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Q4(a)

Identify and evaluate the reasons for deadlock in the WTO negotiations on fisheries between the developing and developed countries

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2022 · PSIR GS 2 · 20 marks · Globalisation

Globalisation: Responses from developed and developing societies.

Core demand of the question

- Identify and evaluate the reasons for deadlock in the WTO negotiations on fisheries between the developing and developed countries
- Write at 20-mark length

Revision summary

Doha mandated cuts in harmful fisheries subsidies.

IUU and overfished-stock bans are the easier slice; overcapacity is the deadlock.

Developing Members want **S&DT** for small-scale and food-security fleets.

Developed Members fear loopholes for large emerging distant-water fleets.

MC12's partial treaty parked the hardest pillar rather than ending the conflict.

Introduction

WTO fisheries talks sit in the Doha Round mandate to curb harmful subsidies. Developing and developed members agree that overfishing is real. They deadlock on who may still subsidise, for how long, and under what special and differential treatment.

Body

What the negotiation is about

- The Doha Development Agenda asked Members to clarify and improve WTO rules on fisheries subsidies, targeting illegal, unreported, and unregulated (IUU) fishing, overfished stocks, and overcapacity.
- The **SDG 14.6** deadline added political heat. Ministerial Conference 12 in 2022 produced a partial Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies. The hardest pillar, overcapacity and overfishing with wide exceptions, was left for later. That leftover is the continuing North-South deadlock.

Reasons for deadlock

- **Historical responsibility:** developing coastal States argue that industrial distant-water fleets of the EU, Japan, the United States, and others built overcapacity. They want policy space for small-scale fishers and for national food security.
- **Special and differential treatment (S&DT):** India and the African, Caribbean and Pacific group seek longer transition periods, higher de minimis thresholds, and exemptions for low-income fishers. Developed Members treat open-ended **S&DT** as a loophole for large

emerging fleets, including China's.

- **IUU listing and determination:** who certifies a vessel as IUU, coastal State or a rich-member list, is a sovereignty fight.
- **Transparency and notification:** weak data in the South meets demands for vessel-level reporting that many administrations cannot yet meet.
- **Livelihood versus export:** Northern conservation NGOs and some developed governments frame a global public good. Southern negotiators frame artisanal employment and protein.
- **Single-undertaking memory:** fisheries was tied to agriculture and industrial market access for years, so mistrust from the wider Doha stall spilled into this file.
- **China's dual status:** a developing-member label with a huge distant-water fleet blurs the old North-South binary and hardens US and EU positions.

Evaluation

- **The deadlock is not ignorance of science. It is distribution:** who pays for conservation with jobs and who keeps fuel and vessel subsidies.
- A ban on IUU and on subsidies to already overfished stocks is the easier moral consensus. Capacity-enhancing subsidies are the class conflict of the world-economy, which Wallerstein's hierarchy helps name.
- Partial legal success at MC12 shows bargaining is possible when the most sensitive **S&DT** and overcapacity texts are parked. Parking is not settlement.

Flow diagram

Doha fisheries mandate -> IUU and overfished stocks and overfished stocks
 Doha fisheries mandate -> Overcapacity subsidies
 S and DT India ACP -> Overcapacity subsidies
 EU US Japan conservation -> Overcapacity subsidies
 Overcapacity subsidies -> North-South deadlock

Conclusion

Fisheries deadlock is a North-South bargain over **S&DT**, historical overcapacity, IUU designation, and China's fleet, not a quarrel about whether fish stocks matter. Until livelihood space for developing coastal States is written in durable exceptions, the Doha fisheries file will keep stalling on the hard pillar.

Facts & figures

Doha fisheries mandate

WTO Members agreed to negotiate to prohibit certain fisheries subsidies that contribute to overcapacity and overfishing.

SDG 14.6

UN target to prohibit harmful fisheries subsidies, used as an external deadline on the WTO talks.

MC12 2022

Partial Agreement on Fisheries Subsidies on IUU and overfished stocks; further negotiation required on overcapacity.

S&DT

Special and differential treatment claims by India and other developing Members for longer phase-outs and artisanal exceptions.

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