



Deliverable 2.4:

Evidence-based policy recommendations for increasing the contribution of multilateral trade rules to the global sustainability by assessing potential options through which trade agreements could contribute to making progress



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TRADE4SD

Fostering the positive linkages between trade and sustainable development

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D2.4. Evidence-based policy recommendations for increasing the contribution of multilateral trade rules to the global sustainability by assessing potential options through which trade agreements could contribute to making progress

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About the TRADE4SD Project

Trade is a central factor in shaping not only global, but also regional and local development. Trade policy has an especially important part to play in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The premise of the TRADE4SD project is that trade has the power to produce positive outcomes when the policies which define the rules of the game are framed and designed in a way to promote access to markets, fair prices and standards of living for farmers, as well as alleviating rural poverty and ensuring sustainable farming practices. Addressing the relation between trade and SDGs requires an integrated approach to policy-making and inclusive governance.

The main objective of the TRADE4SD project is to contribute to build new opportunities for fostering the positive sustainability impacts of trade supported by improved design and framing of trade policy at national, EU and global level, including WTO modernisation, increased policy coherence at different domains including agricultural, energy, climate, environmental and nutritional policies.

To meet this objective, the project will develop an integrated and systematic approach that combines quantitative models from different perspectives, and several qualitative methods recognising that SDGs and trade are highly context-related. On the one hand, a robust analysis of economic, social and environmental impacts is given by using diverse but integrated modelling techniques and qualitative case studies. On the other hand, a wide consultation process is implemented involving stakeholders both in the EU and in partner countries as well as those with a wide international scope of activity, providing opportunities for improved understanding, human capital building, knowledge transfer and dissemination of results. To this extent, the consortium involves, as co-producers of knowledge, a number of research and stakeholder participants with different backgrounds who will use their networks to facilitate the civil society dialogue and build consensus on the subject of gains from trade in view of sustainability.

Project Consortium

No.	Participant Organisation Name	Country
1	Corvinus University of Budapest (CORVINUS)	HU
2	University of Kent (UNIKENT)	UK
3	Consiglio per la Ricerca in Agricoltura e l'Analisi dell'Economia Agraria (CREA)	IT
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6	University of Ghana (UG)	GH
7	Luonnonvarakeskus (LUKE)	FI
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9	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO)	IT
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List of abbreviations

AoA	Agreement on Agriculture
ASF	African Swine Fever
CBD	Convention on Biological Diversity
CV	Customs Valuation
EU	European Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GPA	Agreement on Government Procurement
MBr	Methyl bromide
MS	Member State
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NTM	Non-Tariff Measures
OIE	World Organisation for Animal Health (acronym still used for WOAHA)
SCT	Specific Trade Concern
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SPS	Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures
TBT	Technical Barrier to Trade
TRIM	Trade-Related Investment Measures
TRIPS	Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
UN	United Nations
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNFCCC	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WOAH	World Organisation for Animal Health
WTO	World Trade Organization

Introduction

The aim of this deliverable is to examine the relationship between agreements under the World Trade Organization (WTO) umbrella and other selected multilateral agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity, International Labour Organization's labour standards, and the Paris Agreement, with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The WTO has played a crucial role in mediating international trade relations and promoting liberalization for the past decades, yet it faces intensifying challenges that require innovative solutions. As sustainable approaches are being increasingly recognised as essential, their implementation needs to be substantiated, systematically planned and carried out. Global organisations like the WTO could and should be the catalysts for these solutions. Therefore, it is important to understand whether and to what extent they declare and implement sustainable approaches, and how these processes can be intensified in trade.

To assess how sustainable development goals are being achieved by various multilateral agreements, both under the WTO and in addressing specific development problems, this deliverable includes an analysis of major multilateral agreements. This analysis covers fundamental agreements such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and the establishment of the WTO itself, as well as the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), the Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS), the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (SCM), the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), the Agreement on Customs Valuation (ACV), and the Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs), among others.

Extensive research on the WTO highlighted within the analysis shows its crucial role in shaping global trade policies, which are integral to the functioning of the global economy. Critical analyses emphasise the need for reforms to ensure that the WTO can effectively address contemporary economic and social challenges, promoting fair and equitable trade practices. The focus on social sustainability issues within WTO research underscores the organisation's potential impact on societal well-being, advocating for inclusive economic growth. By addressing controversies and proposing reforms, the research contributes to the ongoing evolution and modernization of the WTO, aiming to enhance its relevance and effectiveness in a rapidly changing world.

It is important to point out, that beside the summaries and conclusions present in particular chapters of this deliverable, as well as general conclusions and recommendations, there is also a Policy Brief included being the final summarising output (Annex II. Policy Brief).

1 World Trade Organization in the view of recent research

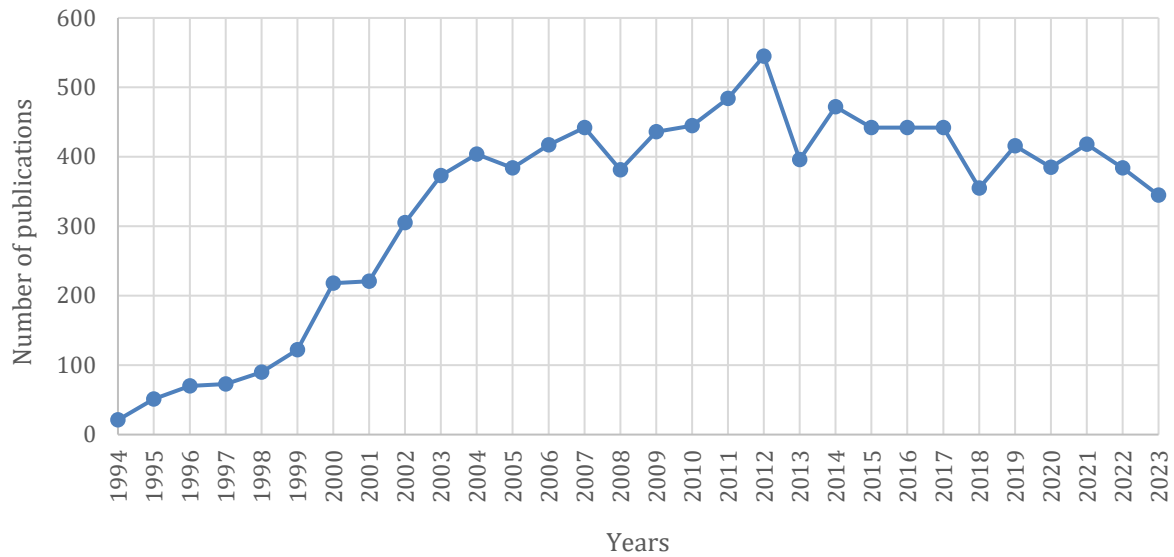
The World Trade Organization struggles with many challenges in its modernisation process, reflecting deep-seated issues within the global trading system. These challenges include the deadlock in negotiations, notably the Doha Development Agenda, and the paralysis of the dispute settlement mechanism due to the U.S. blocking the appointment of new Appellate Body members (Wu, 2023). The organisation also faces systemic issues that undermine its effectiveness, such as difficulties in enforcing disciplines, ensuring transparency, and adapting to emerging issues like climate change and digitalisation (Hoekman and Mavroidis, 2021; Low, 2022). The crisis in the dispute settlement mechanism, exacerbated by the stance of the United States has led to calls for urgent reform to save the WTO from a survival crisis (Low 2022). Moreover, the WTO's relevance is threatened by its inability to address new and developing challenges, including the aforementioned climate change, digital economy, as well as the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic (Khan et al. 2021). Nevertheless, the organisation “grapples with the relationship between trade, sustainability standards, and SDGs, reflecting on how international trade can be aligned with sustainable development objectives”, as Negi (2020) states.

Some researchers are more critical in this matter. Wolff (2023) stresses, that the very existence of the rules-based trading system is under threat, highlighting the need for reforms to address these challenges. Efforts to address these challenges include proposals to increase the flexibility of the negotiation mechanism, establish new trade regulations, and strengthen the WTO's review and supervision functions (Sampson, 2018). Additionally, there is a push for the WTO to adapt to the changing global landscape by addressing trade and health, subsidies, and the relationship between states and markets (Evenett, 2018). However, the organisation's struggle to remain the go-to place for trade negotiations underscores the urgency of reform (Mavroidis, 2022).

Addressing the legitimacy and relevance of the WTO's dispute settlement mechanism is crucial but not sufficient to resolve the wider crisis facing the organisation (Charnovitz, 2020). The fundamental challenges to the intellectual case for open trade, including concerns about ecology, fairness, and geopolitics, further complicate the WTO's modernisation efforts. Collectively, these challenges underscore the complexity of reforming the WTO and the need for a multifaceted approach to ensure its continued relevance in the global trading system.

While the WTO was established based on the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on 1st January 1995, its expected appearance was discussed in publications before that moment. In year 1994, there were already 21 publications (*Figure 1*), yet the number of publications devoted to the WTO peaked in 2012, when 545 such studies were published. Since then, their numbers oscillated between 472 (in 2014) and 345 (in 2023), with an overall slight downward trend after the year 2012.

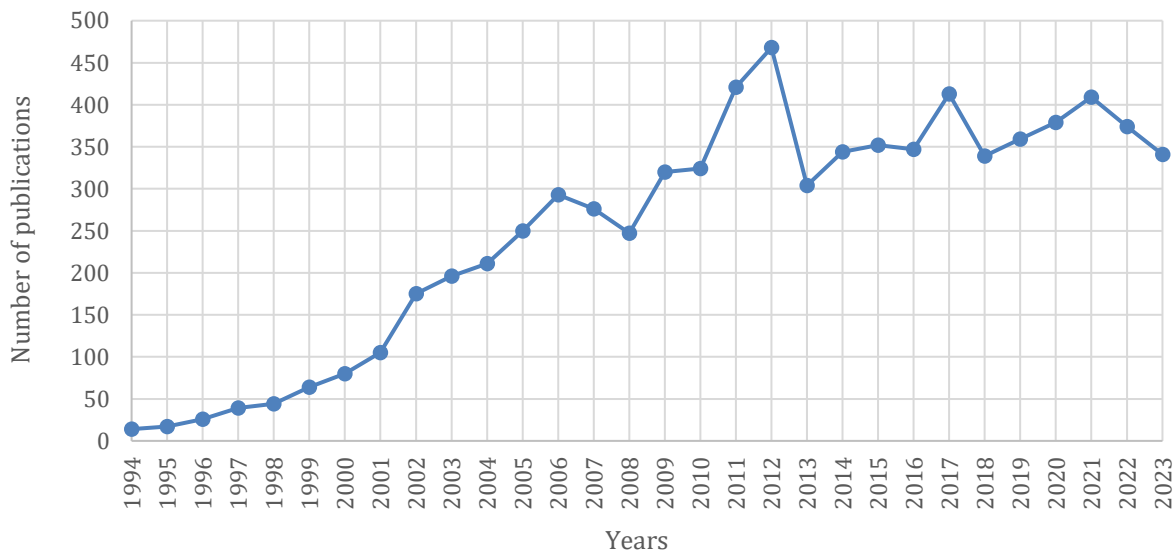
Figure 1. Number of scientific publications on WTO within the SCOPUS database, 1994-2023



Source: Based on the SCOPUS query: “(((TITLE-ABS-KEY("World Trade Organi*") ALL(.)))”.

At the same time a growing number of publications focusing on critical review of the WTO, stating controversies or discussing reforms of this organisation (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Number of critical publications on the WTO within the SCOPUS database, 1994-2023

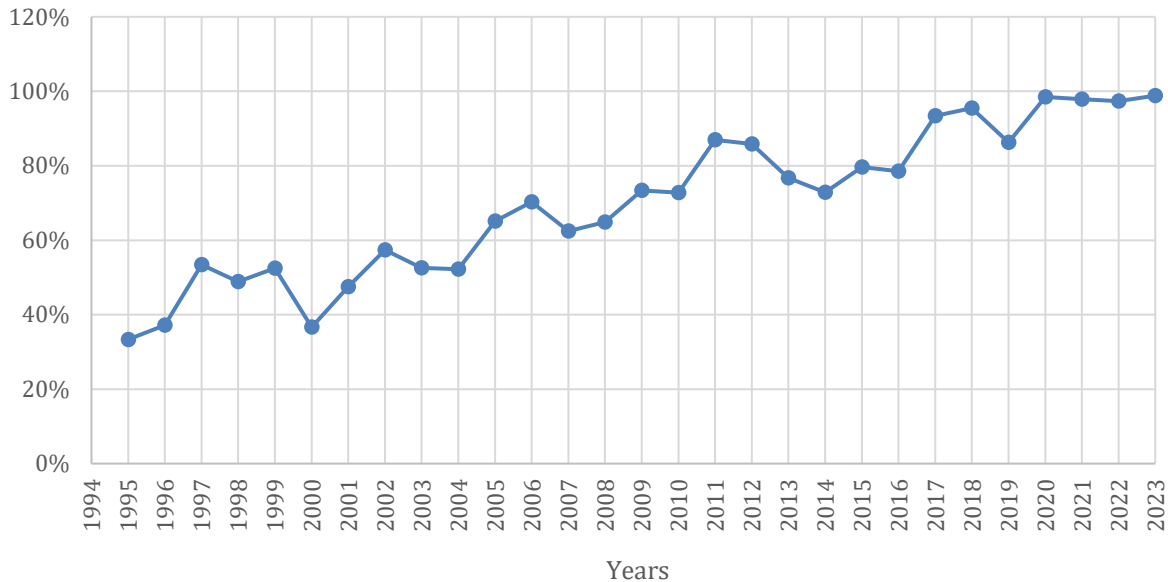


Source: Based on the SCOPUS query: “(((TITLE-ABS-KEY (World Trade Organi*) AND (critic* OR controvers* OR reform*)))”.

Results show that the number of critical scientific publications has been growing rapidly and their share increased to nearly 100% in the recent years (Figure 3), showing the growing need for changes in functioning of the WTO. The lowest share of negative publications about WTO was at the very beginning in 1995 (33% of all WTO publications) and in 2000 (37%). However, since the latter,

the trend was upward and since 2015 that percentage was not less 80% and now practically all the publications are focusing on either critic, controversy or the issues of reforms.

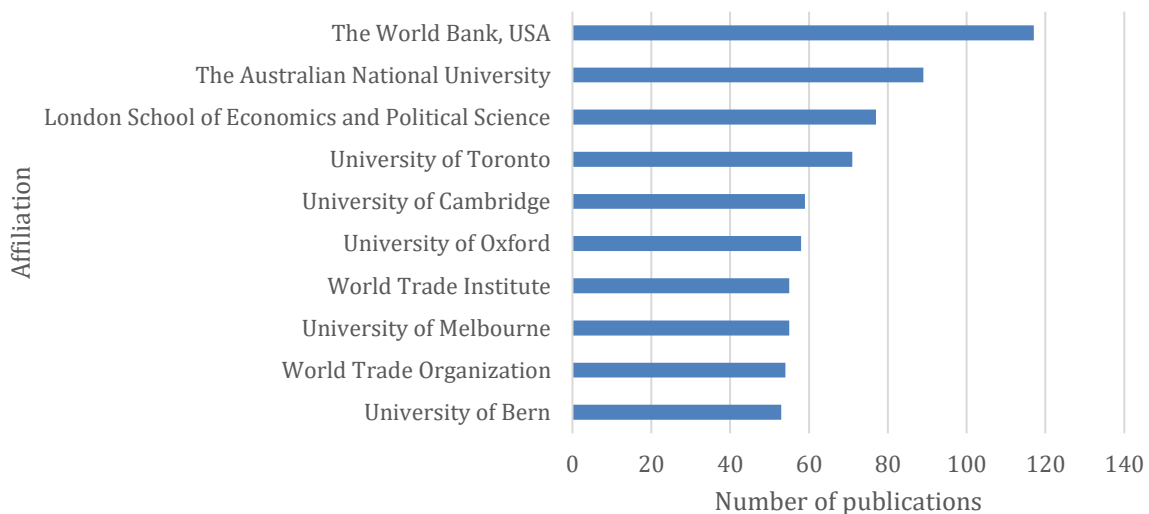
Figure 3. Percentage of critical publications in all publications on the WTO within the SCOPUS database



Source: Own calculations based on the SCOPUS data.

In term of key publishers of these critical publications (*Table 4*), the leaders are the World Bank (117 publications), the Australian National University (89 publications) and the London School of Economics and Political Science (77 publications). The World Trade Organization itself is among the key discussants of the existing issues (with a total of 54 publications).

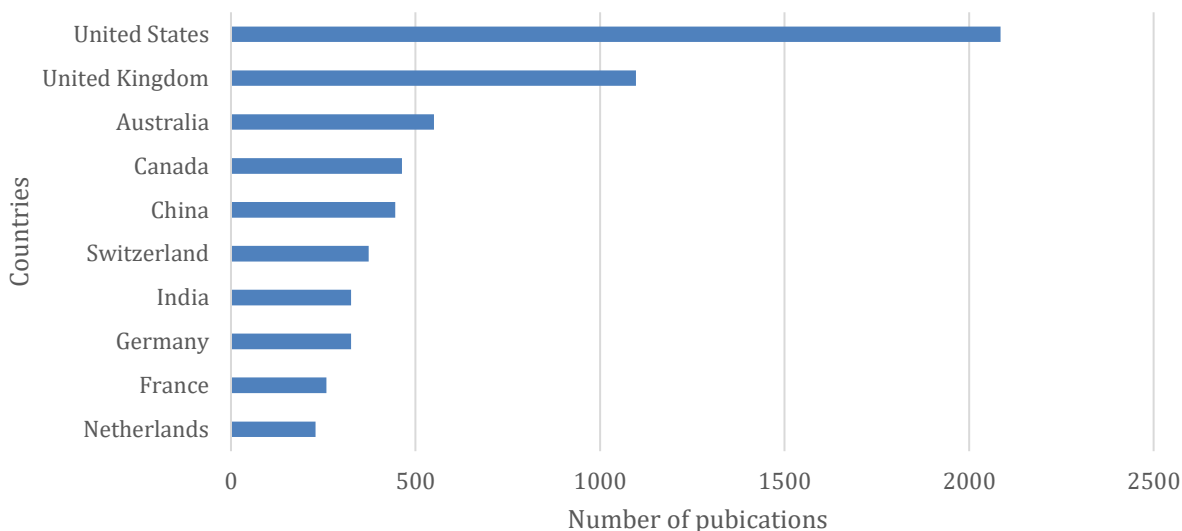
Figure 4. Top organisations contributing to the critical review of the WTO



Source: Own elaboration based on the SCOPUS data.

Thus, geographic distribution of the critical publications is close to the (*Figure 5*) distribution by affiliations, yet also allows to see the intensity of institutions in a particular country with which they contribute to the subjects of WTO development.

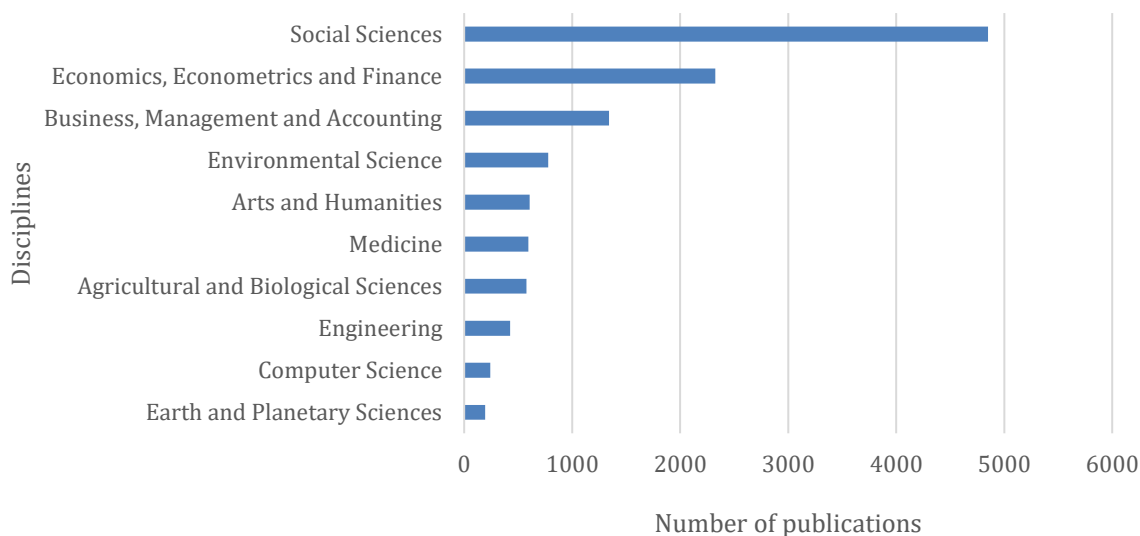
Figure 5. Top countries contributing to the critical review of the WTO



Source: Own elaboration based on the SCOPUS data.

Looking from the perspective of the Sustainable Development Goals and the typical triad of sustainability – economic, social, and environmental (*Figure 6*) – it is the social issues and approaches that are gaining most attention, with economics and business coming as second and third, while the environmental aspects are placed fourth.

Figure 6. Top scientific disciplines contributing to the critical review of the WTO



Source: Own elaboration based on the SCOPUS data.

