at least for the early stages. Depending on the progress of the adoption of the mechanism among

WTO members, we might consider moving it into the WTO system or keeping it in parallel with the WTO on an indefinite basis.

Second, a similar approach should be taken with respect to the issues to be covered under the new DSM. We could start with issues already deferred to the WTO by many RTA DSMs, such as disputes relating to sanitary and phytosanitary, technical barriers to trade, and trade remedies measures. Gradually, this could be expanded into other issues, such as services; tariffs; and fundamental principles, such as non-discrimination and transparency. As to the issues that are routinely excluded from RTA DSMs, such as environment, labour, and competition, it is probably prudent to wait until the WTO itself has acquired competence on these issues by incorporating them as substantive obligations under the covered agreements.

While it will take some time for the new mechanism to be adopted, many countries will realise that using the WTO DSM for RTA disputes is the only way to solve the growing tension between the expanding agenda of RTAs and their outdated DSMs. By referring disputes to the WTO DSM, RTAs can focus on what they do best, namely experimenting with new rules on new issues. The interpretation and clarification of RTA rules through the WTO DSM will also help educate WTO members on the benefits of having these new rules and build consensus for their adoption in the multilateral trading system. In the long run, the synergy between RTAs and the WTO will be further cemented, and this might prove to be the most fruitful collaboration between the two main driving forces in global economic integration.

References

Andersen, Scott, Todd Friedbacher, Christian Lau, Nicolas Lockhart, Jan Yeves Remy, and Iain Sandford. 2017. *Using Arbitration Under Article 25 of the DSU to Ensure the Availability of Appeals*. Working Paper CTEI-2017-17. Geneva: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Centre for Trade and Economic Integration.

Busch, Marc L. 2007. "Overlapping Institutions, Forum Shopping, and Dispute Settlement in International Trade." *International Organization* 61:4 735–761.

Chase, Claud, Alan Yanovich, Jo-Ann Crawford, and Pamela Ugaz. 2013. *Mapping of Dispute Settlement Mechanisms in Regional Trade Agreements: Innovative or Variations on a Theme?* Working Paper ERSD-2013-07. Geneva: World Trade Organization.

Cottier, Thomas. 2015. "The Common Law of International Trade and the Future of the World Trade Organization." *Journal of International Economic Law* 18:1 12–13.

Gao, Henry and C. L. Lim. 2008. "Saving the WTO from the Risk of Irrelevance: The WTO Dispute Settlement Mechanism as a 'Common Good' for RTA Disputes." *Journal of International Economic Law* 11 (4): 899–925.

Kolsky Lewis, Meredith, and Peter Van den Bossche. 2014. "What to Do When Disagreement Strikes? The Complexity of Dispute Settlement under Trade Agreements." In *Trade Agreements at the Crossroads*, edited by Susy Frankel and Meredith Kolsky Lewis, Oxford: Routledge, pp. 9–25.

Porges, Amelia. 2011. "Dispute Settlement." In *Preferential Trade Agreement Policies for Development: A Handbook*, edited by J. Chauffour and J. Maur, 492. Washington, DC: International Bank for Reconstruction and Development and World Bank.

World Trade Organization. 2004. "The Future of the WTO: Addressing Institutional Challenges in the New Millennium." Report by the Consultative Board to the Director-General Supachai Panitchpakdi. Geneva: World Trade Organization.

World Trade Organization. 2007. "Proliferation of regional trade agreements 'breeding concern'—Lamy." 10 September 2007. Accessed 2018. https://www.wto.org/english/news_e/sppl_e/sppl67_e.htm.

World Trade Organization. 2011. *World Trade Report 2011: The WTO and Preferential Trade Agreements: From Co-existence to Coherence*. Geneva: World Trade Organization, pp. 175–177.

World Trade Organization. 2017. "Regional Trade Agreements Information System (RTA-IS)." Accessed 2017. <https://rtais.wto.org/UI/PublicMaintainRTAHome.aspx>.

Jointly implemented by the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the RTA Exchange works in the interest of the sharing of ideas, experiences to date and best practices to harvest innovation from RTAs and leverage lessons learned towards progress at the multilateral level. Conceived in the context of the E15 Initiative, the RTA Exchange creates a space where stakeholders can access the collective international knowledge on RTAs and engage in dialogue on RTA-related policy issues.

