

Trilateral Forum: Opening Statement

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The South Centre perspectives and actions to support developing countries in the response to the Covid-19 pandemic is embodied in the many published research reports and expert analyses. So I will start off providing a broader picture to understand the key challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic.

The world was unprepared prior to the Covid-19 crisis and remains so for new ones. The Covid-19 response was faulty. Covid-19 recovery has been slow and painful, in particular for developing countries.

We are witnessing a changing global order and challenges of global scale. The Covid-19 pandemic is a case in point. There are many uncertainties for future scenarios.

In addition to changing geopolitics, growing inequities within and among States, weakening credibility of government in public policy matters and the strong influence of business, raises new questions for how global governance may evolve to negotiate responses for effectively dealing with global challenges. Struggles with existing international institutions and rules, -including calls for reforms in health, trade and intellectual property spaces-, and in new areas such as international taxation, reflect these tensions, all exacerbated by the shock from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In global health, trade and intellectual property spaces, there is a strong emphasis on the need for greater international cooperation, and to strengthen the role of multilateralism as a solution, including to address issues of financing and inequities.

There are also calls to “decolonise” these spaces, and to focus more on regional institutions and initiatives. An important aspiration is to increase the power and voice of governments of the South and of disadvantaged populations.

All these dynamics are at play at the WHO, WIPO and WTO. Among government relations. In the Secretariats. The collaboration among WHO, WIPO and WTO is meant to assist the coherent implementation of government policies in health, trade, and intellectual property, including through their technical assistance. Feeble multilateral agency collaboration and the often misalignment of government policies intersecting in these areas, requires not only building up the evidence, but also requires giving higher priority to public health and new rules for private sector engagement.

The South Centre plays a role in supporting developing countries to resolve these tensions, reconciling intellectual property with public health needs.

I look forward to the exchange on Covid-19 challenges.