In conclusion, establishment of the WTO in 1995 (based on the GATT), was widely anticipated and discussed in academic publications even before its inception. The peak in scholarly attention occurred in 2012, when the Doha Development Round has been nearing its finalisation, reflecting significant global interest and the need for comprehensive research on the organisation's role and impact. Over time, there has been a marked increase in critical analyses of the WTO, emphasising the need for reform and highlighting various existing controversies. This growing body of critical literature emphasises the importance of addressing the organization's challenges and evolving its framework to better meet contemporary global needs. Leading academic and financial institutions, including the World Bank and prominent universities, have played a crucial role in contributing to this discourse, with a particular focus on social sustainability issues, which have gained the most attention compared to economic and environmental aspects.

2 Analysis of the WTO and other selected multilateral agreements in the context of Sustainable Development Goals

2.1 Method for matching the WTO and other multilateral agreements with SDGs

The method used within this research for linking the WTO and other multilateral agreements with SDGs stems from the scientific research conducted by Roberge et al. (2022), building upon the mapping framework established within the “AURORA: SDG Analysis” project, as detailed by Rivest et al. (2021). The AURORA consortium, comprising of 20 prominent European universities, defined a set of keywords instrumental in identifying research relevant to SDGs. They applied both expert knowledge and machine learning approach. Their comprehensive findings include an SDG keyword dictionary, SDG specific queries, relationship diagrams, and an assessment of the relative impact of each SDG (example of a query - *Figure 7*).

Figure 7. An example of selected part of query for SDG 1

```
(((((TITLE-ABS("unesco") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty") AND TITLE-ABS("program")) OR(AUTHKEY("unesco") AND AUTHKEY("poverty") AND AUTHKEY("program")) OR(TITLE-ABS("poverty*-reducing* polic*") OR TITLE-ABS("povertyreducing* polic*")) OR(AUTHKEY("poverty*-reducing* polic*") OR AUTHKEY("povertyreducing* polic*")) OR(TITLE-ABS("foreign aid") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("foreign aid") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("united nations") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty") AND TITLE-ABS("program")) OR(AUTHKEY("united nations") AND AUTHKEY("poverty") AND AUTHKEY("program")) OR(TITLE-ABS("international aid") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("international aid") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("world bank") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("world bank") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("humanitarian* assist*") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("humanitarian* assist*") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("international support") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("international support") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("gender* inequit*") AND(TITLE-ABS("policy") OR TITLE-ABS("policies")))) OR(AUTHKEY("gender* inequit*") AND(AUTHKEY("policy") OR AUTHKEY("policies")))) OR(TITLE-ABS("humanitarian aid") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("humanitarian aid") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("NGOs") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("NGOs") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("unicef") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty") AND TITLE-ABS("program")) OR(AUTHKEY("unicef") AND AUTHKEY("poverty") AND AUTHKEY("program")) OR(TITLE-ABS("international program") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("international program") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("food bank") OR TITLE-ABS("food banks")) OR(AUTHKEY("food bank") OR AUTHKEY("food banks")) OR(TITLE-ABS("Development* strateg*") AND(TITLE-ABS("poverty") OR TITLE-ABS("developing* countr*")))) OR(AUTHKEY("Development* strateg*") AND(AUTHKEY("poverty") OR AUTHKEY("developing* countr*")))) OR(TITLE-ABS("international support") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("international support") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("international development") AND TITLE-ABS("poverty")) OR(AUTHKEY("international development") AND AUTHKEY("poverty")) OR(TITLE-ABS("gender* inequit*") AND(TITLE-ABS("strategy") OR
```

Source: Rivest et al. (2021).

This method underwent further development by Elsevier in 2021, which utilised it to rank scientific papers based on their contributions to SDGs. The keyword queries developed are adept at associating a single paper with multiple SDGs, accomplished through tailored wording queries specific to each SDG. Essentially, these queries serve as precise instructions for identifying relevant content within Elsevier’s database, with statistics tracking how frequently the queries retrieve sections of papers pertaining to specific SDGs, thereby informing the ranking process (*Table 1*).

Building upon the esteemed reputation of the AURORA project in mapping SDGs to research and the involvement of Elsevier in linking SDGs with scientific papers, we applied this method to analyse the key WTO and other selected documents. Leveraging the MAXQDA software, which enables the customisation of queries for a corpus of downloaded documents, we conducted both qualitative and quantitative analyses. MAXQDA software allowed to facilitate detailed examinations of context and keyword statistics within each document, allowing categorisation of the documents by their contribution to SDGs. Further elaboration on the procedural aspects of our analysis is provided in the subsequent chapter.

Table 1. Examples of key phrases specific to SDGs 1-16

y=SDG_1 top features		y=SDG_2 top features		y=SDG_3 top features		y=SDG_4 top features	
Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature
+21.044	poverty	+33.436	malnutrition	+34.931	cancer	+15.111	trainees
+14.252	social protection	+23.868	biological control	+24.521	aids	+13.774	apprenticeship
+13.817	health insurance	+22.278	food security	+24.356	stroke	+13.252	professional training
+13.299	social welfare	+17.251	domestication	+19.369	diabetes	+13.159	educational needs
+11.528	welfare	+16.118	organic systems	+18.776	obesity	+11.812	distance learning
+11.474	social security	+13.875	stunting	+14.797	hiv	+11.502	educational strategies
+9.707	pension	+13.436	agroforestry	+14.597	suicide	+11.341	school environment
+8.768	social policy	+13.192	biocontrol	+12.971	asthma	+10.805	trainee
+8.645	unemployment	+12.826	agricultural	+12.735	carcinoma	+10.801	professional education
+8.542	social investment	+12.382	undernutrition	+11.836	tuberculosis	+10.642	special education
... 18725 more positive 21149 more positive 20057 more positive 17511 more positive ...	
... 31265 more negative 28841 more negative 29933 more negative 32479 more negative ...	

y=SDG_5 top features		y=SDG_6 top features		y=SDG_7 top features		y=SDG_8 top features	
Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature
+16.618	gender	+39.045	wastewater	+17.324	photovoltaic	+36.035	human capital
+15.297	std	+21.988	water management	+16.966	energy efficiency	+29.453	labor market
+12.871	women	+21.345	water quality	+15.795	biodiesel	+28.401	labour market
+11.732	sexism	+17.758	desalination	+15.161	internet things	+28.290	crop productivity
+10.858	feminist	+16.752	waste water	+14.837	biofuel	+28.089	economic development
+10.353	aggression	+15.573	activated sludge	+13.664	energy efficient	+22.632	economic growth
+9.282	marginalized	+14.617	water pollution	+12.741	fuel cell	+21.139	occupational safety
+8.914	gender issues	+14.358	wastewaters	+12.050	solar cells	+14.076	productivity
+8.808	sexual risk	+13.479	water	+12.030	hydropower	+13.452	environmental economic
+8.320	hypersexuality	+13.305	sanitation	+11.832	geothermal	+13.381	sustainable development
... 17273 more positive 20577 more positive 19044 more positive 21107 more positive ...	
... 32717 more negative 29413 more negative 30946 more negative 28883 more negative ...	

y=SDG_9 top features		y=SDG_10 top features		y=SDG_11 top features		y=SDG_12 top features	
Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature
+18.156	infrastructure	+31.958	medicaid	+23.221	solid waste	+66.999	recycling
+17.758	manufacturing	+29.778	social justice	+20.248	urban	+41.981	recycle
+17.095	internet access	+29.590	financial crisis	+16.090	road network	+21.913	composting
+15.463	industrial	+24.676	social integration	+14.984	earthquake	+21.610	waste disposal
+14.993	microfabrication	+21.534	social inclusion	+14.940	heritage	+19.337	sustainable production
+14.575	prototyping	+18.431	disparities	+14.782	natural disasters	+17.011	vermicompost
+13.662	industry	+14.788	social mobility	+13.767	urban development	+16.406	food preservation
+13.354	innovative	+14.077	health disparities	+13.548	public transport	+15.981	waste
+13.228	micromachining	+13.441	social inequality	+12.950	intelligent transportation	+14.254	hazardous waste
+13.104	nanofabrication	+13.341	financial stability	+12.108	urban planning	+14.248	tourism
... 21202 more positive 19987 more positive 21288 more positive 21797 more positive ...	
... 28788 more negative 30003 more negative 28702 more negative 28193 more negative ...	

y=SDG_13 top features		y=SDG_14 top features		y=SDG_15 top features		y=SDG_16 top features	
Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature	Weight [?]	Feature
+26.611	climate change	+19.683	marine	+27.680	bioremediation	+27.484	human rights
+19.354	co2	+15.216	oil spill	+20.276	extinction	+21.357	corruption
+17.595	co2 emissions	+14.320	conservation	+18.061	conservation	+15.546	community engagement
+16.452	climate warming	+13.627	coastal	+16.976	phytoremediation	+14.672	community participation
+16.402	greenhouse gas	+12.497	spill	+16.319	invasive	+14.521	child welfare
+16.056	global warming	+12.412	phosphorus removal	+15.548	endangered	+14.388	rule law
+14.218	global climate	+11.767	sea	+13.277	afforestation	+13.531	mafia
+12.532	emission	+11.028	bloom	+13.076	reforestation	+12.922	participatory
+12.515	co2 emission	+10.850	blooms	+11.328	soil conservation	+12.664	homicide
+12.257	warming	+10.719	fisheries management	+10.892	desertification	+12.556	community involvement
... 20743 more positive 20987 more positive 21333 more positive 18888 more positive ...	
... 29247 more negative 29003 more negative 28657 more negative 31102 more negative ...	

Source: Elsevier (2021).

2.2 Trade-SDG matrix: mapping the SDGs in selected multilateral agreements

A retrospective quantitative textual analysis of 20 agreements (17 WTO and 3 other multilateral agreements) was carried out focusing on the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The list of analysed documents is provided below:

1. World Trade Organization, 1995. Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization. Marrakesh.
2. World Trade Organization, 1947. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. Geneva.
3. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Agriculture. Marrakesh: WTO.
4. World Trade Organization, 1995. Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures. Marrakesh.
5. World Trade Organization, 1995. Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade. Marrakesh.
6. World Trade Organization, 1995. Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures. Marrakesh.
7. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 (Anti-Dumping). Marrakesh.
8. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 (Customs Valuation). Marrakesh.
9. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Preshipment Inspection. Marrakesh.
10. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Rules of Origin. Marrakesh.
11. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures. Marrakesh.
12. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures. Marrakesh.
13. World Trade Organization, 1994. Agreement on Safeguards. Marrakesh.
14. World Trade Organization, 2014. Protocol Amending the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (Agreement on Trade Facilitation). Geneva.
15. World Trade Organization, 1995. General Agreement on Trade in Services. Marrakesh.
16. World Trade Organization, 2017. Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (as amended on 23 January 2017). Geneva.
17. World Trade Organization, 2012. Agreement on Government Procurement as amended on 30 March 2012. Geneva.
18. Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992. Convention on Biological Diversity. Montreal.
19. International Labour Organization, 2022. ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (amended 2022). Geneva.
20. United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015. Paris Agreement. Paris.

For each SDG a list of keywords and phrases was applied to capture the essence of that particular SDG. Based on 21531 keywords and phrases, documents were coded to identify part of texts that refer to the given SDGs without directly mentioning them (*Table 2*). Such analysis allowed to recognise SDG priorities in the agreements, even in ones arranged years before the creation of the SDGs.

Table 2. Keyword and phrases related to the SDGs

SDGs	SDG name	Number of specific keywords and phrases related to a given SDG
SDG 1	No Poverty	468
SDG 2	Zero Hunger	1126
SDG 3	Good Health	2391
SDG 4	Quality Education	792
SDG 5	Gender Equality	780
SDG 6	Clean Water & Sanitation	1800
SDG 7	Affordable & Clean Energy	2465
SDG 8	Decent Work & Economic Growth	822
SDG 9	Industry & Innovation	946
SDG 10	Reduced Inequality	1712
SDG 11	Sustainable Cities	1078
SDG 12	Responsible Consumption	698
SDG 13	Climate Action	1333
SDG 14	Life Below Water	2144
SDG 15	Life on Land	1446
SDG 16	Peace & Justice	1168
SDG 17	Partnerships for Goals	362

Source: based on the “AURORA: SDG Analysis” project, as detailed by Rivest et al. (2021).

This analysis aims to provide a structured and evidence-based assessment of the alignment between WTO and other selected agreements with the SDGs. While acknowledging the limitations, this approach seeks to offer meaningful insight and visualisation on how international trade policies, as articulated in mentioned agreements, intersect with global sustainable development objectives. The primary data for this analysis comes from a result generated by MAXQDA, a qualitative data analysis software. Presented below (*Table 3*) are the outcomes of MAXQDA coding, revealing the primary focus of agreements in relation to the SDGs.

It is important to point out the visualisation method (colouring), as the range is applied for each document separately, depending on the number of detected references. As the numbers for each document differs greatly, it would be problematic to apply a comprehensive colour range for absolute numbers, thus the approach to create the dedicated scale for each of the documents was decided upon.

Table 3. Trade-SDG matrix based on the reference detection method

Agreements	Sustainable Development Goals																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
WTO 01: WTO Agreement 1995	41	33	20	45	59	29	27	155	1	29	36	17	1	37	123	18	17
WTO 02: 1A GATT 1947	162	409	142	267	273	153	181	518	2	162	300	201	0	237	246	103	40
WTO 03: 1A Agreement on Agriculture	192	922	53	178	207	186	78	112	0	42	274	246	16	121	212	56	41
WTO 04: 1A Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures	86	97	99	123	99	169	110	77	0	32	105	80	1	115	81	30	15
WTO 05: 1A Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade	48	113	58	176	174	41	98	193	0	106	68	75	11	110	115	107	32
WTO 06: 1A Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures	11	28	11	26	18	10	26	39	0	11	9	19	0	7	24	11	7
WTO 07: 1A Anti-dumping	13	222	31	50	161	60	102	138	0	18	135	142	1	84	46	70	3
WTO 08: 1A Customs valuation	26	117	27	92	113	24	50	70	1	36	30	81	0	37	72	100	17
WTO 09: 1A Agreement on Preshipment Inspection	12	12	14	27	74	13	15	37	0	27	22	12	5	31	30	25	2
WTO 10: 1A Agreement on Rules of Origin	22	20	10	59	61	11	19	80	0	20	5	26	1	24	37	20	2
WTO 11: 1A Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures	10	16	17	26	54	3	4	39	0	18	8	7	0	17	20	19	7
WTO 12: 1A Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures	123	440	123	270	306	102	215	316	3	88	237	240	3	286	119	106	43
WTO 13: 1A Agreement on Safeguards	3	42	7	36	48	14	34	57	0	10	73	24	0	10	40	6	5
WTO 14: 1A Agreement on Trade Facilitation	80	45	58	204	263	79	104	195	0	132	170	192	6	169	138	142	108
WTO 15: 1B GATS	195	189	63	230	522	154	505	277	23	114	390	122	2	145	168	55	33
WTO 16: 1C TRIPS	136	206	50	158	336	276	137	282	1	66	270	201	1	202	186	51	8
WTO 17: 4B Plurilateral Government procurement	402	490	104	611	997	225	347	547	2	161	376	658	20	336	454	280	70
18 Other: Convention on Biological Diversity	219	254	71	446	419	204	409	289	5	76	263	308	66	430	547	58	38
19 Other: ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights	127	31	54	206	177	31	53	332	2	16	77	62	17	50	86	38	5
20 Other: Paris Agreement on Climate	205	163	95	365	197	85	145	290	25	77	365	194	168	182	188	67	128

Source: own research results.

3 Meta-analysis of selected multilateral agreements

3.1 WTO - Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (1995)

The Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (WTO) (1995) is foundational to the modern structure of international trade. It sets out the legal groundwork for the WTO as an organisation and for the trade agreements under its umbrella. Given the nature of the WTO Agreement, which primarily focuses on trade regulations, the links to SDGs are implicit, generally conceptual, focusing on overarching principles and general expressions rather than specific indicators or detailed practical measures. Those links are found within the broader context of promoting sustainable development, environmental protection, economic growth and equality.

Most connections of agreement are identified with SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The preamble of the agreement emphasises cooperation among member states to achieve sustainable development and improve living standards through trade. The WTO's commitment to providing a forum for trade negotiations and dispute resolution supports SDG 17 by fostering international partnerships aimed at sustainable economic growth and development. It recognises the importance of trade and economic relationships conducted with a view towards raising standards of living, ensuring full employment, and expanding trade in goods and services, all in line with the objective of sustainable development. This is articulated as follows:

“Recognizing that their relations in the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, and expanding the production of and trade in goods and services, while allowing for the optimal use of the world’s resources in accordance with the objective of sustainable development, seeking both to protect and preserve the environment and to enhance the means for doing so in a manner consistent with their respective needs and concerns at different levels of economic development, ...” (World Trade Organization, 1995, p. 1).

SDG 15 (Life on Land) and SDG 14 (Life Below Water) are not explicitly addressed. However, the acknowledgment of sustainable development principles (*“...allowing for the optimal use of the world’s resources in accordance with the objective of sustainable development, ...”* (World Trade Organization, 1995, p. 1)) suggests an indirect link to those SDGs.

The agreement's objectives to raise standards of living, ensure full employment, and foster economic growth are also in line with SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). By promoting fair and equitable trade (*“...the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international trade relations...”* (World Trade Organization, 1995, p. 1)), the WTO contributes to creating more and better employment opportunities and supports sustained, inclusive economic growth (*“...the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment...”* (World Trade Organization, 1995, p. 1)).

In summary, the WTO Agreement of 1995 addresses the SDGs conceptually, through its preamble and underlying principles that advocate for sustainable development, environmental protection, economic equity, and partnerships. The connections are mostly indirect, framed within the broader context of trade policy rather than specific indicators or explicit mentions of environmental or social goals.

3.2 WTO - The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (1947)

The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (World Trade Organization, 1947), commonly known as GATT 1947, is a landmark agreement that laid the foundation for the WTO. It primarily aimed to reduce tariffs and other trade barriers, and to eliminate preferential trade agreements. When viewed through the lens of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), provides a unique perspective on how early trade agreements contributed to achieving contemporary global sustainability and development aims. Specifically, GATT's alignment with SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities) showcases the integral role of international trade frameworks in promoting sustainable development.

GATT fosters the realization of SDG 17 by promoting effective public, public-private, and civil society partnerships. It encourages cooperation among contracting parties and with international organisations, such as the United Nations and the International Monetary Fund, to ensure that trade policies are aligned with broader development objectives. This collaboration aims to create a coherent policy environment that supports the achievement of the SDGs through international trade.

“...seek appropriate collaboration in matters of trade and development policy with the United Nations and its organs and agencies, including any institutions that may be created on the basis of recommendations by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development”(World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 45).

“The CONTRACTING PARTIES shall seek co-operation with the International Monetary Fund to the end that the CONTRACTING PARTIES and the Fund may pursue a co-ordinated policy with regard to exchange questions within the jurisdiction of the Fund and questions of quantitative restrictions and other trade measures within the jurisdiction of the CONTRACTING PARTIES” (World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 19).

GATT conceptually and practically contributes to reducing inequality within and among countries (SDG 10) by facilitating equitable trade practices and supporting economic development in less-developed contracting parties. It acknowledges the interconnections between trade, financial assistance, and development, emphasising the need for collaboration with international financial institutions to support the economic advancement of developing countries. Through these mechanisms, GATT aims to ensure that all countries, especially those less developed, have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from global trade.

“Being desirous of contributing to these objectives by entering into reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements directed to the substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and to the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international commerce”(World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 2).

“Given the continued dependence of many less-developed contracting parties on the exportation of a limited range of primary products, there is need to provide in the largest possible measure more favourable and acceptable conditions of access to world markets for these products, and wherever appropriate to devise measures designed to stabilize and improve conditions of world markets in these products, including in particular measures designed to attain stable, equitable and remunerative prices, thus permitting an expansion of world trade and demand and a dynamic and steady growth of the real export earnings of these countries so as to provide them with expanding resources for their economic development”* (World Trade Organization, 1947, pp. 41–42).

“Because of the chronic deficiency in the export proceeds and other foreign exchange earnings of less-developed contracting parties, there are important inter-relationships between trade and financial assistance to development. There is, therefore, need for close and continuing collaboration between the CONTRACTING PARTIES and the international lending agencies so that they can contribute most effectively to alleviating the burdens these less-developed contracting parties assume in the interest of their economic development” (World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 42).

GATT’s contributions to promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all (SDG 8) are evident through its efforts to liberalise trade. By reducing tariffs and other trade barriers, GATT aims to enhance market access, thereby fostering economic growth and employment opportunities. The agreement recognises the essential role of international trade in achieving economic advancement and social progress. It underscores the importance of equitable trade policies and practices that ensure developing countries can benefit from global trade, thereby indirectly supporting decent work and economic growth.

“Recognizing that their relations in the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, developing the full use of the resources of the world and expanding the production and exchange of goods” (World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 2).

The GATT also addresses conceptually SDG 9 by suggesting that economic policies should support the processing of primary products and the development of manufacturing industries, taking into account global production and consumption trends. This approach aligns with SDG 9’s focus on building a sustainable industrial sector and encouraging innovation through international trade.

“A diversification programme would generally include the intensification of activities for the processing of primary products and the development of manufacturing industries, taking into account the situation of the particular contracting party and the world outlook for production and consumption of different commodities” (World Trade Organization, 1947, p. 65).

In conclusion, the GATT, through its principles and provisions, conceptually and practically engages with the Sustainable Development Goals, providing a framework that supports economic growth, sustainable industrialisation, reduced inequalities, and the formation of global partnerships. While the agreement primarily focuses on trade, its implications for sustainable development are noticeable, demonstrating how international trade agreements can be leveraged to advance the SDGs.

