



REPORT (2020) ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE COMMITTEE ON AGRICULTURE

REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON

1.1. The present report is being circulated by the Chairperson of the Committee on Agriculture on her own responsibility. This report provides a summary of the activities of the Committee on Agriculture ("the Committee") during 2020.

1.2. The Committee organized three formal meetings in 2020 on 28 July¹, 22-23 September, and 30 November - 1 December.² Two informal meetings of the Committee were held respectively on 21 September and 30 November. Ms. Christiane Daleiden Distefano of Luxemburg chaired the Committee's June special meeting and the July formal meeting. The Committee elected Ms. Maria Araceli Escandor of the Philippines as the new Chairperson for 2020-2021 beginning with the September meeting.

1.3. In accordance with Article 18.1 of the Agreement on Agriculture ("the Agreement"), at each of its meetings, the Committee reviewed progress in the implementation of Members' commitments. This review process is undertaken based on notifications submitted by Members in the areas of market access, domestic support, export competition, export prohibitions and restrictions as well as under the follow-up to the Marrakesh Ministerial Decision on NFIDCs. Between 1 January and 2 December 2020, 338 agriculture notifications were circulated.

1.4. In 2020, Members posed 255 questions in connection with 133 specific notifications during the Committee's review process. These questions were distributed as follows: 71% related to domestic support issues, 21% to market access, 4% to export competition, 3% to export restrictions and prohibitions, and the remaining questions related to the NFIDC Decision.³ Specific concerns were also raised regarding outstanding notifications that some Members had yet to submit to the Committee.

1.5. Members also raised a wide range of matters relevant to the implementation of commitments, independently of notifications, under Article 18.6 of the Agreement. A total of 297 questions on 116 specific implementation matters (SIMs) were raised by 18 Members during 2020. Out of these, 87 SIMs were discussed for the first time in 2020. The remaining matters were discussed on one or more occasions in previous years; three of these SIMs have been brought up in more than 10 CoA meetings and attracting between 27 and 63 questions in total.

1.6. Since 2018, at the request of the Chair, the Secretariat has been monitoring the number of outstanding responses under the CoA review process.⁴ A gradual reduction in the number of outstanding responses has been observed since this exercise started. As of the 30 November-1 December Committee meeting, 82 responses were pending for questions raised during 2013-2018 and 35 for questions raised in 2019. The successive Chairs encouraged Members

¹ The first formal meeting of the Committee in 2020 was initially scheduled for March and was postponed to July due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In view of logistical and time constraints, only items subject to specific questions or requests from Members were considered under the revised agenda for the rescheduled meeting. The September meeting of the Committee reverted to regular standing agenda items.

² The summary reports of these meetings are contained in documents G/AG/R/95, G/AG/R/96 (to be issued) and G/AG/R/97 (to be issued).

³ See G/AG/W/205/Rev.1, G/AG/W/206, G/AG/W/207 and G/AG/W/208.

⁴ The Secretariat circulated a list of outstanding responses in documents G/AG/W/204 and G/AG/W/204/Rev.1.

to continue their efforts to reduce outstanding responses to enhance the efficacy of the Committee's monitoring functions.

1.7. At each meeting the Committee reviewed the status of Members' compliance with their notification obligations under the Agreement based on a Secretariat document summarizing the status of compliance with notification requirements.⁵ While a significant proportion of notifications are still outstanding (about 25% of all notifications from 1995-2018), Members are continuing their efforts to bring their notification record up to date.

1.8. In response to specific requests by Members, a special meeting of the Committee was convened on 18 June pursuant to paragraph 6 of the Committee's working procedures (G/AG/1), focusing on COVID-19 and agricultural trade policies within the framework of the Agreement. The discussions were organized based on specific contributions by Members on COVID-19 and agriculture as well as advance written questions on COVID-19 and agricultural trade policies within the setting of commitments under the AoA.⁶ At the special meeting, Members also agreed to include "COVID-19 and Agriculture" as a standing item on the agenda of future Committee meetings, starting with the September 2020 meeting. It was also agreed to invite the observer international organizations to contribute to the discussions under this agenda item. Starting with the June special meeting, several written contributions⁷ have been submitted by Members on COVID-19 and agriculture, including specific notifications⁸ and ad hoc reports⁹ on their measures taken in the agricultural sector in response to the pandemic; some observer international organizations have also circulated written contributions¹⁰ on this theme.

