

And perhaps most broadly, the question of direction cannot be addressed without consideration of two traditional causes of institutional failure—over-expansion and over-reach.

First, as pressure to address the social dimension of globalization builds (driven by concerns over inequality of income and access to basic public services such as clean water), there is a tendency to look for effective international institutions—thus, Doctors without Borders worked very hard and succeeded in putting public health issues on the WTO agenda. The consequence, it was suggested, is that the WTO is becoming the “World Everything-but-Trade Organization” or perhaps the “World Bargaining Organization”.

Second, given the evident reluctance of the WTO as an institution to say “no”, it runs the risk of taking on too much and breaking the system—in particular, some feel that too much is being loaded on the dispute settlement mechanism, a theme to which we will return below.

Third, as the system expands and begins to look more like the United Nations, it was suggested that WTO rounds might lose their edge with serious trade liberalization shifting to regional negotiations. In time, it was suggested, the WTO might become like the UN—and as relevant in US eyes! The issue of WTO governance reform is thus perhaps more urgent than many think.

It was even suggested that perhaps the idea of rounds is obsolete and, noting the Finance Ministers approach, the question was raised whether or not a shift to a Ministerial framework might be advisable? It was observed in this connection that a broad set of objectives is embedded in the WTO committee structure; these committees could be charged with working on liberalization initiatives that could be periodically brought together as a “roundup”. However, others argued that the Finance Ministers model would not work in the trade context: that would, for example, confront national legislatures with new rules every 6 months! Others observed that there is no objective of completely free trade built into the WTO, raising the question: do Ministers actually need to meet regularly? And