3.3 WTO - Agreement on Agriculture

The Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), established under the WTO, significantly reformed trade in the agricultural sector. It aimed to improve market access for agricultural products, reduce trade-distorting subsidies, and address issues related to agricultural export competition.

The Agreement itself is a result of multilateral negotiations and represents a commitment to global partnership (SDG17). It emphasises cooperation, technical assistance, and capacity building, especially for developing countries.

“In keeping with the recognition that differential and more favourable treatment for developing country Members is an integral part of the negotiation, special and differential treatment in respect

of commitments shall be provided as set out in the relevant provisions of this Agreement and embodied in the Schedules of concessions and commitments. Developing country Members shall have the flexibility to implement reduction commitments over a period of up to 10 years. Least-developed country Members shall not be required to undertake reduction commitments”(World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 15).

“Developed country Members shall take such action as is provided for within the framework of the Decision on Measures Concerning the Possible Negative Effects of the Reform Programme on Least-Developed and Net Food-Importing Developing Countries.”(World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 12)

The World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) directly supports Sustainable Development Goal 2 (Zero Hunger) through provisions on "Public stockholding for food security purposes" and "Domestic food aid." These sections of the agreement acknowledge the critical role of government interventions in ensuring food security and providing aid to those in need, aligning with efforts to eliminate hunger and enhance food accessibility.

“Expenditures (or revenue foregone) in relation to the accumulation and holding of stocks of products which form an integral part of a food security programme identified in national legislation. This may include government aid to private storage of products as part of such a programme. The volume and accumulation of such stocks shall correspond to predetermined targets related solely to food security. The process of stock accumulation and disposal shall be financially transparent. Food purchases by the government shall be made at current market prices and sales from food security stocks shall be made at no less than the current domestic market price for the product and quality in question” (World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 13).

“Expenditures (or revenue foregone) in relation to the provision of domestic food aid to sections of the population in need. Eligibility to receive the food aid shall be subject to clearly-defined criteria related to nutritional objectives. Such aid shall be in the form of direct provision of food to those concerned or the provision of means to allow eligible recipients to buy food either at market or at subsidized prices. Food purchases by the government shall be made at current market prices and the financing and administration of the aid shall be transparent” (World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 13).

The AoA also includes measures aimed at preventing the circumvention of export subsidy commitments, ensuring that food aid is not used as a disguise for commercial exports, and that export prohibitions or restrictions on foodstuffs take into account the effects on importing Members’ food security. Specifically, Article 10 emphasises the regulation of export subsidies, food aid, and export restrictions with the objective of maintaining global food security and ensuring that agricultural trade practices contribute positively to the availability of food.

“Export subsidies not listed in paragraph 1 of Article 9 shall not be applied in a manner which results in, or which threatens to lead to, circumvention of export subsidy commitments; nor shall non-commercial transactions be used to circumvent such commitments” (World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 9).

“the Member instituting the export prohibition or restriction shall give due consideration to the effects of such prohibition or restriction on importing Members’ food security” (World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 11)

The AoA directly influences economic growth and employment in the agricultural sector, notably through provisions on market price support. These rules aim to stabilise agricultural markets, ensuring fair trade practices and contributing to sustainable economic development—a key aspect of SDG 8. The AoA specifies how market price support should be calculated, emphasising the gap between a fixed external reference price and the applied administered price, multiplied by the quantity of eligible production. This mechanism is designed to provide predictable support to farmers without distorting market prices, thus fostering an equitable environment for agricultural trade:

“Market price support: market price support shall be calculated using the gap between a fixed external reference price and the applied administered price multiplied by the quantity of production eligible to receive the applied administered price”(World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 16).

While the Agreement on Agriculture does not directly address education (SDG4), improved economic conditions through fair trade can indirectly support better education outcomes by enabling more significant investments in education systems. Nonetheless, the support payments outlined in the agreement include *“...training services, including both general and specialist training facilities”* (World Trade Organization, 1994, p. 12) which can also indirectly support the education of adults in rural communities.

In conclusion, the World Trade Organization’s Agreement on Agriculture, through its structured commitments and guidelines, conceptually and practically aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals. It offers a supportive framework for addressing key global challenges such as hunger, economic growth, and international cooperation. Although the agreement is centred on agricultural trade, its broader implications for sustainable development are evident. This showcases the potential of international trade agreements to contribute significantly to the advancement of the SDGs, highlighting the role of trade as a vital tool in promoting sustainable development and global partnerships.

3.4 WTO - Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures

The Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS) under the WTO sets guidelines for food safety and animal and plant health standards. It aims to ensure that governments do not use these standards as unjustified trade barriers while maintaining the right to protect human, animal, and plant life and health.

The provisions of the SPS Agreement encompass the protection of animal and plant life or health across both aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, contributing to the conservation and sustainable utilisation of lands, oceans, and natural resources. This agreement underscores measures aimed at safeguarding against risks posed by diseases, pests, and contaminants, which hold substantial implications for biodiversity and sustainability on land and in marine environments. The agreement’s interpretation of Sanitary or Phytosanitary measures directly advances the objectives of SDGs 3, 14, and 15, supporting health and well-being, life below water, and life on land:

“Sanitary or phytosanitary measure - Any measure applied:

(a) to protect animal or plant life or health within the territory of the Member from risks arising from the entry, establishment or spread of pests, diseases, disease-carrying organisms or disease-causing organisms;

(b) *to protect human or animal life or health within the territory of the Member from risks arising from additives, contaminants, toxins or disease-causing organisms in foods, beverages or feedstuffs;*

(c) *to protect human life or health within the territory of the Member from risks arising from diseases carried by animals, plants or products thereof, or from the entry, establishment or spread of pests; or*

(d) *to prevent or limit other damage within the territory of the Member from the entry, establishment or spread of pests”* (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 8).

The SPS Agreement encourages the adoption of measures that are necessary to protect life and health but also insists that these measures should not unnecessarily restrict international trade. By promoting scientific principles and evidence-based decision-making, the agreement supports economic growth by ensuring that trade flows as smoothly, predictably, and freely as possible, which is essential for creating decent work and enhancing economic opportunities:

“Members shall ensure that their sanitary or phytosanitary measures are based on an assessment, as appropriate to the circumstances, of the risks to human, animal or plant life or health, taking into account risk assessment techniques developed by the relevant international organizations.

In the assessment of risks, Members shall take into account available scientific evidence; relevant processes and production methods; relevant inspection, sampling and testing methods; prevalence of specific diseases or pests; existence of pest- or disease-free areas; relevant ecological and environmental conditions; and quarantine or other treatment.

In assessing the risk to animal or plant life or health and determining the measure to be applied for achieving the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection from such risk, Members shall take into account as relevant economic factors: the potential damage in terms of loss of production or sales in the event of the entry, establishment or spread of a pest or disease; the costs of control or eradication in the territory of the importing Member; and the relative cost-effectiveness of alternative approaches to limiting risks.

Members should, when determining the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection, take into account the objective of minimizing negative trade effects” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, pp. 4-5).

This provision directly relates to SDG 8 by acknowledging the importance of considering economic factors in the application of sanitary and phytosanitary measures. It emphasises the need for measures that not only protect life and health but also support economic development by being cost-effective and minimising adverse effects on trade. This approach ensures that the application of health and safety standards contributes positively to economic growth and job creation, reflecting the agreement’s broader implications for sustainable development.

The provision of technical assistance to developing country Members is a clear manifestation of the agreement’s support for SDG 17. This assistance is crucial for enabling these countries to meet international standards and maintain access to export markets, which is essential for economic development and sustainability. The agreement acknowledges the need for international cooperation and technical assistance to help developing countries meet the required standards, thereby facilitating their access to global markets and supporting their development aspirations:

“Recognizing that developing country Members may encounter special difficulties in complying with the sanitary or phytosanitary measures of importing Members, and as a consequence in access to markets, and also in the formulation and application of sanitary or phytosanitary measures in their own territories, and desiring to assist them in their endeavours in this regard” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 1).

“Members agree to facilitate the provision of technical assistance to other Members, especially developing country Members, either bilaterally or through the appropriate international organizations. Such assistance may be, inter alia, in the areas of processing technologies, research and infrastructure, including in the establishment of national regulatory bodies, and may take the form of advice, credits, donations and grants, including for the purpose of seeking technical expertise, training and equipment to allow such countries to adjust to, and comply with, sanitary or phytosanitary measures necessary to achieve the appropriate level of sanitary or phytosanitary protection in their export markets” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 5).

The World Trade Organization’s Agreement on the Application of Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures (SPS Agreement) played important role in aligning international trade practices with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) even years before formulating the latter, particularly emphasising the balance between protecting health and ensuring economic growth. Through its detailed provisions, the agreement navigates the complexities of promoting public health, safeguarding plant and animal health, and minimising disruptions to international trade. In essence, the SPS Agreement exemplifies how targeted international agreements can serve as vital tools for advancing global development objectives. By harmonising health and safety standards with the principles of fair trade, it underscores the potential of trade policies to contribute significantly to sustainable development, demonstrating the interconnections of health, trade, and economic policy in achieving a sustainable future for all.

3.5 WTO - Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade

The Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) focuses on ensuring that regulations, standards, testing, and certification processes do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade, while allowing governments to achieve legitimate objectives, such as the protection of human health and the environment. This aligns conceptually with multiple SDGs, particularly those related to economic growth, innovation and infrastructure, responsible consumption and production, and environmental protection.

The Agreement supports SDG 17, particularly in fostering partnerships for development, through its emphasis on special and differential treatment of developing countries. By acknowledging the unique challenges faced by these countries in the global trade arena, the Agreement lays a foundation for international cooperation and capacity building. It explicitly states:

“Members shall provide differential and more favourable treatment to developing country Members to this Agreement, through the following provisions as well as through the relevant provisions of other Articles of this Agreement.

Members shall give particular attention to the provisions of this Agreement concerning developing country Members’ rights and obligations and shall take into account the special development, financial and trade needs of developing country Members in the implementation of this

Agreement, both nationally and in the operation of this Agreement's institutional arrangements” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 13).

This provision directly contributes to SDG 17 by ensuring that global partnerships and the international trading system are responsive to the needs of developing countries, enhancing their trade capabilities and integration into the world economy.

The SDG9 is supported by the agreement's provisions on using international standards as a basis for technical regulations, which promotes innovation and infrastructure development:

“Where technical regulations are required and relevant international standards exist or their completion is imminent, Members shall use them, or the relevant parts of them, as a basis for their technical regulations except when such international standards or relevant parts would be an ineffective or inappropriate means for the fulfilment of the legitimate objectives pursued, for instance because of fundamental climatic or geographical factors or fundamental technological problems” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 2).

It is important to mention that despite of the above the agreement acknowledge the special conditions and developmental needs of developing countries in the context of technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessment procedures. It emphasises the importance of considering the socio-economic and technological context of these countries to avoid creating unnecessary obstacles to their exports. The Agreement states:

“Members shall, in the preparation and application of technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures, take account of the special development, financial and trade needs of developing country Members, with a view to ensuring that such technical regulations, standards and conformity assessment procedures do not create unnecessary obstacles to exports from developing country Members” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 13).

Moreover, the Agreement recognises the right of developing countries to adopt technical regulations, standards, or conformity assessment procedures that preserve indigenous technology and production methods compatible with their development needs, further illustrating its support for innovation and infrastructure development tailored to the unique contexts of these countries:

“Members recognize that, although international standards, guides or recommendations may exist, in their particular technological and socio-economic conditions, developing country Members adopt certain technical regulations, standards or conformity assessment procedures aimed at preserving indigenous technology and production methods and processes compatible with their development needs. Members therefore recognize that developing country Members should not be expected to use international standards as a basis for their technical regulations or standards, including test methods, which are not appropriate to their development, financial and trade needs” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 13).

The Agreement also conceptually addresses SDG 3, 14 and 15 by allowing members to adopt technical regulations necessary for the protection of life, health and environment:

“Members shall ensure that technical regulations are not prepared, adopted or applied with a view to or with the effect of creating unnecessary obstacles to international trade. For this purpose, technical regulations shall not be more trade-restrictive than necessary to fulfil a legitimate objective, taking account of the risks non-fulfilment would create. Such legitimate objectives are, inter alia:

national security requirements; the prevention of deceptive practices; protection of human health or safety, animal or plant life or health, or the environment” (World Trade Organization, 1995b, p. 2).

This provision underscores the balance between facilitating international trade and protecting health and the environment, illustrating the WTO’s commitment to enabling trade in a manner that does not compromise on essential health and environmental standards.

The “Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade” indirectly addresses SDGs conceptually and practically, however it’s doing so without employing specific indicators. Conceptually, it aligns with SDGs by establishing principles that ensure technical regulations, standards, and conformity assessment procedures facilitate international trade while protecting human, animal, or plant life or health, and the environment. Practically, it provides mechanisms such as urgent action provisions for environmental protection and support for developing countries, thereby contributing to SDGs related to good health, well-being, life on land, and climate action. Through its focus on minimising unnecessary trade barriers while allowing for necessary protections, the agreement embodies a balanced approach to promoting sustainable economic growth alongside environmental and health considerations.

3.6 WTO - Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures

The Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures, commonly known as the TRIMs Agreement, aims to eliminate regulations imposed by countries on foreign investors that discriminate against or restrict trade. It addresses the interplay between investment policy and trade practices, seeking to create a fair and level playing field for international investment.

The TRIMs Agreement supports SDG 8 by promoting a non-discriminatory trading environment, which encourages investment and potentially leads to job creation and economic growth. By requiring members to eliminate trade-related investment measures that are inconsistent with the principles of national treatment and the elimination of quantitative restrictions, the agreement facilitates a more open and fair-trading system.

“Without prejudice to other rights and obligations under GATT 1994, no Member shall apply any TRIM that is inconsistent with the provisions of Article III or Article XI of GATT 1994.

An illustrative list of TRIMs that are inconsistent with the obligation of national treatment provided for in paragraph 4 of Article III of GATT 1994 and the obligation of general elimination of quantitative restrictions provided for in paragraph 1 of Article XI of GATT 1994 is contained in the Annex to this Agreement” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 1).

The Agreement provides for differential treatment for developing and least-developed countries, acknowledging their specific needs and challenges. This aligns with SDG 10 by aiming to reduce inequality among countries through the principle of special and differential treatment. It also supports SDG 17 by promoting international cooperation and partnership through its provisions on notification and transitional arrangements for these countries:

“Each Member shall eliminate all TRIMs which are notified under paragraph 1 within two years of the date of entry into force of the WTO Agreement in the case of a developed country Member, within five years in the case of a developing country Member, and within seven years in the case of a least-developed country Member.

On request, the Council for Trade in Goods may extend the transition period for the elimination of TRIMs notified under paragraph 1 for a developing country Member, including a least-developed country Member, which demonstrates particular difficulties in implementing the provisions of this Agreement. In considering such a request, the Council for Trade in Goods shall take into account the individual development, financial and trade needs of the Member in question” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 4).

In conclusion, the TRIMs Agreement addresses the SDGs conceptually and practically by promoting a stable, fair, and predictable international investment environment, which is crucial for sustainable development. Through its emphasis on transparency, non-discrimination, and special considerations for developing and least-developed countries, the Agreement contributes to the broader objectives of the SDGs, particularly those related to economic growth, innovation, reduced inequalities, and partnerships for development.

3.7 WTO - Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Anti-Dumping)

The Agreement on Implementation of Article VI of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, commonly referred to as the Anti-Dumping Agreement, addresses the practice of exporting goods at prices lower than their normal value. Its aim is to protect industries from unfair trade practices while ensuring compliance with fair trade standards. By its principles and mechanisms, the agreement indirectly supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by promoting fair competition and sustainable economic growth through fostering a rules-based international trading system. Such principles and mechanics under SDG8 support fair competition and protection of domestic industries, ensure economic impact assessment of dumped imports on the domestic industry and timely resolution of anti-dumping investigations.

The agreement outlines the conditions under which provisional measures can be applied to prevent injury to a domestic industry due to dumped imports. Such measures are only applied after a preliminary affirmative determination of dumping and injury, ensuring that actions taken are both necessary and based on substantive evidence:

“Provisional measures may be applied only if:

(i) an investigation has been initiated in accordance with the provisions of Article 5, a public notice has been given to that effect and interested parties have been given adequate opportunities to submit information and make comments;

(ii) a preliminary affirmative determination has been made of dumping and consequent injury to a domestic industry; and

(iii) the authorities concerned judge such measures necessary to prevent injury being caused during the investigation” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 11).

Regarding the economic impact assessment of dumped imports on the domestic industry, the agreement mandates a comprehensive examination of the impact considering various economic factors such as sales, profits, market share, productivity, and employment. This approach ensures that measures are taken not only to counteract dumping but also to mitigate its potential negative effects on economic growth and employment:

“The examination of the impact of the dumped imports on the domestic industry concerned shall include an evaluation of all relevant economic factors and indices having a bearing on the state of the industry, including actual and potential decline in sales, profits, output, market share, productivity, return on investments, or utilization of capacity; factors affecting domestic prices; the magnitude of the margin of dumping; actual and potential negative effects on cash flow, inventories, employment, wages, growth, ability to raise capital or investments” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 4).

To minimise disruption and uncertainty for businesses, the agreement specifies time frames for the conclusion of anti-dumping investigations, ensuring that they do not unduly hinder trade or the procedures of customs clearance:

“An anti dumping proceeding shall not hinder the procedures of customs clearance. Investigations shall, except in special circumstances, be concluded within one year, and in no case more than 18 months, after their initiation” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 8).

Through these provisions, the Anti-Dumping Agreement contributes to the achievement of SDG 8 by promoting sustainable economic growth and decent work through the maintenance of fair-trade practices. By establishing clear rules and procedures for addressing dumping practices, it helps protect domestic industries and workers, contributing to a stable and predictable international trade environment conducive to economic development.

The also supports SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by acknowledging the unique challenges faced by developing countries in the context of anti-dumping measures. Specifically, it emphasises the importance of considering the special situation of developing country Members and exploring constructive remedies before applying anti-dumping duties that could impact their essential interests:

“It is recognized that special regard must be given by developed country Members to the special situation of developing country Members when considering the application of anti dumping measures under this Agreement. Possibilities of constructive remedies provided for by this Agreement shall be explored before applying anti dumping duties where they would affect the essential interests of developing country Members” (World Trade Organization, 1995d, p. 8).

This provision illustrates the agreement’s commitment to equitable treatment in the application of trade rules, aiming to reduce inequalities between countries by ensuring that the interests of developing nations are taken into account in the enforcement of anti-dumping measures.

The agreement contributes to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) primarily in a conceptual manner, focusing on fair trade practices and the protection of domestic industries. It primary support SDG8 by promoting economic growth through fair competition. Additionally, it acknowledges the particular challenges faced by developing countries, aligning with SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by urging developed countries to consider the special situations of these nations before applying anti-dumping measures. The agreement embodies the principles of equity and fairness in international trade, indirectly facilitating a more inclusive and sustainable economic environment.

3.8 WTO - Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (Customs Valuation)

The Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, commonly known as the Customs Valuation Agreement, aims to establish a fair, uniform, and neutral system for the valuation of goods for customs purposes. This agreement plays a crucial role in ensuring transparency and fairness in international trade and it indirectly supports SDG 17 and 10.

By providing a standardised system for determining the customs value of goods, the agreement enhances the global partnership for sustainable development. It fosters an equitable multilateral trading system, crucial for all countries, particularly developing nations, to participate effectively in global trade. Interpretative notes in annex I summarise it:

“Articles 1 through 7 define how the customs value of imported goods is to be determined under the provisions of this Agreement. The methods of valuation are set out in a sequential order of application” (World Trade Organization, 1994b, p. 12).

The SDG17 is also supported through technical assistance and capacity building:

“Developed country Members shall furnish, on mutually agreed terms, technical assistance to developing country Members that so request. On this basis developed country Members shall draw up programmes of technical assistance which may include, inter alia, training of personnel, assistance in preparing implementation measures, access to sources of information regarding customs valuation methodology, and advice on the application of the provisions of this Agreement” (World Trade Organization, 1994b, p. 11).

As a significant part of the agreement takes into account the needs of developing countries, it is in line with the objectives of SDG10. Possibilities a delayed application of provisions and technical assistance from developed countries, aim to reduce inequalities by acknowledging the varying capacities of countries to comply with international standards.

“Developing country Members not party to the Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade done on 12 April 1979 may delay application of the provisions of this Agreement for a period not exceeding five years from the date of entry into force of the WTO Agreement for such Members” (World Trade Organization, 1994b, p. 11).

The agreement also permits developing countries to make reservations on the reversal of the sequential order for customs valuation, allowing them to adapt the agreement’s provisions to their specific needs and capabilities.

“Developing countries which consider that the reversal of the sequential order at the request of the importer provided for in Article 4 of the Agreement may give rise to real difficulties for them may wish to make a reservation to Article 4 in the following terms:

‘The Government of reserves the right to provide that the relevant provision of Article 4 of the Agreement shall apply only when the customs authorities agree to the request to reverse the order of Articles 5 and 6’ (World Trade Organization, 1994b, p. 26).

Moreover, the agreement’s foundation on fairness and neutrality in customs valuation supports the ethos of SDG 8 by providing a predictable and equitable trade environment conducive to economic growth and sustainability:

“Recognizing the need for a fair, uniform and neutral system for the valuation of goods for customs purposes that precludes the use of arbitrary or fictitious customs values;

Recognizing that the basis for valuation of goods for customs purposes should, to the greatest extent possible, be the transaction value of the goods being valued;

Recognizing that customs value should be based on simple and equitable criteria consistent with commercial practices and that valuation procedures should be of general application without distinction between sources of supply” (World Trade Organization, 1994b, pp. 1-2).