1.9. With respect to the work of the Committee related specifically to NFIDCs, the WTO list of NFIDCs was updated¹¹ in September to include Samoa.¹² The Committee undertook the annual monitoring of the follow-up to the Ministerial Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries (NFIDC) at the November 2020 meeting based principally on Members' NF notifications¹³ as well as contributions¹⁴ by observer international organizations. The Secretariat circulated a background note¹⁵ to facilitate the annual NF discussions. Within the Committee's monitoring of the follow-up to the NFIDC Decision, Members continued to reflect on the review of the provisions on international food aid contained in the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition as mandated in its paragraph 32.¹⁶

1.10. At the November 2020 CoA meeting, the Committee undertook the consultations with respect to Members' participation in the normal growth of world trade. The exercise, conducted annually pursuant to Article 18.5 of the Agreement on Agriculture, was supported by a background note¹⁷ by the Secretariat.

⁵ G/AG/GEN/86/Rev.37 to Rev.40.

⁶ The summary report of this meeting is contained in documents G/AG/R/94 and G/AG/R/94/Add.1.

⁷ WT/GC/208/Rev.2 - G/AG/30/Rev.2; WT/GC/218 - TN/AG/44 - G/AG/31; WT/GC/217; RD/AG/77 and RD/AG/79.

⁸ G/AG/N/THA/107, G/AG/N/THA/107/Add.1, G/AG/N/KGZ/8, G/AG/N/MKD/26, G/AG/N/MYN/21, G/AG/N/MYN/21/Add.1, G/AG/N/VNM/13 and G/AG/N/NZL/122.

⁹ G/AG/GEN/159; G/AG/GEN/159/Add.1; G/AG/GEN/159/Add.2; G/AG/GEN/159/Add.3; G/AG/GEN/160; G/AG/GEN/161; G/AG/GEN/162; G/AG/GEN/163; G/AG/GEN/164; G/AG/GEN/164/Add.1; G/AG/GEN/165; G/AG/GEN/166; G/AG/GEN/167; G/AG/GEN/167/REV.1; and G/AG/GEN/172. Pursuant to Members' request for tracking and unifying submitted *ad hoc* reports, the Secretariat circulated on 25 November a draft compilation document (G/AG/W/209 and attachment, to be issued). Brazil on behalf of the Ottawa Group circulated a compilation of *ad hoc* reports made by Ottawa Group Members (G/AG/GEN/177 and attachment).

¹⁰ G/AG/GEN/168, G/AG/GEN/169, G/AG/GEN/170, G/AG/GEN/171, G/AG/GEN/175, G/AG/GEN/176.

¹¹ G/AG/5/Rev.11.

¹² The annual review of the NFIDC list, usually considered at the March meetings of the Committee, was postponed to the September meeting due to logistical reasons. See footnote 1.

¹³ Referred to in paragraph 2B(i) of the convening airgram of the November-December 2020 meeting of the Committee (WTO/AIR/AG/48).

¹⁴ G/AG/GEN/173 and G/AG/GEN/174.

¹⁵ G/AG/W/42/Rev.21.

¹⁶ WT/MIN(15)/45, para. 32.

¹⁷ G/AG/W/32/Rev.19 plus corrigendum.

1.11. The Committee maintained a standing item on its agenda relating to implementation issues, both in the framework of its follow-up to the Decision by the Doha Ministerial Conference on Implementation-Related Issues and Concerns¹⁸, as well as in the framework of issues and proposals referred to it by the General Council. No Member intervened under this agenda item in 2020.

1.12. The Committee also discussed follow-up to Ministerial outcomes, specifically related to (i) the Understanding on Tariff Rate Quota Administration Provisions of Agricultural Products, as defined in Article 2 of the Agreement; (ii) the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition; and (iii) the Bali Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes.

1.13. Following the adoption of the report¹⁹ on the Review of the Bali Decision on TRQ administration and the associated recommendations by the General Council at its December 2019 meeting, the Committee held follow-up discussions on the issue. The Secretariat circulated an updated background document²⁰ on TRQ administration and fill rates pursuant to the agreed recommendations. The Committee also considered a Tracking Register to record matters raised under the underfill mechanism based on a draft circulated by the Secretariat.

