



CUTS GLOBAL WEBINAR With the Support of UNCTAD

The G20 Championing the Consumer Movement

Date: 23 August, 2023 Wednesday

Time: 05:30PM - 08:30PM (IST)

02:00 PM- 05:00 PM (CET), 09:00 AM- 12:00 PM (Brazil-BRT)

07:00 PM- 10:00 PM (Indonesia-WIB), 02:00 PM- 05:00 PM (South Africa- SAST)

Background and Context

Consumers are the *raison d'être* of all economic activity. Indeed, in its early years, the G20 focused primarily on financial and macroeconomic issues such as financial market regulation, fiscal policies, and international monetary cooperation. But with the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, consumer protection became an important issue for the G20. It began to recognise the importance of protecting consumers from fraudulent and unfair business practices to promote sustainable economic growth and development. Subsequent G20 summits therefore began to address consumer protection policies, and took a number of initiatives to advance the consumer protection agenda.

In 2011, the G20 summit hosted by the French government highlighted the importance of keeping consumers at the heart of the G20's work. However, the strong impetus emerged during the German G20 Presidency in 2017 when Berlin hosted the inaugural G20 Consumer Summit, focusing on fostering consumer trust in the digital realm. Following the summit, the G20 ministers responsible for digital economy released a statement on April 7th acknowledging the suggestions put forth at the G20 Consumer Summit and highlighting the significance of establishing a trustworthy digital environment for consumers.¹ This success of the first summit quickly paved the way for the second G20 Consumer Summit in Buenos Aires in 2018, held under the Argentinian Presidency of the G20, with the National Directorate for Consumer Protection as the host. Discussions at this summit covered various consumer issues, including child safety in internet-connected products, emerging challenges in product safety, and concerns about food waste.²

Furthermore, in 2019, a G20 International Conference on Consumer Policy took place as a side event of the G20 Osaka Summit.³ During this conference, the G20 countries and affiliated organizations engaged in deliberations on addressing novel consumer issues arising from the rapid advancement of digitalization, progress in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and shared policy challenges among nations.

¹ G20 Digital Economy Ministerial Declaration, G20 Germany 2017. Accessed at www.bmwk.de/Redaktion/DE/Downloads/G/g20-digital-economy-ministerial-declaration-english-version.pdf?__blob=publicationFile&v=1

² Statements from Cohost, G20 Consumer Summit 2018. Accessed at <http://consumersfederation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/G20-Consumer-Summit-statement.pdf>

³ G20 International Conference on Consumer Policy, 2019 G20 Osaka Summit. Accessed at <https://www.pref.tokushima.lg.jp/5026541/5026715/5026815>

Over the years G20 summits have worked on a number of initiatives related to consumer protection, including developing principles for effective consumer dispute resolution, harnessing technology to improve product safety, and sharing information on consumer protection issues related to e-commerce, scams, fake reviews and the digital economy etc.

For example, the 2020 Saudi Arabia G20 summit declaration supports fostering an open, fair, and non-discriminatory environment, and protecting and empowering consumers, while addressing the challenges related to privacy, data protection, intellectual property rights, and security; and discussed measures to protect consumers in the context of the pandemic. It also recognised the contemporary problem of the pandemic which had resulted in large number of fatalities and morbidities among consumers. The next two summits in Rome (2021) and Bali (2022) refined it further to include consumers of the digital economy which had achieved huge significance following the pandemic.

It is needed to reiterate this focus for promoting fair trade practices and help create a more equitable and sustainable global economy for the achievement of SDGs. For this, it is vital to raise the ante on consumer protection, particularly in the Global South as the India G20 summit this year is followed by Brazil (2024) and South Africa (2025).

By promoting fair trade practices, ensuring product safety, encouraging sustainable consumption, and encouraging innovation etc, these nations, leaders of the Global South, can help create a more equitable and sustainable global economy and endeavour for the achievement of SDGs that leave no one behind.