The “Agreement on Implementation of Article VII of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade 1994 (Customs Valuation)” conceptually supports the Sustainable Development Goals by promoting a standardised and transparent customs valuation system that enhances international trade efficiency and cooperation. It also facilitates economic growth by creating a fair and predictable trading environment and in doing so it ensure that global trade practices do not disproportionately disadvantage less developed nations.

3.9 WTO - Agreement on Preshipment Inspection

The Agreement on Preshipment Inspection under the WTO governs the use of preshipment inspections, which are procedures used to verify the quality, quantity, price, and/or tariff classification of goods before they are shipped. This agreement aims to protect the interests of importers and exporters by ensuring the integrity of traded goods. The Agreement addresses several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its provisions, which emphasise fairness, transparency, and efficiency in the preshipment inspection process.

The agreement promotes sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all which aligns perfectly with SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). This is explicitly stated in Article 2, Obligations of User Members, which requires user members to ensure that preshipment inspection activities are carried out in a non-discriminatory manner:

“User Members shall ensure that preshipment inspection activities are carried out in a non-discriminatory manner, and that the procedures and criteria employed in the conduct of these activities are objective and are applied on an equal basis to all exporters affected by such activities. They shall ensure uniform performance of inspection by all the inspectors of the preshipment inspection entities contracted or mandated by them” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 2).

It also states that activities should be transparent: *“User Members shall ensure that preshipment inspection activities are conducted in a transparent manner”* (World Trade Organization, 1994c, p. 2). This alignment with SDG 8 is fundamental as it ensures that the agreement contributes to economic growth by fostering an equitable and clear regulatory environment for international trade.

The agreement also contributes indirectly to SDG 16 by promoting peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, providing access to justice for all, and building effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels. This is particularly evident in its provisions for the resolution of disputes between exporters and preshipment inspection entities, as outlined in Article 8, Dispute Settlement.

“Any disputes among Members regarding the operation of this Agreement shall be subject to the provisions of Article XXIII of GATT 1994, as elaborated and applied by the Dispute Settlement Understanding.” (World Trade Organization, 1994c, p. 9). This indicates a commitment to a structured, fair, and transparent process for resolving disputes, thus reinforcing the principles of justice and strong institutions.

Through its emphasis on international cooperation and the establishment of a framework for the operation of pre-shipment inspection activities, the agreement aligns with SDG 17, which aims to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. The agreement’s introductory notes highlight the need for an agreed international framework of rights and obligations and recognise the importance of transparency and effective dispute resolution mechanisms.

“Recognizing the need to establish an agreed international framework of rights and obligations of both user Members and exporter Members;

Recognizing that it is desirable to provide transparency of the operation of pre-shipment inspection entities and of laws and regulations relating to pre-shipment inspection;

Desiring to provide for the speedy, effective and equitable resolution of disputes between exporters and pre-shipment inspection entities arising under this Agreement” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 1).

“User Members shall publish promptly all applicable laws and regulations relating to pre-shipment inspection activities in such a manner as to enable other governments and traders to become acquainted with them” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 3).

These elements underscore the importance of multilateral partnerships and cooperation in achieving the agreement’s objectives and, by extension, contributing to the broader goals of sustainable development.

In summary, the Agreement on Pre-shipment Inspection by the WTO conceptually and practically addresses several SDGs, particularly those related to economic growth, justice, and international partnerships. Through its emphasis on non-discrimination, transparency, and the establishment of a fair dispute resolution mechanism, the agreement contributes to creating a more equitable and efficient international trading system, which is essential for sustainable development.

3.10 WTO - Agreement on Rules of Origin

The Agreement on Rules of Origin under the WTO sets out the criteria for determining the national source of a product. The rules of origin are crucial for applying tariffs, quotas, trade preferences, or anti-dumping measures, and they play a significant role in international trade. It plays a significant role in addressing several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly those related to promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth, fostering innovation, and facilitating the establishment of a multilateral trading system that is rule-based, open, non-discriminatory, and equitable.

The agreement’s focus on making rules of origin clear, predictable, and transparent directly supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by potentially reducing trade barriers and making it easier for all countries, especially developing and least-developed countries, to participate in global trade.

“Recognizing that clear and predictable rules of origin and their application facilitate the flow of international trade;

Desiring to ensure that rules of origin themselves do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 1).

The agreement also emphasizes on ensuring that rules of origin do not serve as indirect trade barriers speaks to SDG 8 by promoting a global trade environment where economic activities can grow without unnecessary restrictions. This aspect is vital for fostering innovation, competitiveness, and sustainable economic growth.

“...rules of origin should not be used as instruments to pursue trade objectives directly or indirectly. They should not themselves create restrictive, distorting or disruptive effects on international trade” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 6).

Also, the goal of harmonisation mentioned in Article 9 of the agreement aims to reduce unpredictability in trade, thereby lowering costs and facilitating smoother international transactions. This directly contributes to economic development by making it easier for businesses to expand their operations and enter new markets.

“With the objectives of harmonizing rules of origin and, inter alia, providing more certainty in the conduct of world trade...” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 6).

All stated above links to the SDG8 can also lead to increased exports, higher income levels, and job creation, which could be indirectly contributing to poverty reduction (SDG 1).

By ensuring that rules of origin are not used as instruments to pursue trade objectives indirectly and do not create unnecessary obstacles to trade, the agreement aligns with SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals), particularly in enhancing global macroeconomic stability through policy coordination and policy coherence. Also, the emphasis on harmonisation and impartial application of rules underlines SDG 17 by showcasing the importance of multilateral cooperation and partnerships in achieving a more equitable global trading system. This cooperation is crucial for addressing complex global challenges and ensuring that trade contributes positively to sustainable development.

The commitment to non-discrimination and equal application of rules across members addresses SDG 10 by ensuring that all countries, especially developing ones, have equal opportunities in global trade. This is crucial for reducing inequalities between countries, as it helps level the playing field in international commerce. Ensuring that rules of origin are not more stringent for imports and exports than for determining domestic goods encourages inclusivity and helps prevent practices that could disproportionately disadvantage smaller or less developed economies, thus working towards reducing inequalities.

“...the rules of origin that they apply to imports and exports are not more stringent than the rules of origin they apply to determine whether or not a good is domestic and shall not discriminate between other Members, irrespective of the affiliation of the manufacturers of the good concerned” (World Trade Organization, 1994d, p. 2).

The emphasis of the Agreement on Rules of Origin on transparency, fairness, and harmonisation in trade practices provides a foundational layer for advancing several goals related to sustainable economic growth, innovation, and equitable trade. Through its implementation, WTO contributed to a more inclusive and sustainable global economic system, indirectly advancing the SDG agenda.

3.11 WTO - Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures

The Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures under the WTO governs the use of import licensing systems. It aims to ensure that these systems are transparent, fair, and do not become unnecessary barriers to trade. The agreement sets out rules for granting licenses and procedures to prevent discriminatory practices in licensing. This document has several connections to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially in terms of promoting fair trade, supporting economic growth, and ensuring sustainable consumption patterns.

The agreement promotes economic growth by ensuring that import licensing procedures do not become trade barriers. This aligns with aims of SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). For example, it mandates that licensing procedures be neutral, fair, and equitable:

“The rules for import licensing procedures shall be neutral in application and administered in a fair and equitable manner” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 2),

and specifically aims to prevent trade distortions:

“as interpreted by this Agreement, with a view to preventing trade distortions that may arise from an inappropriate operation of those procedures, taking into account the economic development purposes and financial and trade needs of developing country Members” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 1).

The agreement aims also align with the SDG 10’s goal of reducing inequality within and among countries. By considering the development and financial needs of developing countries, it addresses reduced inequalities by recognising the special circumstances of those countries and aiming to simplify and bring transparency to administrative procedures:

“Taking into account the particular trade, development and financial needs of developing country Members” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 1).

“The foreign exchange necessary to pay for licensed imports shall be made available to licence holders on the same basis as to importers of goods not requiring import licences” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 3).

The agreement fosters partnerships by establishing a framework for countries to collaborate on import licensing issues and by providing a dispute resolution mechanism. This aligns with SDG 17’s aim of revitalising global partnerships for sustainable development through a multilateral trade system under the WTO. The establishment of consultative and dispute resolution mechanisms fosters international cooperation, essential for achieving SDG17:

“Desiring to provide for a consultative mechanism and the speedy, effective and equitable resolution of disputes arising under this Agreement” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 1).

Also, the creation of the Committee on Import Licensing is a direct action towards fostering partnerships, facilitating dialogue, and ensuring the agreement’s objectives align with sustainable development goals through collective decision-making and consultation:

“There is hereby established a Committee on Import Licensing composed of representatives from each of the Members. The Committee shall elect its own Chairman and Vice-Chairman and shall meet as necessary for the purpose of affording Members the opportunity of consulting on any matters relating to the operation of this Agreement or the furtherance of its objectives” (World Trade Organization, 1994e, p. 5).

Each of these connections indicates that the agreement addresses the SDGs both conceptually, by recognising the importance of fair and equitable trade practices, and practically, by establishing specific procedures and mechanisms to achieve these goals.

3.12 WTO - Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures

The Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures, part of the WTO framework, addresses the use of subsidies and the measures countries can take to counter the effects of subsidies. This agreement aims to regulate subsidies that distort international trade and provides guidelines for applying countervailing measures to prevent unfair trade advantages.

It indirectly supports the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its provision, particularly to goals related to the economic growth (SDG8); Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10); Innovation and Infrastructure (SDG 9), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). However, the SCM's provisions on non-actionable subsidies indicate a conceptual link to the SDGs by encouraging certain types of subsidies that support sustainable development outcomes.

The Agreement's allowance for subsidies related to research activities supports SDG 9 by encouraging innovation and infrastructure development. Article 8 identifies non-actionable subsidies, including assistance for research activities conducted by firms or higher education or research establishments on a contract basis with firms. This assistance is limited to covering a percentage of the costs associated with industrial research or pre-competitive development activity:

"...assistance for research activities conducted by firms or by higher education or research establishments on a contract basis with firms if: the assistance covers not more than 75 per cent of the costs of industrial research or 50 per cent of the costs of pre competitive development activity..." (World Trade Organization, 1994f, p. 8).

Next SDG which links to can be found in the agreement is SDG11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). Subsidies aimed at assisting disadvantaged regions can contribute to making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. The agreement mentions assistance to disadvantaged regions within the territory of a Member, given pursuant to a general framework of regional development. This includes regions with economic development measures that fall below certain benchmarks, such as income per capita or unemployment rates:

"assistance to disadvantaged regions within the territory of a Member given pursuant to a general framework of regional development and non specific (within the meaning of Article 2) within eligible regions provided that:

(i) *each disadvantaged region must be a clearly designated contiguous geographical area with a definable economic and administrative identity;*

(ii) *the region is considered as disadvantaged on the basis of neutral and objective criteria, indicating that the region's difficulties arise out of more than temporary circumstances; such criteria must be clearly spelled out in law, regulation, or other official document, so as to be capable of verification;*

(iii) *the criteria shall include a measurement of economic development which shall be based on at least one of the following factors:*

-one of either income per capita or household income per capita, or GDP per capita, which must not be above 85 per cent of the average for the territory concerned;

- unemployment rate, which must be at least 110 per cent of the average for the territory concerned;

as measured over a three year period; such measurement, however, may be a composite one and may include other factors” (World Trade Organization, 1994f, pp. 8-9).

The Agreement’s provisions on environmental subsidies align with SDG 12 by promoting efficient resource use and reducing waste. Assistance to promote adaptation of existing facilities to new environmental requirements imposed by law or regulations, which result in greater constraints and financial burdens on firms, is considered non-actionable. This assistance is designed to support firms in reducing pollution and environmental nuisances without covering any manufacturing cost savings that may be achieved:

“assistance to promote adaptation of existing facilities to new environmental requirements imposed by law and/or regulations which result in greater constraints and financial burden on firms, provided that the assistance:

(i) is a one time non recurring measure; and

(ii) is limited to 20 per cent of the cost of adaptation; and

(iii) does not cover the cost of replacing and operating the assisted investment, which must be fully borne by firms; and

(iv) is directly linked to and proportionate to a firm’s planned reduction of nuisances and pollution, and does not cover any manufacturing cost savings which may be achieved; and

(v) is available to all firms which can adopt the new equipment and/or production processes” (World Trade Organization, 1994f, pp. 9-10).

The paragraph quoted above also aligns with the support of SDG 13 (Climate Action) by encouraging actions to combat climate change and its impacts. Through subsidies for firms adapting to new environmental requirements, the SCM Agreement promotes investments in cleaner, more sustainable practices.

The Agreement also indirectly supports SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through its provisions related to developing countries. Article 27 recognises the role of subsidies in the economic development programs of developing country members. It provides special and differential treatment to these countries, acknowledging that subsidies can be instrumental in achieving economic growth and development:

“27.1 Members recognize that subsidies may play an important role in economic development programmes of developing country Members.

27.2 The prohibition of paragraph 1(a) of Article 3 shall not apply to:

(a) developing country Members referred to in Annex VII.

(b) other developing country Members for a period of eight years from the date of entry into force of the WTO Agreement, subject to compliance with the provisions in paragraph 4.

27.3 *The prohibition of paragraph 1(b) of Article 3 shall not apply to developing country Members for a period of five years, and shall not apply to least developed country Members for a period of eight years, from the date of entry into force of the WTO Agreement.*

27.4 *Any developing country Member referred to in paragraph 2(b) shall phase out its export subsidies within the eight year period, preferably in a progressive manner. However, a developing country Member shall not increase the level of its export subsidies, and shall eliminate them within a period shorter than that provided for in this paragraph when the use of such export subsidies is inconsistent with its development needs. If a developing country Member deems it necessary to apply such subsidies beyond the 8 year period, it shall not later than one year before the expiry of this period enter into consultation with the Committee, which will determine whether an extension of this period is justified, after examining all the relevant economic, financial and development needs of the developing country Member in question. If the Committee determines that the extension is justified, the developing country Member concerned shall hold annual consultations with the Committee to determine the necessity of maintaining the subsidies. If no such determination is made by the Committee, the developing country Member shall phase out the remaining export subsidies within two years from the end of the last authorized period” (World Trade Organization, 1994f, p. 28).*

These provisions indicate a conceptual link between the agreement and the SDGs by promoting practices that lead to sustainable economic growth, reduced inequalities, responsible consumption and production, and proactive climate action. The agreement’s focus on limiting trade-distorting subsidies while allowing for environmental protection measures aligns with the objectives of the SDGs, highlighting the practical ways international trade rules can support global sustainability efforts.

3.13 WTO - Agreement on Safeguards

The Agreement on Safeguards is a WTO agreement that provides guidelines for the implementation of safeguard measures. These measures allow countries to temporarily restrict imports of a product to protect a specific domestic industry from an increase in imports causing or threatening to cause serious injury. The agreement has indirect but significant connections to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), notably SDG 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), and SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

Safeguard measures aim to protect domestic industries from the adverse effects of sudden increases in imports, which can support job preservation and economic stability, aligning conceptually with SDG 8’s focus on promoting sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. Article 4 emphasises the determination of serious injury or threat thereof, including factors like changes in employment levels, which directly relates to job preservation:

“1. *For the purposes of this Agreement:*

(a) *"serious injury" shall be understood to mean a significant overall impairment in the position of a domestic industry;*

(b) *"threat of serious injury" shall be understood to mean serious injury that is clearly imminent, in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 2. A determination of the existence of a threat of serious injury shall be based on facts and not merely on allegation, conjecture or remote possibility; and*

(c) *in determining injury or threat thereof, a "domestic industry" shall be understood to mean the producers as a whole of the like or directly competitive products operating within the territory of a Member, or those whose collective output of the like or directly competitive products constitutes a major proportion of the total domestic production of those products.*

2. (a) *In the investigation to determine whether increased imports have caused or are threatening to cause serious injury to a domestic industry under the terms of this Agreement, the competent authorities shall evaluate all relevant factors of an objective and quantifiable nature having a bearing on the situation of that industry, in particular, the rate and amount of the increase in imports of the product concerned in absolute and relative terms, the share of the domestic market taken by increased imports, changes in the level of sales, production, productivity, capacity utilization, profits and losses, and employment.*

(b) *The determination referred to in subparagraph (a) shall not be made unless this investigation demonstrates, on the basis of objective evidence, the existence of the causal link between increased imports of the product concerned and serious injury or threat thereof. When factors other than increased imports are causing injury to the domestic industry at the same time, such injury shall not be attributed to increased imports"* (World Trade Organization, 1994g, p. 2).

By allowing temporary protection measures, the agreement can help domestic industries adjust to competition, potentially fostering innovation and infrastructure development as firms seek to become more competitive, thus practically support aims of SDG9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). The preamble acknowledges the importance of enhancing rather than limiting competition in international markets, which can drive innovation within industries:

"Recognizing the importance of structural adjustment and the need to enhance rather than limit competition in international markets" (World Trade Organization, 1994g, p. 1).

Article 5.1 mentions the facilitation of adjustment for industries affected by increased imports, implying support for industrial development and resilience:

"A Member shall apply safeguard measures only to the extent necessary to prevent or remedy serious injury and to facilitate adjustment. If a quantitative restriction is used, such a measure shall not reduce the quantity of imports below the level of a recent period which shall be the average of imports in the last three representative years for which statistics are available, unless clear justification is given that a different level is necessary to prevent or remedy serious injury. Members should choose measures most suitable for the achievement of these objectives" (World Trade Organization, 1994g, p. 3).

The agreement also encourages international cooperation and dialogue among WTO members, reflecting SDG 17's aim to strengthen the means of implementation and revitalise the global partnership for sustainable development. Article 12 outlines the procedures for notification and consultation, promoting transparency and collaboration among members, essential for effective partnerships:

"Notification and Consultation

1. *A Member shall immediately notify the Committee on Safeguards upon:*

- (a) initiating an investigatory process relating to serious injury or threat thereof and the reasons for it;*
- (b) making a finding of serious injury or threat thereof caused by increased imports; and*
- (c) taking a decision to apply or extend a safeguard measure” (World Trade Organization, 1994g, p. 6).*

Article 13 establishes a Committee on Safeguards to monitor the agreement’s implementation, fostering international cooperation:

“1. A Committee on Safeguards is hereby established, under the authority of the Council for Trade in Goods, which shall be open to the participation of any Member indicating its wish to serve on it. The Committee will have the following functions:

(a) to monitor, and report annually to the Council for Trade in Goods on, the general implementation of this Agreement and make recommendations towards its improvement;

(b) to find, upon request of an affected Member, whether or not the procedural requirements of this Agreement have been complied with in connection with a safeguard measure, and report its findings to the Council for Trade in Goods;

(c) to assist Members, if they so request, in their consultations under the provisions of this Agreement;

(d) to examine measures covered by Article 10 and paragraph 1 of Article 11, monitor the phase out of such measures and report as appropriate to the Council for Trade in Goods;

(e) to review, at the request of the Member taking a safeguard measure, whether proposals to suspend concessions or other obligations are "substantially equivalent", and report as appropriate to the Council for Trade in Goods;

(f) to receive and review all notifications provided for in this Agreement and report as appropriate to the Council for Trade in Goods; and

(g) to perform any other function connected with this Agreement that the Council for Trade in Goods may determine.

2. *To assist the Committee in carrying out its surveillance function, the Secretariat shall prepare annually a factual report on the operation of this Agreement based on notifications and other reliable information available to it” (World Trade Organization, 1994g, pp. 6-7).*

The Agreement on Safeguards conceptually and practically supports several SDGs by promoting sustainable economic growth, protecting jobs, encouraging industrial innovation, and fostering international cooperation. The agreement provisions align with the goals’ broader objectives, facilitating a conducive environment for achieving sustainable development through trade regulation and international collaboration.

3.14 WTO - Protocol Amending the Marrakesh Agreement Establishing the World Trade Organization (Agreement on Trade Facilitation)

The Protocol Amending the Marrakesh Agreement, notably the Agreement on Trade Facilitation (ATF), represents a significant reform of the global trade system. It aims to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. It sets out measures for effective cooperation between customs and other appropriate authorities on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues. The Protocol addresses several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) both directly and indirectly.

The ATF aims to expedite the movement, release, and clearance of goods, including goods in transit. This facilitation can boost economic growth by reducing trade costs, enhancing efficiency in border management, and promoting exports, especially for developing and least-developed countries. The preamble recognises the needs of developing and least-developed countries and the importance of assistance and support for capacity building, highlighting a direct link to promoting sustained economic growth and supporting decent work through increased trade opportunities and efficiency. This aligns with the aims of the SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) and SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities).

“Having regard to the negotiations launched under the Doha Ministerial Declaration;

Recalling and reaffirming the mandate and principles contained in paragraph 27 of the Doha Ministerial Declaration (WT/MIN(01)/DEC/1) and in Annex D of the Decision of the Doha Work Programme adopted by the General Council on 1 August 2004 (WT/L/579), as well as in paragraph 33 of and Annex E to the Hong Kong Ministerial Declaration (WT/MIN(05)/DEC);

Desiring to clarify and improve relevant aspects of Articles V, VIII and X of the GATT 1994 with a view to further expediting the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit;

Recognizing the particular needs of developing and especially least-developed country Members and desiring to enhance assistance and support for capacity building in this area;

Recognizing the need for effective cooperation among Members on trade facilitation and customs compliance issues” (World Trade Organization, 2014, p. 3).

