



Webinar Series

Imperative of Resurrecting Multilateralism

Organised by: CUTS International

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Key Speakers: **Pradeep Mehta** (Secretary General, CUTS International), **Pascal Lamy** (Chair, Paris Peace Forum), **Lakshmi M Puri** (Former Assistant Secretary General, United Nations), **Jorge Heine** (Research Professor, Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University and Former Ambassador of Chile to India), **Bruce Stokes** (Executive Director, Transatlantic Task Force: Together or Alone? German Marshall Fund), **Sabina Dewan** (President and Executive Director, JustJobs Network), **Kishore Mahbubani** (Prof. and Dean, LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore), **Lydia Kulik** (Head of India Studies at the SKOLKOVO Institute of Emerging Market Studies, Moscow School of Management), **Vijay Latha Reddy** (former Deputy National Security Advisor of India), **Henry Huiyao Wang** (Founder and President, Center for China and Globalization), **Asoke Mukerji** (former Ambassador of India to the United Nations) and **Bipul Chatterjee** (Executive Director, CUTS International)

1. Introduction

1.1 This was a series of webinars that CUTS International has organised on the future of multilateralism. The first programme was held on 3rd and 18th September, 2020.

1.2 There is a remarking similarity between the world we witness today and that about a century ago- during the interwar years, which resulted in the demise of the League of Nations. While at that time, a rising power refused to join the international comity of nations, this time another rising (and expansionist) power is doing everything that goes against trust. Therefore, trust building is very important in today's world.

1.3 In this context, the webinar discussed creating a better sense about the virtues of being a 'good international citizen'. The possibility of it to happen and the role of traditional and emerging powers to make it happen were also discussed.

2. Key Points of the Discussion

2.1 Multilateralism in its Low: Multilateralism is now at its lowest point in recent history.

2.1.1 There is a gradual reduction of the faith in multilateral institutions around the world, which is a matter of great concern. Multilateralism is at its low when it is needed the most, due to the current global challenges such as the pandemic and climate change.

2.1.2 Multilateralism reaching its low point in the recent past is not a sudden happening. It happened gradually and there are numerous long-term and short-term factors for this decline. The divergence of values and interests of sovereign powers changed in the past 30 years. Increasing inequalities around the world has created an anti-globalisation sentiment. International cooperation has become largely obsolete in the previous years.

2.1.3 Today, from many sides, there is an effort to create political capitals denouncing the UN, WTO and other international organisations. There was also an opinion about the insufficiency of international instruments which are able to hold multilateralism to its fullest. The short-term reason for multilateralism to become at its low point is the devastating pandemic and its repercussions.

2.2 Importance of Multilateralism: The discussion underlined the importance of multilateralism. All the speakers mentioned about the need and relevance of multilateralism, especially in this time of a global pandemic and the subsequent economic hardships.

2.2.1 World is facing a number of challenges today like the pandemic and climate change. The current situation shows us that there is no alternative to address the scale of problems faced by the world without adhering to the principles and norms of the multilateral system.

2.2.2 There is no other important mission in the world today than resurrecting multilateralism, because of the fact that the world is fully interdependent today. The global boat in which the entire people on earth travel is sinking and a joint attempt can only keep the boat from sinking.

2.2.3 There were suggestions to make the vaccine for Covid as a global public good for the greater global interest. But if it has to be done, there should be strong and impartial international institutions.

2.3 Resurrection of Multilateralism is a necessity: Resurrection of multilateralism to its fullest should be an utmost priority for all. New approaches can be adopted in order to do this.

2.3.1 The faith in international institutions should be rebuilt and the international instruments should be updated and strengthened according to the need of the day. International institutions should act in the interest of all. They should be given the freedom to exercise their power without any biases.

2.3.2 Newer approaches can be adopted as a solution to resurrect multilateralism. Polyilateralism is such a solution which was proposed in the discussions. If nation states do not agree to share more sovereignty other actors have to be inserted in the game who are ready to share sovereignty, influence and power such as businesses, NGOs, Think Tanks, academic institutes and big cities.

2.3.3 Multilateralism has to be revitalised through the application of a multi-stakeholder approach. There is no point in putting all weights on the national governments to act for the resurrection of multilateralism and wait for it.

2.3.4 For resurrecting multilateralism, people should understand the values that polyilateralism can bring for global peace, security, stability and prosperity. A mobilization at the local level is required to tackle the problems, which currently does not exist.

2.4 Needs reform and revitalisation, not recreation or redrawing: The discussion came to the point that recreating or redrawing of multilateralism is not possible in today's world. Reforming and revitalising multilateralism from within is the possible and necessary thing.

2.4.1 The 1945 Rules-based order was very beautiful because it is an amazing multilateral framework. It will have flaws, which should be corrected. But it is not possible to invent or recreate a new order, because things will be drowned in negotiations.

2.4.2 The system of multilateralism has to be upgraded and improved from within. Countries like India, China, U.S and Russia have to play a greater role in encouraging cooperation. There should be stronger leadership for multilateral institutions such as WTO.

2.5 Equity should be the signature and needs trust-building: All the members in the discussion demanded that every member of the international community should get equal voice and power in a multilateral world.

2.5.1 There is a chance for likeminded countries who have a common agenda to come together in a multilateral world. This can lead to exclusion of other voices. Therefore, all countries should be heard and should have equal rights and voice in a multipolar world.

2.5.2 Democratisation of international relations is very important in today's context. The issue of equity is to be addressed while reforming multilateralism. Trust-building is needed among nations for the delivery of global public good.

2.5.3 Forgetting the short run losers of multilateralism is a reason for the backlash against globalisation today. Different countries have different values and they are intrinsic to their sovereignty. Therefore, it is important to have a balanced approach for understanding and exercising the values of 'agree to disagree'.

2.6 Regional cooperation as building blocks for multilateral cooperation: Multilateral cooperation can be built and fostered by the regional level institutions

2.6.1 The panelists in the discussion said that regional economic communities are not just about discussing regional issues but, as like the Association for Southeast Asian Nations, they should also deliberate upon issues on which global cooperation is needed.

2.6.2 It is important to have local level cooperation and understanding for larger global goals. Regional institutions can build momentum at the local level and help to build international cooperation for global causes.

2.7 Multilateral Institutions should act in the interest of all members: The speakers in the discussion said that multilateral institutions should act in the interest of all members and not in the interests of a few powerful members.

2.7.1 Many countries have sentiments against globalisation due to the inequitable growth and growth without employment. International institutions recognising the needs of all its members and acting for everyone will help to build trust among members. Trust among members of the international community is an important requirement for the resurrection of multilateralism.