

Trade, Development and the Environment (TRADE) Hub

The issue

The global trade of food, goods, services and technology has broad impacts on society and the environment. Trade is widely recognised as an engine for inclusive economic growth and poverty reduction and key to achieving Sustainable Development Goals. But how can we boost trade while safeguarding the environment and people's wellbeing, particularly in developing countries?

Developing countries, as the main exporters of wildlife and agricultural commodities, depend heavily on healthy ecosystems such as forests and rivers. Most of the Earth's biodiversity hotspots are found in the tropics, often coinciding with vulnerable indigenous communities who face intense pressure from development. While international trade may offer opportunities for local communities, if not accompanied by appropriate policies, it can contribute to biodiversity loss and harm these communities.



This trade challenge has seemed intractable for many years for various reasons including limited scientific evidence on how trade impacts biodiversity and human well-being, or on how the current trade governance system mitigates or exacerbates these impacts. There has been little interaction among scientists, corporations and decision-makers in national and international trade bodies that set the rules, a lack of consultation with farmers in developing countries, and a lack of commitment to integrating biodiversity considerations into trade rules and corporate decision-making.

Increased understanding of the links between trade flows and impacts is fundamental to develop appropriate policies that can steer the world towards a sustainable system of production and consumption.

The response

The TRADE Hub project is a network of scientists, national and international NGOs, government agencies and companies from developing and higher-income countries as a global force for addressing the trade challenge. Drawing from many disciplines, the hub brings to light the positive and negative effects of global trade on biodiversity and society. Scientists from different disciplines from developed and developing countries work with local farmers and forest communities as well as evaluate trade policy and data at national and international level. The aspiration is to create a set of policy options to improve the sustainability of trade at a sourcing level to help reverse biodiversity loss.

The hub is managed by the UN Environment World Conservation Monitoring Centre (UNEP-WCMC), working closely with developing country and UK researchers, corporate partners, trade bodies within the UN system, and international NGOs. A Scientific Advisory Board and Stakeholder Advisory Board guides the project.

The Luc Hoffmann Institute is led the co-design and development of the global theory of change that has guided the first five years of the work programme This process brings together key thought leaders, practitioners and researchers to form a shared understanding of the challenge, in order to channel the Trade HUB's research and resources towards durable, systemic change.

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