By advocating for improved transparency, the agreement requires members to publish information that enables traders to become acquainted with importation, exportation, and transit procedures. This supports the development of quality, reliable, sustainable, and resilient infrastructure to support economic development and human well-being.

“Each Member shall promptly publish the following information in a non-discriminatory and easily accessible manner in order to enable governments, traders, and other interested parties to become acquainted with them: (a) procedures for importation, exportation, and transit (including port, airport, and other entry-point procedures), and required forms and documents;

(b) applied rates of duties and taxes of any kind imposed on or in connection with importation or exportation;

(c) fees and charges imposed by or for governmental agencies on or in connection with importation, exportation or transit;

(d) rules for the classification or valuation of products for customs purposes;

(e) laws, regulations, and administrative rulings of general application relating to rules of origin;

(f) import, export or transit restrictions or prohibitions;

(g) penalty provisions for breaches of import, export, or transit formalities;

(h) procedures for appeal or review;

(i) agreements or parts thereof with any country or countries relating to importation, exportation, or transit; and

(j) procedures relating to the administration of tariff quotas” (World Trade Organization, 2014, pp. 3-4).

Also, the emphasis on electronic payment options and the use of information technology directly aligns with fostering innovation and infrastructure development by modernising trade procedures and leveraging technology for trade facilitation.

“Each Member shall, to the extent practicable, adopt or maintain procedures allowing the option of electronic payment for duties, taxes, fees, and charges collected by customs incurred upon importation and exportation” (World Trade Organization, 2014, p. 9).

“Each Member shall, where appropriate, endeavour to accept paper or electronic copies of supporting documents required for import, export, or transit formalities.

Where a government agency of a Member already holds the original of such a document, any other agency of that Member shall accept a paper or electronic copy, where applicable, from the agency holding the original in lieu of the original document” (World Trade Organization, 2014, p. 14).

The ATF underscores the importance of international cooperation and capacity building, especially in its provisions for special and differential treatment for developing and least-developed countries (Section II). This includes commitments to help these countries implement the agreement effectively (Articles 13-14):

“2. Assistance and support for capacity building¹⁶ should be provided to help developing and least-developed country Members implement the provisions of this Agreement, in accordance with their nature and scope. The extent and the timing of implementation of the provisions of this Agreement shall be related to the implementation capacities of developing and least-developed country Members. Where a developing or least-developed country Member continues to lack the necessary capacity, implementation of the provision(s) concerned will not be required until implementation capacity has been acquired.

3. Least-developed country Members will only be required to undertake commitments to the extent consistent with their individual development, financial and trade needs or their administrative and institutional capabilities” (World Trade Organization, 2014, p. 22),

which directly contributes to SDG 17 by enhancing global partnerships for sustainable development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilise and share knowledge, expertise, technology, and financial resources.

In summary, the ATF addresses SDGs conceptually through its emphasis on economic development, innovation, and international cooperation. Practically, it outlines specific measures and

commitments that member countries should undertake to facilitate trade, which can lead to achieving these broader development goals. The linkage to SDGs is both direct, through explicit commitments to facilitate trade in a manner that supports development, and indirect, through the expected positive outcomes of streamlined trade on global economic growth and sustainable development.

3.15 WTO - General Agreement on Trade in Services

The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a pivotal treaty under the WTO that governs international trade in services. It seeks to reduce trade barriers and expand global services trade, maintaining the right for governments to regulate and introduce new services. GATS encompasses a wide range of internationally traded service sectors. Its provisions can be linked conceptually and practically to few SDGs, particularly in the areas of promoting sustainable economic growth (SDG 8), reducing inequalities (SDG 10), and fostering partnership for the goals (SDG 17).

The GATS aims to expand trade in services under conditions of transparency and progressive liberalisation, promoting economic growth and development, especially in developing countries:

“Recognizing the growing importance of trade in services for the growth and development of the world economy;

Wishing to establish a multilateral framework of principles and rules for trade in services with a view to the expansion of such trade under conditions of transparency and progressive liberalization and as a means of promoting the economic growth of all trading partners and the development of developing countries;

Desiring the early achievement of progressively higher levels of liberalization of trade in services through successive rounds of multilateral negotiations aimed at promoting the interests of all participants on a mutually advantageous basis and at securing an overall balance of rights and obligations, while giving due respect to national policy objectives;

Recognizing the right of Members to regulate, and to introduce new regulations, on the supply of services within their territories in order to meet national policy objectives and, given asymmetries existing with respect to the degree of development of services regulations in different countries, the particular need of developing countries to exercise this right;

Desiring to facilitate the increasing participation of developing countries in trade in services and the expansion of their service exports including, inter alia, through the strengthening of their domestic services capacity and its efficiency and competitiveness;

Taking particular account of the serious difficulty of the least-developed countries in view of their special economic situation and their development, trade and financial needs” (World Trade Organization, 1995e, p. 1).

It recognises the importance of increasing participation of developing countries in service trade to enhance their economic growth (World Trade Organization, 1995e, pp. 4–5). This aligns with SDG 8’s focus on promoting inclusive and sustainable economic growth and full and productive employment.

Provisions of GATS related to the SDG8 also align with goals of SDG10 (Reduced Inequalities). GATS addresses the reduction of inequalities by acknowledging the need to increase

the participation of developing countries in global trade and supports the development of their domestic services capacity, efficiency, and competitiveness:

“(a) the strengthening of their domestic services capacity and its efficiency and competitiveness, inter alia through access to technology on a commercial basis;

(b) the improvement of their access to distribution channels and information networks;

(c) the liberalization of market access in sectors and modes of supply of export interest to them.”
(World Trade Organization, 1995e, pp. 4-5).

It also emphasises the importance of access to technology and improvement in access to distribution channels and information networks, which are crucial for levelling the playing field in international trade.

As presented above the GATS, by establishing a multilateral framework for trade in services, promoting a rule-based international trading system, and encouraging cooperation among countries to achieve sustainable development, the agreement embodies the spirit of SDG17 (Partnership for the Goals).

The agreement also highlights the significance of an efficient and advanced telecommunications infrastructure for the expansion of trade in services, which supports goals of SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure). This is articulated by encouraging the development of a global services trade that can stimulate technological advancements, improve infrastructure through increased investment, and enhance innovation capacity in developing countries.

“Members recognize that an efficient, advanced telecommunications infrastructure in countries, particularly developing countries, is essential to the expansion of their trade in services. To this end, Members endorse and encourage the participation, to the fullest extent practicable, of developed and developing countries and their suppliers of public telecommunications transport networks and services and other entities in the development programmes of international and regional organizations, including the International Telecommunication Union, the United Nations Development Programme, and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development” (World Trade Organization, 1995e, p. 31).

In conclusion, while GATS primarily focuses on trade in services, its provisions and the liberalization processes, it promotes have broader implications for achieving several SDGs. While the agreement predates the establishment of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by two decades, its provisions and underlying principles significantly contribute to the advancement of several SDGs, although in a manner that is largely conceptual and indirect. Presented above links highlight the relevance of GATS to the sustainable development agenda. The agreement’s emphasis on development, access to markets, and technological transfer can indirectly support goals related to reduction of inequalities, economic growth, partnership and more. However, the specific impacts on these SDGs have depend on how GATS provisions were implemented by member countries and how they integrated these trade rules with their development policies.

3.16 WTO - Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights

The Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS), a core WTO agreement, sets comprehensive standards for intellectual property protection and enforcement. It

plays a crucial role in the trade of goods and services involving intellectual property, impacting innovation, technology transfer, and the legal framework for IP rights. While TRIPS does not explicitly mention the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), its provisions intersect with several SDGs by addressing issues such as public health, inequalities or innovation and technological transfer.

TRIPS allows members to navigate IPRs to protect public health, notably by permitting exceptions to patent rights for pharmaceuticals in public health emergencies, thereby supporting access to affordable medicines. particularly in its provisions on patents and compulsory licensing have practical implications for SDG 3 by influencing access to medicines.

“Members may also exclude from patentability:

(a) diagnostic, therapeutic and surgical methods for the treatment of humans or animals;

(b) plants and animals other than micro-organisms, and essentially biological processes for the production of plants or animals other than non-biological and microbiological processes” (World Trade Organization, 2017, p. 13).

“Other Use Without Authorization of the Right Holder. Where the law of a Member allows for other use of the subject matter of a patent without the authorization of the right holder, including use by the government or third parties authorized by the government” (World Trade Organization, 2017, p. 14).

Above cited articles allow for exceptions to patent rights for pharmaceuticals under specific conditions, thus potentially enhancing access to essential medicines.

The agreement conceptually supports SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure) by establishing a framework for the protection of intellectual property rights, encouraging innovation and development of new technologies. Article 7 outlines the objectives of the TRIPS agreement, emphasising the promotion of technological innovation and transfer of technology.

“The protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights should contribute to the promotion of technological innovation and to the transfer and dissemination of technology, to the mutual advantage of producers and users of technological knowledge and in a manner conducive to social and economic welfare, and to a balance of rights and obligations” (World Trade Organization, 2017, p. 5).

Furthermore, Article 27.1 states that patents shall be available for any inventions, whether products or processes, in all fields of technology, provided they are new, involve an inventive step, and are capable of industrial application.

“Subject to the provisions of paragraphs 2 and 3, patents shall be available for any inventions, whether products or processes, in all fields of technology, provided that they are new, involve an inventive step and are capable of industrial application.5 Subject to paragraph 4 of Article 65, paragraph 8 of Article 70 and paragraph 3 of this Article, patents shall be available and patent rights enjoyable without discrimination as to the place of invention, the field of technology and whether products are imported or locally produced” (World Trade Organization, 2017, pp. 12–13).

TRIPS embodies the spirit of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) through its establishment of a cooperative international framework for IPR protection, fostering global partnerships. It also indirectly supports SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through its provisions on technical cooperation

and capacity building for developing countries, aiming to enhance their ability to comply with the agreement.

The preamble recognises the need for a balanced approach to intellectual property rights, taking into account the needs of developing countries and the special needs of the least developed among them.

“Recognizing the need for a multilateral framework of principles, rules and disciplines dealing with international trade in counterfeit goods;

Recognizing that intellectual property rights are private rights;

Recognizing the underlying public policy objectives of national systems for the protection of intellectual property, including developmental and technological objectives;

Recognizing also the special needs of the least-developed country Members in respect of maximum flexibility in the domestic implementation of laws and regulations in order to enable them to create a sound and viable technological base;

Emphasizing the importance of reducing tensions by reaching strengthened commitments to resolve disputes on trade-related intellectual property issues through multilateral procedures;

Desiring to establish a mutually supportive relationship between the WTO and the World Intellectual Property Organization (referred to in this Agreement as "WIPO") as well as other relevant international organizations” (World Trade Organization, 2017, p. 2).

Article 66.2 obligates developed country members to provide incentives to their enterprises and institutions for the promotion of and cooperation in technology transfer to least-developed countries.

“Developed country Members shall provide incentives to enterprises and institutions in their territories for the purpose of promoting and encouraging technology transfer to least-developed country Members in order to enable them to create a sound and viable technological base” (World Trade Organization, 2017, p. 29).

In summary, the TRIPS Agreement addresses the SDGs conceptually by establishing a framework that supports innovation, technology transfer, and access to information and knowledge. These contributions are primarily indirect, leveraging the protection of IPRs to incentivise developments that align with the SDGs, impacting health, innovation, and international cooperation. The specific references provided illustrate how TRIPS’ provisions can be interpreted and applied to support the achievement of the SDGs, highlighting the importance of balancing intellectual property protection with global development goals. The references to specific articles illustrate the agreement’s linkages to the goals, highlighting its role in the broader context of global development efforts.

3.17 WTO - Agreement on Government Procurement 2012 and related WTO legal texts (Plurilateral Government procurement)

The Agreement on Government Procurement (GPA) is a plurilateral agreement within the framework of the WTO, meaning that it is not mandatory for all WTO members but binding only on those members who have agreed to be bound by it. The GPA aims to open up government procurement markets to international competition, ensuring transparency and fair competition in the procurement process.

The GPA has conceptual and practical linkages to the SDG8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth). It encourages economic growth and sustainable development by promoting efficient and transparent procurement practices. By ensuring fair competition and equal treatment for goods and services from participating countries, it contributes to a more prosperous global economy. Article IV (General Principles) of GPA emphasises non-discrimination and fairness in procurement processes. This promotes economic growth by ensuring open, fair, and competitive access to international procurement markets:

“With respect to any measure regarding covered procurement, each Party, including its procuring entities, shall accord immediately and unconditionally to the goods and services of any other Party and to the suppliers of any other Party offering the goods or services of any Party, treatment no less favourable than the treatment the Party, including its procuring entities, accords to:

(a) domestic goods, services and suppliers; and

(b) goods, services and suppliers of any other Party” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 17).

Other example is Article XVI (Transparency of Procurement Information) which supports SDG8 by aiming to increase transparency and integrity in government procurement. It contributes to economic development by fostering a transparent environment that encourages participation and competition:

“A procuring entity shall promptly inform participating suppliers of the entity’s contract award decisions and, on the request of a supplier, shall do so in writing” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 40).

The GPA also supports the development of sustainable and resilient infrastructure, at the same supporting SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), through efficient and transparent procurement of public works and services, which can stimulate innovation and encourage the development of sustainable industries. Article X (Technical Specifications and Tender Documentation) encourages the use of technical specifications that promote conservation of natural resources and environmental protection:

“For greater certainty, a Party, including its procuring entities, may, in accordance with this Article, prepare, adopt or apply technical specifications to promote the conservation of natural resources or protect the environment” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 31).

Other Article supporting SDG9 is article IV (Use of Electronic Means) which, in procurement processes, can drive innovation in how government procurement is conducted.

“When conducting covered procurement by electronic means, a procuring entity shall:

(a) ensure that the procurement is conducted using information technology systems and software, including those related to GPA authentication and encryption of information, that are generally available and interoperable with other generally available information technology systems and software; and

(b) maintain mechanisms that ensure the integrity of requests for participation and tenders, including establishment of the time of receipt and the prevention of inappropriate access” (World Trade Organization, 2012, pp. 17-18).

The conceptual and practical linkages between the GPA and SDG can be also found with the SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production). The GPA contributes to sustainable consumption and production patterns by allowing for technical specifications that can include environmental and sustainability criteria in government procurement decisions. The Article X (Technical Specifications and Tender Documentation) specifically mentions the allowance for technical specifications to promote conservation of natural resources or protect the environment, directly linking to SDG 12 the focus on sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources:

“For greater certainty, a Party, including its procuring entities, may, in accordance with this Article, prepare, adopt or apply technical specifications to promote the conservation of natural resources or protect the environment” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 31).

Although the text quoted above does not directly mention climate change, the provision allowing procurement entities to prepare, adopt, or apply technical specifications that promote environmental protection indirectly supports SDG 13 (Climate Action).. By encouraging the procurement of goods and services that have a lower environmental impact, the GPA contributes to climate action efforts.

The GPA addresses the development, financial, and trade needs of developing countries by giving special consideration to their unique circumstances. This is aligned with SDG 10’s focus on reducing inequalities among countries. The agreement provides for special and differential treatment for developing countries, supporting their integration into the global economy in a manner that respects their development need:

“Recognizing the need to take into account the development, financial and trade needs of developing countries, in particular the least developed countries” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 9).

The overall nature of the GPA is that it promotes international cooperation (SDG17 - Partnerships for the Goals) by creating a multilateral framework for public procurement that fosters economic growth and sustainable development in all member countries. Preamble and Article XXI (Institutions), which outline the agreement’s objectives of promoting liberalization and expansion of international trade and the establishment of the Committee on Government Procurement to oversee the implementation of the GPA. The Preamble sets the stage for international cooperation and the agreement’s objectives, stating the recognition of:

“Recognizing the need for an effective multilateral framework for government procurement, with a view to achieving greater liberalization and expansion of, and improving the framework for, the conduct of international trade” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 9).

Article XXI establishes the Committee on Government Procurement as a forum for cooperation among parties:

“There shall be a Committee on Government Procurement composed of representatives from each of the Parties” (World Trade Organization, 2012, p. 50).

In conclusion, the GPA addresses various SDGs conceptually and practically through its provisions on sustainable procurement, special and differential treatment for developing countries, promotion of environmentally friendly procurement practices, and support for technical cooperation and capacity building. These linkages, however, are more conceptual and indirect rather than being

based on specific indicators or quantitative targets. The agreement's focus on integrating sustainable development considerations into government procurement practices illustrates a practical approach to contributing to the SDGs by influencing how governments procure goods and services, thereby promoting economic growth, sustainability, and reduced inequalities.

3.18 Convention on Biological Diversity

The Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), established in 1992, is an international legal instrument for the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components, and the fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources. Although not a WTO agreement, the CBD has significant implications for trade policies related to biodiversity.

The CBD conceptually contributes to SDG 14 and SDG 15, which aim to conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas, and marine resources for sustainable development, and to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, manage forests sustainably, combat desertification, halt and reverse land degradation, and halt biodiversity loss, respectively. Preamble underscore:

“... the intrinsic value of biological diversity and of the ecological, genetic, social, economic, scientific, educational, cultural, recreational and aesthetic values of biological diversity and its components,” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 2)

Where the Article I sets the objectives of the convention:

“... to be pursued in accordance with its relevant provisions, are the conservation of biological diversity, the sustainable use of its components and the fair and equitable sharing of the benefits arising out of the utilization of genetic resources, including by appropriate access to genetic resources and by appropriate transfer of relevant technologies, taking into account all rights over those resources and to technologies, and by appropriate funding” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 3).

Other example of article which supports SDG 14 and 15 is the Article 8 (In-situ Conservation) which details measures for the in-situ conservation of biodiversity, including the establishment of protected areas, promotion of the protection of ecosystems and natural habitats, and the recovery of threatened species (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, pp. 7-8).

The article 8 of the CBD can also be perceived as a conceptual link to the SDG13 (Climate Action) by promoting actions that contribute to climate change mitigation and adaptation through ecosystem preservation and restoration. Other article supporting this SDG is the Article 6 which calls for the integration of biodiversity conservation and sustainable use into national strategies, plans, or programs:

“Each Contracting Party shall, in accordance with its particular conditions and capabilities:

(a) Develop national strategies, plans or programmes for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or adapt for this purpose existing strategies, plans or programmes which shall reflect, inter alia, the measures set out in this Convention relevant to the Contracting Party concerned; and

(b) Integrate, as far as possible and as appropriate, the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity into relevant sectoral or cross-sectoral plans, programmes and policies” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 5).

As the nature does not align with political borders, important part of the CBD is a international cooperation which supports SDG17 (Partnerships for the Goals). The CBD encourages international cooperation and partnerships to strengthen global support for achieving a shared commitment to conserve biodiversity. Article 5 (Cooperation) emphasises the importance of international cooperation for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity:

“Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate, cooperate with other Contracting Parties, directly or, where appropriate, through competent international organizations, in respect of areas beyond national jurisdiction and on other matters of mutual interest, for the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 5).

Also the article 18 (Technical and Scientific Cooperation) and article 20 (Financial Resources) outline mechanisms for international technical, scientific, and financial cooperation to support the convention’s objectives:

“The Contracting Parties shall promote international technical and scientific cooperation in the field of conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity, where necessary, through the appropriate international and national institutions” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 13).

“Each Contracting Party undertakes to provide, in accordance with its capabilities, financial support and incentives in respect of those national activities which are intended to achieve the objectives of this Convention, in accordance with its national plans, priorities and programmes” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 15).

Some conceptual links to the SDG 2 (Zero Hunger) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) can be found in the CBD through its focus on sustainable use of biodiversity. The CBD indirectly supports efforts to end hunger and promote health by ensuring the availability of genetic resources that are crucial for food security, nutrition, and medicinal resources. Article 10 (Sustainable Use of Components of Biological Diversity) highlights the integration of biodiversity conservation into national decision-making and the protection and encouragement of customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices:

“Each Contracting Party shall, as far as possible and as appropriate:

(a) Integrate consideration of the conservation and sustainable use of biological resources into national decision-making;

(b) Adopt measures relating to the use of biological resources to avoid or minimize adverse impacts on biological diversity;

(c) Protect and encourage customary use of biological resources in accordance with traditional cultural practices that are compatible with conservation or sustainable use requirements;

(d) Support local populations to develop and implement remedial action in degraded areas where biological diversity has been reduced; and

(e) Encourage cooperation between its governmental authorities and its private sector in developing methods for sustainable use of biological resources” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 9).

Article 15 (Access to Genetic Resources) and Article 16 (Access to and Transfer of Technology) facilitate access to genetic resources and technology transfer which are important for agricultural productivity and medical research.

“Access to genetic resources shall be subject to prior informed consent of the Contracting Party providing such resources” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 12).

“Each Contracting Party, recognizing that technology includes biotechnology, and that both access to and transfer of technology among Contracting Parties are essential elements for the attainment of the objectives of this Convention, undertakes subject to the provisions of this Article to provide and/or facilitate access for and transfer to other Contracting Parties of technologies that are relevant to the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity or make use of genetic resources and do not cause significant damage to the environment” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 12).

Last but not least, the specific parts of the preamble offer direct support to SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) through the recognition of the roles and rights of indigenous and local communities, and the emphasis on gender equality in the context of biodiversity conservation:

“Recognizing also the vital role that women play in the conservation and sustainable use of biological diversity and affirming the need for the full participation of women at all levels of policy-making and implementation for biological diversity conservation” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 3).