1.14. The follow-up to the Nairobi Ministerial Decision on Export Competition mainly consisted²¹ in the annual dedicated discussion on export competition which took place during the September 2020 meeting. The discussions were held based on the Secretariat's background document. Following the meeting, a revised background document compiling all the information received by the Secretariat was circulated on 26 October 2020²² concluding this review process. During the September meeting, Members exchanged on specific measures in relation to the implementation of the Nairobi Decision.²³ Members also had the possibility to raise questions in relation to export measures covered by the Nairobi Decision during other Committee meetings in the year.

1.15. Regarding the modification of the scheduled export subsidy commitments pursuant to the Nairobi Decision, the latest situation as reported by the Chairperson at the November 2020 Committee meeting was as follows: out of the 16 Members with export subsidy reduction commitments at the time of the Nairobi Decision, 11 Members had their schedule revised pursuant to the Decision, two other Members had submitted their revised draft schedule in 2017 where the certification has been pending, one Member had submitted its revised draft schedule in October 2020 and the remaining two Members had not yet circulated their draft schedules.

1.16. In a first recourse to the Bali Ministerial Decision on Public Stockholding for Food Security Purposes, one Member notified²⁴ the Committee on 31 March that it had exceeded the *de minimis* level for rice for the marketing year 2018-2019 and that this was covered by the Interim Solution set out in the Bali Decision²⁵ and in the subsequent General Council Decision²⁶ of November 2014. The notification was reviewed at the July, September and November-December meetings of the Committee.²⁷

1.17. In 2020, the Committee continued its deliberations on possible elements to enhance transparency and the Committee's review process. The issue was considered in two informal meetings in September and November. The Committee also continued discussions aimed at improving Members' notification compliance.

1.18. Several online tools support the Committee's monitoring and transparency functions. Since 2012, the AG-IMS platform has facilitated Member submission of questions and responses in the context of the Committee's monitoring of implementation of commitments. At the October 2019

¹⁸ WT/MIN(01)/17, para. 2.

¹⁹ G/AG/29.

²⁰ G/AG/W/183/Rev.1 and Attachements.

²¹ See also the review of the provisions on international food aid contained in the Nairobi Decision on Export Competition as mentioned in paragraph 1.9.

²² G/AG/W/125/Rev.13, G/AG/W/125/Rev.13/Add.1 - G/AG/W/125/Rev.13/Add.4, G/AG/W/125/Rev.13/Add.2/Corr.1 and G/AG/W/125/Rev.13/Add.2/Corr.2.

²³ Section 4 of G/AG/W/207.

²⁴ G/AG/N/IND/18.

²⁵ WT/MIN(13)/38.

²⁶ WT/L/939.

²⁷ Relevant summary reports of the meetings are referenced in footnote 2.

meeting, the Secretariat launched the on-line agriculture notification system²⁸ for use by all Members. In 2020, the Secretariat introduced enhancements to the AG-IMS Q&A system based on Members' suggestions and informed Members that further improvements are being developed. A transparency information session was organized by the Secretariat in the margins of the November meeting to showcase the Q&A function of the AG-IMS and to present a study on the questions raised in the context of the CoA review process.

1.19. Regarding technical assistance activities, the eleventh Geneva-based workshop on agriculture notifications originally scheduled in July 2020 was postponed to 2021 in light of the COVID-19 pandemic. Other face-to-face trainings were also postponed or cancelled. In 2020, the WTO's Agriculture and Commodities Division delivered two virtual workshops to Mongolia and Jamaica focusing specifically on agriculture notifications. Additionally, upon request, the Secretariat organized one-on-one trainings on the AG-IMS to assist Members with the use of the online notification submission system.

1.20. Following Members' request at the special meeting in June, an information session on COVID-19 and agriculture took place on the margins of the July meeting. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), the International Grains Council (IGC), the International Trade Centre (ITC) and the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) participated in the session and presented work on the monitoring and analysis of COVID-19 related agricultural policies.²⁹

1.21. The following international intergovernmental organizations have regular observer status in the Committee: Food and Agriculture Organization, International Monetary Fund, the International Grains Council, OECD, UNCTAD, World Food Programme, and the World Bank.[At its 30 November - 1 December meeting, the Committee agreed to renew the *ad hoc* observer status of the Inter-American Institute for Agricultural Cooperation (IICA) for 2021.

1.22. The dates of the meetings of the Committee in 2021 were announced at the 30 November-1 December 2020 CoA meeting.³⁰

²⁸ <http://agims.wto.org/>.

²⁹ Details are accessible at https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/agric_e/info_sess_28jul20_e.htm.

³⁰ G/AG/GEN/178.