This underscores the importance of including women in decision-making processes related to biodiversity, directly supporting SDG 5’s aim to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

“Recognizing the close and traditional dependence of many indigenous and local communities embodying traditional lifestyles on biological resources, and the desirability of sharing equitably benefits arising from the use of traditional knowledge, innovations and practices relevant to the conservation of biological diversity and the sustainable use of its components” (Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, p. 2).

Above cited acknowledgment of the contributions and rights of indigenous and local communities directly supports SDG 10’s goal of reducing inequalities by promoting the equitable sharing of benefits from biodiversity and recognising traditional knowledge and practices.

In summary, the above-mentioned provisions of the CBD contribute directly and conceptually to the achievement of several SDGs by emphasising the principles of conservation, sustainable use and equitable benefit sharing, gender and community equity. The Convention’s focus on in-situ and ex-situ conservation, as well as the integration of biodiversity considerations into broader policy and decision-making processes, illustrates a multifaceted approach to sustainable development and underpins its critical role in the global sustainability agenda.

3.19 International Labour Organization Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights

The International Labour Organization (ILO) Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, adopted in 1998, commits member states to respect and promote principles and rights in four categories: freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour, the effective abolition of child labour, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation. This declaration, while not a WTO agreement, has significant implications for labour standards in international trade.

The Declaration is directly relevant to SDG 8, which aims to promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all. It emphasises the eradication of forced labour, child labour, and discrimination in the workplace, and the promotion of freedom of association and collective bargaining, which are foundational to achieving decent work.

Paragraph 2 of the Declaration specifies the obligation of all members to respect, promote, and realise principles concerning fundamental rights including freedom of association, elimination of forced labour, abolition of child labour, elimination of discrimination, and a safe and healthy working environment:

“Declares that all Members, even if they have not ratified the Conventions in question, have an obligation, arising from the very fact of membership in the Organization, to respect, to promote and to realize, in good faith and in accordance with the Constitution, the principles concerning the fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions, namely:

(a) freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining;

(b) the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labour;

(c) the effective abolition of child labour;

(d) the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation; and

(e) a safe and healthy working environment” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 9).

Other example can be found in preface by Guy Ryder, which highlights the importance of a safe and healthy working environment, addressing it as critical to preventing accidents and diseases at work, thereby directly contributing to SDG 8:

“This landmark decision addresses concretely all working women and men in all occupations and all kinds of workplaces across the world. The loss of life, accidents, and diseases caused by inadequate safety and protection of the working environment remain a dire reality in every country, from the poorest to the most prosperous. The consequences in terms of lives lost or damaged as well as the economic costs to enterprises and the economy are enormous” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 1).

Through its emphasis on eliminating discrimination in respect of employment and occupation, the Declaration contributes to reducing inequalities within and among countries, aligning with SDG 10 and SDG 5's aims. Paragraph 2(d) (see above) explicitly mentions the elimination of

discrimination in respect of employment and occupation as a fundamental principle and right at work. Also Preface by Guy Ryder discusses the amended Declaration's role in creating equitable working conditions for all, regardless of gender, nationality, or social background, reinforcing the commitment to reducing inequalities:

“Achieving a safe and healthy working environment now falls within this active promotional framework” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 3).

“Based on the Declaration the ILO will continue to cooperate with other international organizations to support the promotion of the promotion of a safe and healthy working environment. Reflecting the indivisibility of human rights and conditions of work, the amended Declaration will thus further support an inclusive and coherent multilateralism which is grounded on the values and principles of social justice” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 4).

The inclusion of a safe and healthy working environment as a fundamental principle aligns the Declaration with SDG 3, particularly in promoting good health and well-being through safer work conditions. The 2022 amendment to the Declaration, as mentioned in the preface by Guy Ryder, integrates a safe and healthy working environment into the Declaration's core principles (mentioned addition is a Paragraph 2(e)- cited earlier):

“On 11 June 2022, the International Labour Conference amended this Declaration by adding to it a safe and healthy working environment as a fifth principle and right” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 1).

The Declaration's emphasis on international cooperation and assistance from the ILO to its Member States for achieving these fundamental principles showcases the spirit of SDG 17, which advocates for strengthening global partnerships to support sustainable development. Paragraph 3 emphasises the ILO's commitment to assist Member States in realising these fundamental rights through technical cooperation and mobilization of resources:

“Recognizes the obligation on the Organization to assist its Members, in response to their established and expressed needs, in order to attain these objectives by making full use of its constitutional, operational and budgetary resources, including by the mobilization of external resources and support, as well as by encouraging other international organizations with which the ILO has established relations, pursuant to article 12 of its Constitution, to support these efforts:

(a) by offering technical cooperation and advisory services to promote the ratification and implementation of the fundamental Conventions;

(b) by assisting those Members not yet in a position to ratify some or all of these Conventions in their efforts to respect, to promote and to realize the principles concerning fundamental rights which are the subject of those Conventions; and

(c) by helping the Members in their efforts to create a climate for economic and social development” (International Labour Organization, 2022, pp. 9-10).

Another example of supporting the aims of SDG17, the annex (Follow-up to the Declaration) outlines mechanisms for annual follow-up and global reporting, encouraging a collaborative approach to monitoring progress and providing support where needed:

“1. The aim of the follow-up described below is to encourage the efforts made by the Members of the Organization to promote the fundamental principles and rights enshrined in the Constitution of the ILO and the Declaration of Philadelphia and reaffirmed in this Declaration.

2. In line with this objective, which is of a strictly promotional nature, this follow-up will allow the identification of areas in which the assistance of the Organization through its technical cooperation activities may prove useful to its Members to help them implement these fundamental principles and rights. It is not a substitute for the established supervisory mechanisms, nor shall it impede their functioning; consequently, specific situations within the purview of those mechanisms shall not be examined or re-examined within the framework of this follow-up” (International Labour Organization, 2022, p. 11).

The ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work, through its provisions and the follow-up mechanisms established, demonstrates a clear and direct contribution to advancing several SDGs by promoting equitable, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, reducing inequalities, ensuring healthy work environments, and fostering international partnerships. However, these links are rather conceptual, with no actual indicators.

3.20 The Paris Agreement

The Paris Agreement, adopted within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in 2015, is a landmark international accord that sets out a global framework to avoid dangerous climate change by limiting global warming to well below 2 degrees Celsius. The agreement aims to strengthen countries’ ability to deal with the impacts of climate change and support them in their efforts. While not a WTO agreement, the Paris Agreement has profound implications for trade policies in the context of global climate action.

As mentioned above, the Paris Agreement establishes concrete measures and indicators for SDG 13 by setting quantifiable targets for limiting global warming. Its commitment to keeping the increase in global average temperature well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels, with efforts to limit it to 1.5°C, serves as a direct and measurable contribution to achieving SDG 13’s aim for urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. This approach goes beyond conceptual linkages, offering a structured and quantifiable framework for nations to align their climate action strategies with global sustainability goals.

“1a) Holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels, recognizing that this would significantly reduce the risks and impacts of climate change” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 3).

The article 4.1 states the long-term goal of reaching a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of the century:

“1. In order to achieve the long-term temperature goal set out in Article 2, Parties aim to reach global peaking of greenhouse gas emissions as soon as possible, recognizing that peaking will take longer for developing country Parties, and to undertake rapid reductions thereafter in accordance with best available science, so as to achieve a balance between anthropogenic emissions by sources and removals by sinks of greenhouse gases in the second half of this century, on the basis of equity,

and in the context of sustainable development and efforts to eradicate poverty” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 4).

The Paris Agreement also indirectly supports SDG 7 through Article 10, which emphasises technology development and transfer, particularly technologies that support clean and renewable energy solutions. This support is operationalised through mechanisms that foster innovation and facilitate access to clean energy technologies, making the linkage to SDG 7 not merely conceptual but practical, with a focus on enhancing capacities and financial support to transition to sustainable energy systems.

“1. Parties share a long-term vision on the importance of fully realizing technology development and transfer in order to improve resilience to climate change and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

2. Parties, noting the importance of technology for the implementation of mitigation and adaptation actions under this Agreement and recognizing existing technology deployment and dissemination efforts, shall strengthen cooperative action on technology development and transfer” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 14).

The Paris Agreement also supports SDG 17’s call for revitalising global partnerships for sustainable development through its framework for international cooperation, especially in Articles 6, 9, and 11. These articles outline structured mechanisms for financial support, technology transfer, and capacity building among nations, underpinning a practical approach to fostering partnerships. The requirement for developed countries to support developing nations provides a clear framework for collaboration, making the linkage to SDG 17 practical with identifiable mechanisms for action.

“6.2. Parties shall, where engaging on a voluntary basis in cooperative approaches that involve the use of internationally transferred mitigation outcomes towards nationally determined contributions, promote sustainable development and ensure environmental integrity and transparency, including in governance, and shall apply robust accounting to ensure, inter alia, the avoidance of double counting, consistent with guidance adopted by the Conference of the Parties serving as the meeting of the Parties to this Agreement” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 7).

“9.1. Developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 9).

“11.1. Capacity-building under this Agreement should enhance the capacity and ability of developing country Parties, in particular countries with the least capacity, such as the least developed countries, and those that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change, such as small island developing States, to take effective climate change action, including, inter alia, to implement adaptation and mitigation actions, and should facilitate technology development, dissemination and deployment, access to climate finance, relevant aspects of education, training and public awareness, and the transparent, timely and accurate communication of information” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 15).

The Paris Agreement’s provisions, particularly in article 7 on adaptation efforts and article 9 on financial support, lay the groundwork for making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable supporting SDG 11(Sustainable Cities and Communities). The focus on adaptation measures and financial mechanisms to support these initiatives indicates a practical

linkage. The agreement's emphasis on building resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change impacts directly contributes to creating sustainable urban environments, thus offering practical pathways rather than merely conceptual connections to SDG 11.

“7.1. Parties hereby establish the global goal on adaptation of enhancing adaptive capacity, strengthening resilience and reducing vulnerability to climate change, with a view to contributing to sustainable development and ensuring an adequate adaptation response in the context of the temperature goal referred to in Article 2” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 9).

“9.1. Developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 13).

Lastly, but no less important, article 5 of the agreement directly supports efforts under SDG 15 to protect, restore, and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. The explicit call for action to conserve and enhance sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases, including forests, and the encouragement of sustainable management of forests, are practical measures that align with SDG 15 targets. These articles offer a clear directive for countries to integrate ecosystem and biodiversity conservation into their climate action plans, demonstrating a practical and measurable connection to SDG 15.

“5.1. Parties should take action to conserve and enhance, as appropriate, sinks and reservoirs of greenhouse gases as referred to in Article 4, paragraph 1 (d), of the Convention, including forests.

5.2. Parties are encouraged to take action to implement and support, including through results-based payments, the existing framework as set out in related guidance and decisions already agreed under the Convention for: policy approaches and positive incentives for activities relating to reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation, and the role of conservation, sustainable management of forests and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries; and alternative policy approaches, such as joint mitigation and adaptation approaches for the integral and sustainable management of forests, while reaffirming the importance of incentivizing, as appropriate, non-carbon benefits associated with such approaches” (United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, 2015, p. 6).

In summary, the Paris Agreement's connections to the mentioned SDGs are predominantly practical, underpinned by specific measures, mechanisms, and indicators. The Paris Agreement demonstrates its strategic and practical linkages with the SDGs by outlining specific commitments and mechanisms that contribute to climate action, sustainable energy, partnerships, sustainable urban development, and conservation of life on land.

3.21 Analysis summary

The preceding sections, encapsulated in the simplified matrix provided (*Table 4*), have explored in detail the interrelationships between various international agreements and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This subchapter serves as a summary, integrating the findings from the assessment of a wide range of documents, from the foundational treaties of the World Trade Organization (WTO) to key environmental agreements such as the Paris Agreement. The synthesis

aims to shed light on the intricate relationship between global legal frameworks and the ambitious goals outlined in the SDGs. This analysis reveals the multifaceted roles that trade, environmental, labour, and climate policies play in advancing the SDGs, emphasising the necessity of integrated approaches to global challenges.

The matrix (*Table 4*) highlights several SDGs that are repeatedly supported in the documents analysed, in particular SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth), SDG 17 (partnerships for the goals), SDG 10 (reducing inequalities), SDG 9 (industry, innovation and infrastructure) and SDG 14 (life below water). The ubiquitous mention of SDG 8 in various agreements underscores the fundamental link between trade policy and the achievement of economic growth and employment. Similarly, the prominence of SDG 17 reflects a global consensus on the importance of international cooperation and partnerships in pursuing sustainable development goals.

The contributions of different types of agreements to the SDGs can be distinguished. World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements primarily emphasise economic growth and partnership (SDGs 8 and 17), demonstrating the critical impact of trade policy on sustainable development. Environmental and climate agreements, such as the Convention on Biological Diversity and the Paris Agreement, address a broader range of goals, highlighting the essential linkages between environmental protection and sustainable development. In addition, labour agreements such as the ILO Declaration underline the importance of addressing social dimensions, including decent work and gender equality, within the framework of sustainable development.

The complexity of achieving sustainable development can be seen from the previous subchapters, which highlight the different but interrelated roles of international agreements in this endeavour. The focus on economic policies (SDG 8) in several documents demonstrates the perceived centrality of economic factors in sustainable development. The analysis also highlights the critical need for global partnerships (SDG 17) in addressing the multidimensional challenges of sustainable development.

In addition, the clear potential of trade and economic agreements to address inequalities (SDG 10) and promote industrial innovation (SDG 9) is evident. The attention given to environmental sustainability in various agreements (SDGs 14 and 15) highlights the importance of integrating environmental considerations into all aspects of sustainable development.

The need to advocate for a holistic and integrated approach to sustainable development, in which economic, social and environmental goals are pursued in tandem, is clear.

Further advancing the implementation of the SDGs through trade agreements and other international agreements will require enhanced global cooperation and strategic alignment of these agreements with the SDGs to ensure that trade and economic policies not only promote economic growth, but also contribute to the broader goals of equity, environmental sustainability and social inclusion. This analysis serves as a testament to the complex interplay between global governance mechanisms and sustainable development, and highlights the need for concerted efforts across all sectors to achieve the SDGs.

Table 4. Trade-SDG contextual review alignment matrix

Agreements	Sustainable Development Goals																
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17
WTO 01: WTO Agreement (1995)								•						•	•		•
WTO 02: 1A GATT (1947)								•	•	•							•
WTO 03: 1A Agreement on Agriculture		•		•				•									•
WTO 04: 1A Sanitary and Phytosanitary Measures			•					•						•	•		•
WTO 05: 1A Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade			•											•	•		•
WTO 06: 1A Agreement on Trade-Related Investment Measures								•		•							•
WTO 07: 1A Anti-dumping								•		•							
WTO 08: 1A Customs Valuation								•		•							•
WTO 09: 1A Agreement on Preshipment Inspection								•								•	•
WTO 10: 1A Agreement on Rules of Origin	•							•		•							•
WTO 11: 1A Agreement on Import Licensing Procedures								•		•							•
WTO 12: 1A Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures								•	•	•	•	•	•				
WTO 13: 1A Agreement on Safeguards								•	•								•
WTO 14: 1A Agreement on Trade Facilitation								•		•							•
WTO 15: 1B GATS								•	•	•							•
WTO 16: 1C TRIPS			•						•	•							•
WTO 17: 4B Plurilateral Government procurement								•	•	•		•	•				
18 Other: Convention on Biological Diversity		•	•		•					•			•	•	•		•
19 Other: ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights			•		•			•		•							•
20 Other: Paris Agreement							•				•		•		•		•
Total number of alignments	1	2	5	1	2	0	1	16	6	13	2	2	4	4	5	1	17

Source: own research results.

4 Investigating links between trade and sustainability through Specific Trade Concerns

4.1 Specific Trade Concerns – why are they an important tool for the WTO liberalisation and thrive for sustainability?

The role of trade in reducing poverty and further integrating developing countries is widely recognised (World Bank Group and World Trade Organization, 2015 and 2018).

International trade and investment have been shown to be essential to fighting poverty and achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nation (UN) Agenda 2030. Despite the multiple benefits of liberalization resulting from the reduction of tariff barriers, trade has been faced with growing protectionism in recent years. The World Trade Organization (WTO), the main engine of this liberalization, is under fire due to growing geopolitical tensions and the recognition that global competition has resulted in an unfair distribution of the economic gains and losses from trade experienced by sectors, regions and workers around the world (Stanford, 2020; Dullien, 2018). The WTO is experiencing a crisis of legitimacy and appears unprepared to effectively address the challenges of rapid economic, political, social, technological and environmental change (Oonagh, 2020).

Discourses on the modernisation of the WTO refer to its three pillars: trade negotiation, trade policy monitoring and reform of the dispute settlement system (Mildner et al., 2022; Van der Loo, 2022). Increasing attention is also being paid to the need to promote environmental and social sustainability through trade.

The Agenda 2030 recognises international trade as a means to achieve socio-economic development; however, the understanding of the interlinkages between trade policy and sustainable development it remains a challenge for policymakers (UNCTAD, 2016).

In recent years, the growing liberalisation of agricultural trade brought about the tariff reduction has been accompanied by an increasing use of non-tariff measures (NTMs) (Olper, 2017; Beguin, 2022; Grant, Arita, 2017; Matthews et al., 2017; Disdier and Fugazza, 2019). These are defined as measures other than the imposition of tariffs that have the potential to affect trade in terms of quantity of goods traded, prices or both (DITC, UNCTAD, 2010).

NTMs range from measures used as trade policy instruments with a mainly protectionist scope (the so-called non-technical measures), to technical measures with non-trade policy objectives, aiming to protect health or the environment (UNCTAD, 2016). A comprehensive classification of NTMs was developed by UNCTAD in 2012 and has been progressively updated to reflect the evolution of international trade (UNCTAD, 2019).

Most NTMs are represented by Sanitary and Phyto-Sanitary (SPS) measures and Technical Barrier to Trade (TBT) regulations. Although, the latter predominate in total trade in terms of number of products covered and as share of trade value covered, the former dominante in agri-food trade (Disdier and Fugazza, 2019; WTO ITC UNCTAD, 2021). It is estimated that almost 80% of agricultural world trade is affected by SPS measure, equal to 10% of total world trade (UNCTAD, 2016).

In the WTO, the SPS Agreement covers regulations on food safety and animal and plant health standards. SPS measures are primarily used to protect human health, animal or plant life and the environment, and thus directly address issues related to sustainable development. This leads to increasing friction between countries over SPS measures due to their potential to distort international trade (Roberts, Unnevehr, 2003). In turn, by affecting trade, they also have an indirect impact on sustainability through trade (UNCTAD, 2015 and 2016). Therefore, we can observe a kind of reciprocal relationship between trade and sustainability, where one influences the other.

The aim of this chapter is to investigate how SPS measures impact on the achievement of sustainability issues, as perceived by trading partners. We have identified three case studies that are representative of the different dynamics of behaviour featured by the EU and its partners, in terms of reciprocity and asymmetries between countries. The study is carried out through the analysis of three Specific Trade Concerns (STC), a mechanism under the SPS Committee considered as a transparent monitoring tool that allows countries to learn more about each other's national implementation of SPS measures in light of international obligations (Cassehgari et al., 2019). As STCs are raised because SPS measures are considered to be overly trade-restrictive, thus affecting the achievement of sustainability goals, we analyse three STCs with the EU as a trading partner to identify potential problems that standards and their implementation pose for trade: EU-China on African Swine Fever (ASF), EU-India on Phytosanitary import restrictions and Senegal-EU on Rapid Alert System regarding mango imports.

STCs are raised orally in the SPS Committee and progress made through bilateral discussions between trading partners is summarised in notes by the Secretariat. They are not formal disputes but are often a signal that a national measure taken by another WTO member is considered inconsistent with international rules (Horn et al. 2013). According to the literature, STCs have defused potential trade conflicts by resolving trade concerns non-litigiously (Horn et al. 2013; Cassehgarri et al., 2019; Wolfe, 2020).

An extensive literature has analysed STCs as a good proxy for non-tariff measures that represent a barrier to trade (Laget, Deuss, 2023; Orefice, 2016; Fontagné, et al., 2015), but to the best of our knowledge, no study has explored the sustainability issues behind STCs. This study aims to fill this gap through three case studies which are representative of the behaviours that can be considered:

- a) cooperative (Senegal) because the two trading partners share the same sustainability goals;
- b) divergent (China), because the two trading partners have different perceptions of sustainability issues;
- c) negotiable trade-offs (India), with respect to the different sustainability goals achievement.

We try to add new evidence to Wolfe's (2020) work on the use of STCs to manage conflicts within the WTO. In this context, we consider the theory of change (Vogel, 2012) as a useful tool to improve this system and hopefully contribute to the resolution of international frictions (Vogel, 2012) keeping in mind the objective of fostering positive linkages between trade and sustainable development.

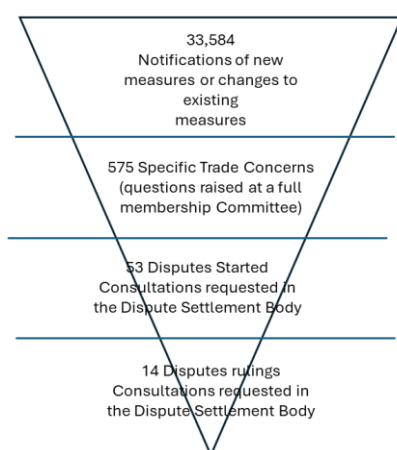
4.2 Selected case studies on the Specific Trade Concerns

In the last decades, the growing liberalisation of trade and the simultaneous interest in promoting sustainability through trade, have led to a growing number of NTMs mostly related to product and process standards. These include SPSs and TBTs, both of which aimed to prevent the creation of undesirable barriers to trade. Although most NTMs are non-trade related, they can have an indirect impact on trade, by changing market access conditions. The direction and magnitude of such impacts on trade and welfare are controversial, depending on the type of NTM, the countries/products/standards involved, and the methodology applied (Santeramo, Lamonaca, 2019; Beghin et al., 2012; Roberts, Unnevehr, 2003).

The SPS Agreement allows WTO members to “provide the level of health protection they deem appropriate”, while ensuring that this does not lead to overly restrictive trade measures. Members are encouraged to use international standards, but may adopt higher levels of protection if they are based on scientific justification and applied in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner.

The SPS Agreement is based on transparency obligations that require Member countries to provide all information on the SPS measures that they intend to introduce or modify. The system can be described as an inverted pyramid, with a significant number of notifications of SPS measures introduced or intended to be modified at the top and the actual number of disputes at the bottom (*Figure 8*). This system provides for a continuous consultation process between the parties after the notification, which is recognised as an important step in limiting friction between countries (Cassehgari et al., 2019; Wolfe, 2020). As can be seen, only a limited number of notifications result in STC and an even smaller number result in actual trade disputes.

Figure 8. The SPS inverted pyramid (1995 – 20 November 2023)



Source: own adaptation based on https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/sps_e.htm#work.

The international standards, guidelines and recommendations referred to in the SPS Agreement are developed in three other international organisations (the so-called “Three sisters”), which have gained importance following their involvement in the SPS Agreement (Roberts and Unnevehr, 2003). The three organizations are the Codex Alimentarius Commission, the World Organisation for Animal Health (WOAH) and the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC).

The three STCs analysed see the EU as the main actor to different extents. The first STC deals with Chinese import restrictions from the EU due to ASF. The STC was first raised by the EU in July 2015, and then 18 more times, most recently in November 2023. China imposes a country-wide ban on imports of pigs and pig products from EU Member States (MS) where ASF was detected, and does not recognise the EU regionalisation applied in accordance with the international standards set by the WOA. The EU raised concerns about China's ban, considering it overly trade restrictive and inconsistent with China's obligations under the SPS Agreement and WOA standards (regionalization). On the other hand, China considers the ban necessary because of the ineffective control of the disease by the EU MSs with different levels of prevention and control, imposed in accordance with the SPS agreement. Regionalization allows a country to limit the spread of the disease to a restricted area, while allowing trade to continue in the rest of the territory. Only a limited number of countries partially or fully recognise the EU regionalisation measures for ASF, while a larger number of countries do not recognise the EU regionalization measures at all. ASF is a highly contagious infectious disease that affects domestic and wild pigs of all breeds and ages. Its spread around the world has become a major global source of crisis for the pork industry, with a high socio-economic impact on the affected countries, due to restrictions on meat exports and limitations on local forest activities (Sánchez-Cordón et al., 2018). Moreover, its spread poses a serious problem for global food security, as pork meat is one of the primary sources of animal proteins and is expected to account for 34% of all the protein from meat sources by 2030 (OECD/FAO, 2021). China is both the largest producer and consumer of pig meat in the world, accounting for over 40% of the total in 2021.

The second STC concerns India's Phytosanitary import restrictions, due to the requirement of fumigation of plants and plant materials with Methyl bromide (MBr). The STC was raised by the EU and the US (three times, all in 2004), supported by Canada, Chile, and New Zealand. MBr as a fumigant is recognised as an important tool for the control of some quarantine pests of plants and plant-derived materials. At the same time, MBr is a powerful ozone-depleting gas. For these reasons, MBr is regulated by two Multilateral Agreements: the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer and the IPPC. The production and consumption of MBr has been phased out around the world, by 2005 for developed countries and by 2015 for developing countries. An exemption to the ban exists for MBr for Quarantine and Pre-Shipment (QPS) use, considering the need for its use where there is no alternative exists. Countries are, however, encouraged to use alternatives to MBr where they are technically and economically feasible. In the EU, the production and consumption of MBr for QPS purposes has been banned since March 2010, not allowing fumigation with MBr in agricultural exports/imports. In 2004, a new import regulation came into force in India requiring pre-shipment fumigation treatment with MBr for most plants and plant products. Because of the ban, India allowed fumigation upon arrival in India until 2017. However, due to the thinning of the ozone layer over the country, India first withdrew and then reinstated permission for fumigation at Indian ports. From 2017, periodically (every six months) India is granting a waiver from the use of MBr in exporting countries and allow fumigation upon arrival, subject to payment of a penalty by exporters. Concerns have been raised about both procedural issues and India's reluctance to accept alternatives to MBr.

The third STC was raised by Senegal (once in 2008) for problems with control, inspection and approval procedures. It concerns the EU's restriction of mango imports from Senegal due to the interception of the fruit fly (an invasive pest considered the major threat to the horticultural industry in Africa) in imports from Senegal. The mango sector in Senegal has grown dramatically in recent

years, both in terms of production and exports, but its potential remains underexploited due to the weakness of the production structures in the main Senegalese-producing regions. To strengthen measures to prevent the introduction and spread of harmful pests and diseases in the EU, a revised EU phytosanitary regime entered into force in December 2019, imposing additional requirements on all countries exporting mangoes to the EU. The EU and Senegal are working together to modernise the mango sector, make it compliant with the new EU SPS regulation and to continue exporting to the EU.

4.3 Case studies on STCs and their relevance for sustainability

The three STCs differ to each other in many ways: the role of the EU in the STC, the EU's position on trade, the international organisations involved in SPS, the sustainability issues involved and the global dimension of the STC (*Table 5*).

Table 5. Case studies on STCs

Case studies		EU-China on ASF	EU-India on Fumigation with MBr	Senegal-EU on Mango
EU position in STC	EU Raising	x	x	
	EU Respondent			x
Number of times STC was raised (until February 2024)		19 (since July 2015)	3 (since March 2004)	1 (June 2008)
International organisations involved in SPS		World Organisation for Animal Health - WOA	International Plant Protection Convention - IPPC	International Plant Protection Convention - IPPC
Primary subject keyword in STC document	Declared	Animal Health	Plant Health	Food safety
Other Keywords	Not declared (from literature)	Food security Climate change	Climate change Food security	Food security
EU position in trade		Exporter	Exporter	Importer
Risk perception		China: Defensive approach for economic and social effects on one's territory	India: Trade-off between sustainability objectives (food security vs climate change)	EU-Senegal: Cooperative approach between the two trading partners with respect to the economic, social and environmental concerns
Global dimension of STC		Yes	Yes	No
Status of STC		Still pending	Resolved	Resolved

Source: own research results.

The China case study highlights the different perception of risk associated to food safety and food security between the two trading partners. The perceived failure to accommodate legitimate differences in food regulations is considered as a crucial element that can increase resistance to trade liberalisation and, lead to unforeseen policy choices (Roberts, Unnevehr, 2003). China and the EU take divergent positions on the impact of regionalisation, a theme that is widely discussed in the WTO. The different position, in turn, reflects on the different expectations of achieving sustainability objectives in both trading partners. China's highly defensive position shows a high sensitivity to socio-economic concerns (food security) in a country characterised by a strong separation between pork production and consumption area (Yao *et al.*, 2022). The EU, for its part aims to protect its pig industry for economic reasons as it is the world's largest exporter of pigs and pig products and the second largest producer in the world after China, with a high concentration of pig meat production in a few MSs. The sector accounts for 8.5% of the total EU-27 agricultural output, the highest share of any meat sector (Augère-Granier, 2020). The STC shows a divergent perception of sustainable issues between the trading partners, one more pronounced on food security and the other on economic concerns.

The analysis of the EU-India STC looks at the trade-off effects of the SPS implemented by India, which focuses more on food security than on climate change. In this sense, although the STC was formally raised due to problems of harmonisation of procedures, the underlying sustainability issues reveal a different level of awareness/needs of the two partners.

The case of Senegal is an example of cooperative behaviour between the two partners, both of whom are aware of the importance of the mango sector in contributing to the sustainable economic growth of Senegal and its potential to provide employment opportunities, particularly for women and young people, and to support rural communities by reducing poverty and ensuring decent work (GIZ, 2021; COLEACP, 2022).

4.4 Analysis summary

The aim of this analysis is to represent a way for the modernisation of the WTO towards sustainability through a constructive and ongoing process of cooperation and consensus-building, aimed at linking trade and sustainability, overcoming trade-offs and developing win-win situations. This work has been developed according to the logical framework of the theory of change, which has dominated the institutional construction and capacity buildings of the major international agencies and agreements over the last decades (Vogel, 2012). This theory is very useful for understanding, analysing and hopefully contributing to the resolution of international frictions. The key points of the theory of change can be summarised as follows: 1) the theory attempts to hold together concepts such as context, actors and a sequence of logically-linked events leading to long-term change, although there may be many combinations and differently developed applications of these; 2) the approach is easily adapted according to the nature, scope and level of detail of the change being implemented in different organisations and agencies; 3) the theory of change is seen as a more realistic and flexible thinking tool than other current logical framework approaches. Following this theory, the main objective is to identify accelerators and enablers, bottlenecks and solutions to address bottlenecks in order to enhance the country's ability to prioritise actions to achieve sustainable issues along the three pillars of sustainability: economic, social and environmental.

The IPPC, which is directly involved in the SPS disputes in the India and Senegal cases, has also adopted the theory of change approach, which aims at greater integration between the actors involved, with a view to introducing the principles of environmental and social sustainability and the achieving the UN Millennium Development Goals.

To accomplish this, there is no single predetermined path, but the only fruitful way is to analyse specific cases, set up a process of learning from experience, build some good practices to become inspirational and lead the way to further steps (Wolfe, 2020).

The analysis of the three-case studies highlighted the linkages between sustainability concerns in STCs and trade. Following the main theory of change framework, which mainly highlights the processes through which change occurs, the consensus on how to improve the use of STCs to reduce trade disputes (Wolfe, 2020; Fabri *et al.*, 2023; Cassehgar *et al.*, 2019) can be seen as paving the way to further steps to foster the positive linkages between trade and sustainable development through the understanding NTMs (UNCTAD, 2015).

The three case studies illustrate the importance of addressing the potential problems that standards and their implementation pose for trade and the achievement of sustainability objective. there is a need to (at least) take the following actions: strengthen cooperation and information sharing between trading partners (as suggested by the analysis of the EU-China and EU-India STCs); provide ongoing technical assistance programmes, so to help countries improve sustainability and compliance with norms and standards, also through effective dialogue and engagement between the public and private sectors involving all stakeholders (as in the case of Senegal); raise the level of ambition in bilateral economic and trade relations for sustainable development (China, India), moving from a dialogue between technicians to a higher political level.

The STC mechanism is a process that aims to enhance transparency and surveillance, promote policy learning and best practices, engage economic diplomacy to clarify misunderstandings, create a dialogue among experts, and thus provides a space for collaboration (Fabri *et al.*, 2023). Furthermore, this analysis suggests that STCs could be further improved to link trade and sustainability.

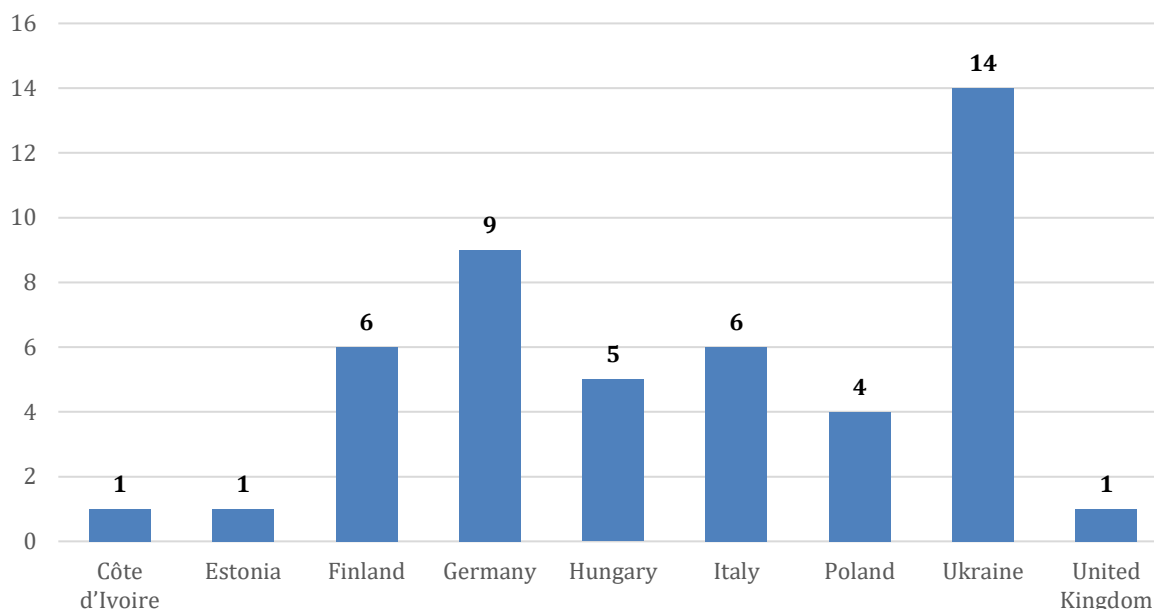
Our understanding of these links has highlighted the need to involve local actors and small producers in a participatory, collaborative and coordinated process so that international trade can make its contribution to sustainable development.

5 Brainstorming stakeholder survey

In June-September 2023 an online brainstorming stakeholder survey was conducted in order to obtain stakeholder opinions on two interrelated issues: 1) the EU and global trade between developed and developing nations in regards to their impact upon the environment, 2) functioning and potential modernisation of the World Trade Organization (WTO). The survey was conducted through the Google Forms tool, the stakeholders were selected and invited for participation by the project partners based on their expertise in agri-food trade.

A total of 47 stakeholders were reached from nine countries (*Figure 9*): Ukraine (14), Germany (9), Finland (6), Italy (6), Hungary (5), Poland (4), Côte d'Ivoire (1), Estonia (1), the UK (1).

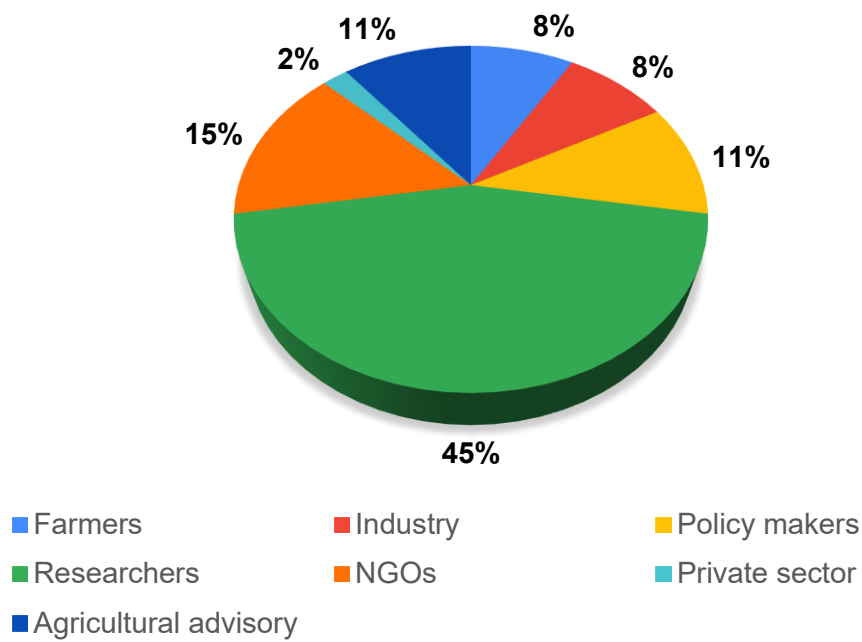
Figure 9. Geographic representation of the brainstorming survey respondents



Source: own elaboration.

In terms of the type of stakeholder the survey participants represented the following groups (*Figure 10*): farmers (4), agricultural industry (4), policy makers (5), NGOs (7), agricultural advisors (5), researchers (21) and private sector (1).

Figure 10. Professional representation of the brainstorming survey respondents



Source: own elaboration.

Five questions were focusing on the WTO functioning and potential modernisation, possible directions of changes, as well as the key issues that should be focused more upon in the WTO regulations to better target the SDGs.

Question 1. Is it possible to modernise the World Trade Organization (WTO) to help pursue sustainability goals in addition to liberalization in agri-food trade?

The first question asked the respondents whether it is generally possible to modernise the WTO to help pursue sustainability goals in addition to liberalization in agri-food trade. Forty-three respondents (91.5%) indicated a positive opinion, while the remaining 4 (8.5%) respondents disagreed.

Among the respondents who gave a positive reply we additional comments that gave further insight to their opinions, which focused upon the following. 1) Any new agreement will include some sustainability aspects; 2) It will be an excellent solution to the current situation. 3) This might be possible but not necessarily the easiest option, at least for the agri-food sector it has been argued that a human-rights based process outside the WTO would be more likely to provide meaningful results (e.g. the UN special rapporteur on the right to food: <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41301-021-00305-0>). 4) The World Trade Organization (WTO) could play a pivotal role in fostering dialogues and negotiations concerning trade-linked environmental standards and pacts; such discussions could encompass various matters, including the promotion of sustainable fisheries, the establishment of carbon pricing mechanisms, and the formulation of regulations governing hazardous substances; these agreements would serve as safeguards to ensure that international trade endeavours align with the overarching objectives of global sustainability. 5) Several initiatives started, however, the recent overall atmosphere in general now neither towards sustainability nor liberalization. 6) This will clearly be difficult because of the decision-making arrangements in the WTO. 7) Possible yes, but no political consensus on the horizon. Also, why focus on agri-food trade? All emissions count.

The rest of stated in a more general way that it is the only way to level the playing field, and asked a rather rhetorical question on “who else would be there to provide hope for the future”?

The respondents giving the negative response to this question stated additionally that 1) There is no political will, and 2) All countries must have the same rules.

Question 2. Should the focus of WTO modernization be more on economic, social or environmental goals in terms of agri-food trade?

An equal number of respondents (16 persons or 34% each) stated that economic and social dimensions should be the primary focus within the WTO modernization process, while 15 respondents (31.9%) chose the environmental dimension.

Among the respondents selecting the economic dimension additional comments were given: 1) Three goals must be promoted at the same time in a balanced way. The experiences of the economic top and now the environmental top in policy-making are not good. 2) The focus of WTO modernization in terms of agri-food trade should ideally be balanced among economic, social, and environmental goals. Each of these aspects is interconnected and contributes to creating a sustainable and equitable trading system.

Respondents choosing the social dimension had more additional comments and stated the following. 1) Actually, a more integrative approach was relevant. So, to understand synergies and as well trade-offs of economic security (e.g., by liberalization or the contrary, i.e., protection) AND sustainability. 2) Global boundaries should frame the new policy instruments. Every emission should cost (why only agri trade? - <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41893-019-0465-1>). 3) It is risky to give an organisation such as the WTO more than one objective. 4) Economics are well embedded - social and environmental need to become much stronger. 5) Should have a balanced approach to achieve all three! 6) The three pillars of sustainable development should be taken into account when modernising the WTO. 7) My response would be that social and environmental factors need to be taken into account.

Among the respondents suggesting to focus on the environmental dimension of WTO modernization the additional comments included: 1) More ecological criteria should be preferred (see more: wedding cake model of SDGs); 2) as name of this trade suggests, we consume these products. Taking care of the quality of these products is tantamount to taking care of your own health.

Question 3. Could shifting the focus of WTO towards sustainable development goals be an obstacle to processes of further trade liberalization?

Twenty-nine respondents (61.7%) replied “yes” to this question, while the remaining 18 (38.3%) gave a “no” reply. Therefore, only the minority was optimistic in this regard and does not foresee additional obstacles related to processes of trade liberalization.

Those respondents who agree with the statement that promoting the focus of WTO on sustainability goals could be an obstacle to trade liberalization stated additionally: 1) Probably so, but business as usual will surely lead to more conflict and higher future debts; 2) Additional aims will always conflict with the principle of trade liberalization; 3) If not all trade liberalization results in higher welfare, after taking into account all externalities and distributional effects, this should be the case. A special consideration is that effects on poverty would not to be considered separate from total economic growth; 4) Shifting the focus of the World Trade Organization (WTO) towards sustainable development goals could potentially pose challenges to the processes of further trade liberalization.

While the intention to align trade policies with sustainability objectives is commendable, it's important to recognise that there might be trade-offs and complexities involved; 5) This could be mitigated if the third countries strengthen their environmental policies, potentially with the finances and know-how provided by the EU; 6) Isn't it the question on how make prices regard for (current) externalities and trade less harmful within the global boundaries? The consensus issue remains. One respondent also suggested that the result it extremely difficult to assess.

Among the respondents that don't see the suggested processes as obstacles to trade liberalization stated: 1) the recent tensions - Covid, Russian war AND overall economic rivalry - pushed awareness on economic security. Therefore, a sensible balance of both and of understanding trade-offs of longer- and shorter-term effects are relevant; 2) They do not have to be contradictory.

Question 4. What are the main obstacles to modernization of the WTO and improving its focus on sustainability?

The question was a multiple choice type with the following options: 1) Rigidness of the WTO structure; 2) Overcomplexity of regulations and procedures; 3) Weak representation of the least-developed countries; 4) Unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes; 5) Other (to be completed by a respondent).

The option "Unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes" received the most replies (chosen in total by 34 respondents), next was the "Overcomplexity of regulations and procedures" (15 responses), the "Rigidness of the WTO structure" (14 responses), with the last being the "Weak representation of the least-developed countries" (11 responses).

At the same time the option "Unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes" was chosen by 14 respondents as their sole response, while the other options were mainly mixed with other ones. Thus, the "Overcomplexity of regulations and procedures" was chosen as the primary response by 11 stakeholders, which was followed in their responses by "Unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes" (6 responses) or "Weak representation of the least-developed countries" (3 responses).

The "Rigidness of the WTO structure" was chosen as the primary response by 14 stakeholders, which was followed in their responses by either "Unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes" or "Overcomplexity of regulations and procedures" (both appearing as the second response in case of 5 respondents). The option "Weak representation of the least-developed countries" appeared as the primary response in case of 5 respondents.

Valuable additional comments were given by the stakeholders, including the following obstacles: 1) Lack of consensus (e.g. how to measure and "tax" emissions), maybe a committee (like the SPS-committee, or a system of CODEX, IPPC and OIE) might allow at least for a science based debate on the topic; 2) Overall atmosphere of tensions leading to an understanding of trade as zero-sum game: The recent rivalry reflects that trade is seen as zero-sum. And WTO rules function best if there is an overall support of trade as positive sum. In addition with existing WTO weakness of the dispute mechanisms nor real enforcing option. So: maybe current policy conflict atmosphere as dominant to hinder any type of WTO setting; 3) Economic power concentration and their influence on politics - The most influential countries were more likely to shape WTO policies and support mainly their own economic interests; 4) More representative, more long term future security and more orientation towards planetary boundaries, more willingness to accept fair burden sharing; 5) Lack of implementable proposals!

Question 5. What are the key agri-food trade dimensions needed to be tackled for modernization of the WTO to help improve its influence upon the global sustainability?

The question was a multiple choice type with the following options: 1) Subsidies; 2) Non-tariff barriers; 3) Export restrictions; 4) Agri-food prices; 5) Singling out environmental goods; 6) Other (to be completed by a respondent).

The “Subsidies” option was the most frequently selected by stakeholders, resulting in 23 responses. It was followed by the “Non-tariff barriers” option (19 responses), the “Singling out environmental goods” (14 responses), the “Agri-food prices” (13 responses), and the “Export restrictions” (9 responses).

At the same time the option “Subsidies” was chosen by 10 respondents as their sole response, while the other replies were mainly mixed and included additional options. Thus, other participants choosing “Subsidies” (13 stakeholders) have additionally selected “Non-tariff barriers” (8 respondents), “Agri-food prices” (3 responses) or other.

The “Non-tariff barriers” was chosen as the sole response only by 4 respondents, while in 7 more responses it was combined with other options: in 5 instances with the “Agri-food prices” and in 2 cases – with the “Export restrictions”.

Among the additional comments on the question are the following: 1) Politically subsidies seen as most critical to support further steps for adjusted AoA; 2) The trend towards "cheap food, no matter at what cost" has lead us to where we are, and surely we know that we cannot continue that way; 3) Non-tariff barriers that support the right to food need to be considered as a possibility; 4) There is no single action to improve the influence of WTO upon the global sustainability).

6 Stakeholder consultations

Stakeholder consultations were conducted in the form of interviews in the spring 2024 at the headquarters of Confagricoltura. During the meetings, experts from production services, international relations managers, and technical staff specialising in innovation and sustainable development at Confagricoltura were contributing to the discussion of the outputs and ongoing WTO-related issues. The experts included the Director of the EU and international relations, Director for political direction of economic development of the food chains, Director for sustainable development and innovation, experts representing the Directorate of economic development policies of the agri-food chains, as well as the sustainable development and innovation fields (detailed information presented in Annex I. Final stakeholder consultations).

A questionnaire consisting of 7 questions on topics related to the modernisation of the WTO was administered to production service experts, international relations managers, and technical staff in the field of innovation and sustainable development. The textual analysis of the interviews was incorporated into a document and a summary of the results is reported below.

The stakeholders have identified a multitude of pressing issues that require urgent attention. These include the need to modernise the World Trade Organisation, which has been criticised for its failure to keep up with the changing times. Additionally, climate change and biodiversity concerns are high on the agenda, as they have far-reaching consequences for the planet and its inhabitants.

To address these issues, a group of experts from various fields were invited to a roundtable discussion. They engaged in a meaningful conversation, sharing their opinions and perspectives on the topics at hand. As the discussion progressed, they arrived at a common understanding, paving the way for a unified approach to the challenges that lie ahead.

More specifically, these questions aimed to gather opinions on:

- the need for modernisation of the World Trade Organisation in response to current global challenges;
- the compatibility of agricultural subsidies with the free global market and competition, and their impact on developing countries;
- new measures that can be incorporated to ensure social sustainability and inclusivity in international trade;
- the promotion of greater environmental sustainability through trade;
- whether non-tariff barriers could generate more trade liberalisation;
- whether investment policies, including foreign direct investment, can be aligned with WTO objectives to promote greater stability and development in international trade while safeguarding national sovereignty and governance.

The interviews clearly reveal a general consensus around the opinion that the World Trade Organization is going through a crisis. The international organization, indeed, has not been able to finalise an agreement since the Doha round, and this crisis has affected other international organizations as well. The main reason behind this situation is the increasing tensions between member states, which make it hard to reach a single agreement, except in cases of urgent need. This is the crisis in the multilateral system. To solve this deadlock, a comprehensive approach is needed

to address the issues that will shape the future of global trade. Unfortunately, the current situation does not allow for such a change.

A reform of the system appears crucial to ensure that trade allows for the movement of goods and resolves disputes within a reasonable time frame while contributing to sustainability. By reforming the system, trade can positively address global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. However, stakeholders have pointed out that compliance with certain environmental sustainability standards promoted by the EU is not fully aligned with the WTO principle of free movement of goods. The debate against the EU regulation on products obtained by deforestation could be an example. To make progress, we need to predict upstream measures that restore a climate of effective cooperation capable of activating sustainable interventions.

Additionally, subsidies and non-tariff measures tend to be obstacles to trade. On the one hand, subsidies, in the long run, can lead to protectionism, which is supported by people who only focus on their country's internal problems. In the case of agriculture, domestic subsidies could be given to support market demand. Non-tariff measures should be rebalanced as well and not delayed. Currently, they seem to go against the principles of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Efforts should be made to ensure sustainable trade and prevent any social tensions arising from the scarcity of the reference good.

Finally, the interview analysis reveals that cooperation plays a crucial role. Multilateral cooperation is essential and is at the stage of a debate that involves geopolitical tensions and demands reform of the World Trade Organization. The lack of progress in resolving disputes, for instance, is a problem, and the prolonged duration of conflicts results in unsustainable delays that complicate trade relations.

Below are the administered questions and the synthesis of the discussion for each of them.

Question 1. WTO modernization: What is your opinion on the necessity and feasibility of modernising the World Trade Organization (WTO) in response to current global challenges?

Synthesis of answers: The WTO crisis is a fact. The international organization has not closed an agreement since the Doha round. The crisis does not only affect the WTO, but also other international organizations in general. The main reason for this crisis is the growing tensions between the member states, which makes it difficult to reach a consensus on any issue except in cases of dire need or urgency. We can claim it is a crisis in the multilateral system. To overcome this stagnation phase, it may be helpful to implement a comprehensive approach when discussing issues impacting the future and progress of global international trade. However, the current geopolitical context does not allow any WTO modernization.

Question 2. Subsidies: What is your stance on financial incentives, such as subsidies in the agricultural sector, and their compatibility with the goals of a free global market and competition within the framework of the WTO?

Synthesis of answers: WTO rules have established that decoupled payments from production are compatible with multilateral law. Production-related aids are contested as they put developing countries at a competitive disadvantage. In the CAP reform, for instance, coupled payments are limited to 15% of direct payments not to exceed the WTO red line. The mutual respect of the rules by the parties involved, especially by large players such as China and India with their unilateral restrictions on international trade and extensive internal subsidies in economic crisis periods, remains

a key point. The same consideration can be made for the US Inflation Reduction Act. In the long run, these measures lead to forms of protectionism legitimised by a social base that only considers national interest. As far as agriculture is concerned, one potential solution would be domestic subsidies to support market demand.

Question 3. Social measures: Which social measures do you consider key to ensuring sustainability and inclusivity in international trade, and how could these be incorporated into a new WTO framework? **Question 7. Climate, Biodiversity and Labour Agreements:** What is your opinion on the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the Paris Agreement on Climate Change and the Convention on Biodiversity? Could these multilateral agreements be supported by the WTO and in what terms? More generally, how could they be incorporated into the WTO? **Note:** the answers to both questions (3 and 7) were so close that it was decided to combine them in the outcome synthesis.

Synthesis of answers: There exist several crucial global agreements that have been established and are currently active in the world of international relations. These agreements were made through collaborative efforts of various nations and organizations and are aimed at addressing global issues such as climate change (the Paris Agreement) and labour rights (ILO). However, the effectiveness of these agreements is limited to those countries that have agreed to participate in them. If the World Trade Organization (WTO) does not adopt these agreements, they will not be binding on all member states. This is because the WTO operates under a different set of rules and principles that are focused on promoting free trade and market access. In order to fully realise the benefits of these global agreements, there needs to be a thorough regulatory revision that ensures their implementation across all member states. This could lead to widespread benefits, including improved environmental protection and better labour standards. However, the major hurdle of unanimity still remains, as not all member states might be willing to adopt these agreements due to various reasons.

Question 4. Environmental measures: What is your opinion on the possibility of promoting greater environmental sustainability through trade, and how could it be incorporated into a new WTO framework?

Synthesis of answers: Even in this case, to address the challenges posed by environmental sustainability, it is crucial to update the regulatory framework. However, this is not a simple task, as recent agreements made by the European Union, which require compliance with certain environmental sustainability standards, are not entirely consistent with the WTO principle of free movement of goods. This issue is exemplified by the appeal against the EU regulation on products obtained by deforestation, which has sparked controversy. To move forward, it may be necessary to devise upstream measures that foster a climate of effective cooperation, leading to the development of sustainable interventions.

Question 5. Trade instruments: How do you assess the growing proliferation trade agreements and the increasing use of non-tariff measures (NTMs) in light of the constraints facing the WTO?

Synthesis of answers: In today's world, unilateral protectionist measures are becoming increasingly common, especially in times of fragmented conflicts. The decline in tariff rates has allowed the proliferation of NTMs around the world. The reasons behind these measures may vary, but commercial gains remain the primary motivation. Many of the NTMs that governments impose have legitimate objectives, such as safeguarding human health, plant safety, national security, consumer protection, and more. These policies often respond to societal demands likely to grow over

time and with consumer wealth. It is important to study NTMs due to their proliferation in terms of numbers and variety; additionally, their impact on trade is still not completely understood, and their magnitude is difficult to measure. NTMs can be discriminatory, even if they are uniformly applied to all imported goods, as compliance costs can be different across exporters. This can lead to higher costs for developing countries. Therefore, all non-tariff measures affect the free movement of goods and sometimes are contrary to the principles of the WTO. To restore a complete movement of goods, it is necessary to rebalance the geopolitical framework and reduce the mechanisms of sanctions. These steps would be particularly effective in an international framework where large actors are present. With regard to food, it is essential to adopt flexible and accommodating measures to avoid potential social tensions resulting from food scarcity.

Question 6. Investment policies: What is your opinion on investment policies, including foreign direct investment (FDI), and how can these be aligned with the objectives of the WTO to promote huge stability and development in international trade while safeguarding national sovereignty and governance?

Synthesis of answers: In the modern economy, the free flow of goods and services between nations is largely dependent on the free flow of capital. That being said, it is also important to recognise that there are certain areas where governments should be permitted to exercise their sovereignty, particularly in sensitive sectors that have implications at both national and international levels, such as those within the European Union. This is due to the legitimate principle of safeguarding strategic sectors for development and security, which is crucial for protecting the interests of both investors and citizens. Maintaining investor confidence is essential in this regard, as it helps to ensure that capital continues to flow freely and that the economy remains stable and prosperous.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

The above analysis allows to understand how important the WTO and its activities are to the researchers and policymakers, with the critical accents arising in a growing manner. The WTO has assumed numerous responsibilities, and its rigidity and complexity of tackled issues, expectations of member countries, growing focus on sustainability creating new challenges – all these slow down the WTO in its functioning and result in more critical opinions. This again shows the importance of analysis and discussions resulting in clear understanding of the organisation's evolution and adapting to the current challenges.

Based on the analysis of international agreements in the context of the Sustainable Development Goals, the following policy recommendations can be drawn:

1. **Include explicit indicators:** There is a notable lack of explicit indicators in the most documents to measure their impact on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As trade liberalisation and related policies are designed and implemented, it is crucial to incorporate specific, measurable indicators that can track the progress and impact of these international agreements on the achievement of the SDGs. This approach will not only increase transparency and accountability, but also enable policymakers and stakeholders to make informed adjustments to ensure alignment with sustainable development goals.
2. **Harmonising agreements within organisations:** International agreements, especially those under the auspices of the same organisation, should be harmonised to collectively and comprehensively support the SDGs. This would involve ensuring that all agreements within the scope of an organization are aligned in their advocacy and promotion of the SDGs. Such harmonisation would avoid contradictions or conflicts between policies, and facilitate a consistent approach to achieving sustainable development. It would also strengthen the coherence and effectiveness of the organisation's contribution to the SDGs.
3. **Strengthen partnerships for sustainable development:** Given the prominence of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) in multiple documents, it is clear that strengthening partnerships at all levels is a critical pathway to sustainable development. Policymakers should encourage greater collaboration between governments, international organisations, the private sector, civil society and other stakeholders to leverage resources, expertise and innovation in pursuit of the SDGs.
4. **Sustainability and environmental protection:** The alignment of several agreements with environmental SDGs (particularly SDGs 13, 14 and 15) underscores the critical importance of integrating environmental sustainability into the fabric of international agreements. Policymakers should prioritise the inclusion of environmental and climate measures in agreements to ensure that economic and trade policies contribute to, rather than undermine, environmental sustainability and climate goals.
5. **Regular review and adjustment of agreements:** To ensure that international agreements remain aligned with the evolving landscape of sustainable development, regular reviews and adjustments based on established indicators and stakeholder feedback are essential. This adaptive approach will allow for the continuous improvement of policies and their alignment

with the SDGs, ensuring that they are responsive to changing global challenges and opportunities.

6. **Strengthen SDG-related conditionalities:** Introducing and strengthening SDG-related conditionalities in trade agreements. This approach ensures that trade liberalisation and economic partnerships explicitly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, by making certain benefits conditional on meeting specific sustainability criteria.
7. **Promote policy coherence for sustainable development (PCSD):** Promoting policy coherence across sectors and agreements. This includes aligning trade, environment, labour and climate change policies in support of the SDGs, and ensuring that policies in one area do not undermine those in another.
8. **Strengthen the participation of developing countries:** The frequent mention of SDG 10 (reduce inequalities) in the analysis signals the importance of addressing inequalities through international trade and economic policies. Policymakers should ensure that the interests and challenges of developing countries are adequately addressed in international agreements. This includes providing technical assistance, capacity building and ensuring equitable distribution of benefits to support their efforts to achieve the SDGs.
9. **Expand public and stakeholder engagement:** Increase the involvement of civil society, local communities and the private sector in the negotiation, implementation and monitoring of agreements. Such engagement can provide valuable insights, promote greater transparency and enhance the overall impact of agreements on sustainable development.

The above recommendations aim to strengthen the alignment between international agreements (primarily those within the WTO framework) and the Sustainable Development Goals, ensuring that global policies across sectors contribute synergistically to a sustainable, inclusive and equitable future.

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Annex I. Final stakeholder consultations

Stakeholder consultations of the TRADE4SD Task 2.4 outputs were conducted in the form of interviews between 18 April and 4 May 2024 at the headquarters of Confagricoltura, with the organisation, implementation and preparation of the report process lasting between 10 April and 6 May 2024 (*Table 6*). A roundtable discussion was organised on 26 April 2024 to obtain more critical views and ignite discussion between the participants.

Table 6. Timetable of meetings within the stakeholder consultation process

Date	Time of beginning	Place and scope
April 10, 2024	16:00	Confagricoltura Organization Meeting
April 15, 2024	10:00	Confagricoltura Organization Meeting
April 18, 2024	10:30	Confagricoltura Meeting
April 22, 2024	10:30	Confagricoltura Meeting
April 26, 2024	10:30	Confagricoltura Meeting - Roundtable
May 6, 2024	10:00	Confagricoltura Summary Meeting

Source: own elaboration.

In total ten experts have participated in the stakeholder consultation process (due to the GDPR limitations only position and/or field of work is indicated):

- Expert 1: Director of EU and international relations.
- Expert 2: EU and international relations area.
- Expert 3: Directorate of Economic Development Policies of the Agri-Food Chains.
- Expert 4: Directorate of Economic Development Policies of the Agri-Food Supply Chains.
- Expert 5: Directorate of Economic Development of the Agri-Food Supply Chains.
- Expert 6: Director Political Direction of Economic Development of the Food Chains.
- Expert 7: Director Area Sustainable Development and Innovation.
- Expert 8: Sustainable development and innovation area.
- Expert 9: Sustainable development and innovation area.
- Expert 10: Sustainable development and innovation area.

Annex II. Policy Brief

**Policy Brief:
Contribution of
multilateral trade
rules to the global
sustainability**

The World Trade Organization has played a crucial role in mediating international trade relations and promoting liberalisation for the past decades, yet currently it faces numerous intensifying challenges that require innovative solutions. As sustainable approaches are being increasingly recognised as essential, their implementation needs to be substantiated, systematically planned and carried out.

Establishment of the WTO was widely anticipated and discussed in academic publications even before its inception. The peak in scholarly attention occurred in 2012, reflecting significant global interest and the need for comprehensive research on the organisation's role and impact. Over time, there has been a marked increase in critical analyses of the WTO, emphasising the need for reform and highlighting various controversies.


What is lacking?

In current stakeholder perception the WTO is undergoing a crisis and needs to be modernised. The main reason for this crisis are the growing tensions between member states, which makes it difficult to reach a consensus on any issue (except in cases of dire need or urgency).

Majority (92%) of surveyed stakeholders think that it is possible to modernise the WTO and transform it to help support the sustainability.

Yet 62% of stakeholders think that shifting the focus of the WTO towards sustainable development goals could be an obstacle to processes of further trade liberalisation.

Between the main obstacles to modernisation of the WTO and improving its focus on sustainability, stakeholders select the unwillingness of the most influential countries to implement changes, overcomplexity of regulations and procedures, and rigidity of the WTO structure.



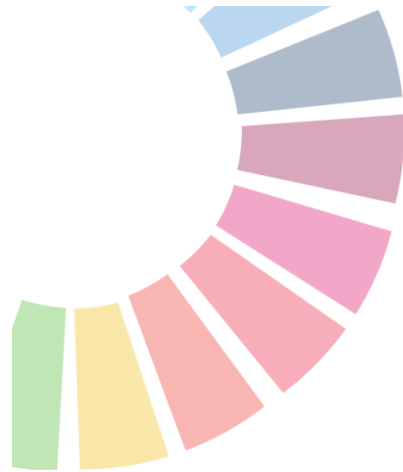
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Which SDGs?

Analysis has shown that the WTO agreements primarily emphasise economic growth and partnership (SDGs 8 and 17), demonstrating the critical impact of trade policy on sustainable development.

Some attention is given to the environmental sustainability in various WTO agreements (primarily SDGs 14 and 15), which highlights the importance to increase the integration of environmental aspect into trade provisions.

There is also a clear potential of trade and economic agreements to address inequalities (SDG 10) and promote industrial innovation (SDG 9).

Recommendations:

1. **Include explicit indicators:** This approach will not only increase transparency and accountability, but also enable policymakers and stakeholders to make informed adjustments to ensure alignment with sustainable development goals.
2. **Harmonising agreements within organisations:** International agreements, especially those under the auspices of the same organisation, should be harmonised to collectively and comprehensively support the SDGs.
3. **Strengthen partnerships for sustainable development:** Given the prominence of SDG 17 (Partnerships for the Goals) in multiple documents, it is clear that strengthening partnerships at all levels is a critical pathway to sustainable development.
4. **Sustainability and environmental protection:** The alignment of several agreements with environmental SDGs (particularly SDGs 13, 14, and 15) underscores the critical importance of integrating environmental sustainability into the fabric of international agreements.

5. **Regular review and adjustment of agreements:** To ensure that international agreements remain aligned with the evolving landscape of sustainable development, regular reviews and adjustments based on established indicators and stakeholder feedback are essential.

6. **Strengthen SDG-related conditionalities:** This ensures that trade liberalisation and economic partnerships explicitly contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, by making certain benefits conditional on meeting specific sustainability criteria.

7. **Promote policy coherence for sustainable development:** Aligning trade, environment, labour and climate change policies in support of the SDGs, and ensuring that policies in one area do not undermine those in another.

8. **Strengthen the participation of developing countries:** The frequent mention of SDG 10 (reduce inequalities) in the analysis signals the importance of addressing inequalities through international trade and economic policies.

9. **Expand public and stakeholder engagement:** Increase the involvement of civil society, local communities and the private sector in the negotiation, implementation and monitoring of agreements.