

1. Main Messages

Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) are critical for promoting sustainability in international trade, but their **enforcement remains inconsistent across countries**.

EU trade agreements increasingly incorporate environmental provisions, but **compliance is hindered by limited stakeholder engagement, weak enforcement mechanisms, and capacity constraints in partner countries**.

Case studies from Ghana, Vietnam, and Tunisia highlight diverse sustainability challenges, including deforestation, water scarcity, and limited access to sustainable trade opportunities.

Stakeholders emphasise the **need for targeted capacity-building and financial support to ensure compliance with sustainability provisions**.

A more coherent and unified framework is needed to integrate sustainability provisions across EU trade agreements, ensuring consistent implementation.

2. Research Scope & Methodology

This study assesses the effectiveness of MEA enforcement in trade agreements, using:

- **Case studies of Ghana (cocoa), Vietnam (coffee), and Tunisia (olive oil)**, examining how sustainability provisions are implemented.
- **Stakeholder consultations** with government officials, NGOs, and industry representatives in the three countries.
- **Comparative analysis of EU trade agreements**, focusing on their sustainability chapters and enforcement mechanisms.
- **Policy recommendations derived from stakeholder feedback** to improve MEA implementation in trade policies.

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ENFORCING MULTILATERAL ENVIRONMENTAL AGREEMENTS IN TRADE POLICIES



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3. Key Findings: Evidence Supporting Policy Discussions

3.1. Limited Enforcement of MEA Provisions in Trade Agreements

- **Sustainability provisions are often poorly enforced**, with weak monitoring and limited consequences for non-compliance.
- **Stakeholders report insufficient awareness of MEA requirements**, particularly among smallholder farmers and local traders.
- **Environmental degradation** (e.g., deforestation in Ghana, water scarcity in Tunisia) **persists despite sustainability clauses in trade agreements**.

Implication: Stronger enforcement mechanisms and capacity-building are essential for effective MEA implementation.

3.2. Barriers to Compliance with MEA Provisions

- Smallholder farmers and local businesses **struggle to meet sustainability standards due to high compliance costs and limited technical support**.
- **Sustainability standards often conflict with national regulations**, creating confusion and reducing compliance.
- **Stakeholder engagement is limited** during the negotiation and implementation of sustainability provisions.

Implication: Trade policies should include targeted support for smallholders and stronger stakeholder engagement mechanisms.

3.3. Recommendations for Strengthening MEA Enforcement

- **Enhance monitoring and reporting mechanisms** for sustainability provisions in trade agreements.
- **Develop targeted capacity-building programs for smallholders**, ensuring they can meet sustainability standards.
- **Increase stakeholder engagement during trade negotiations** to ensure that sustainability provisions reflect local realities.

Implication: Effective MEA enforcement requires a combination of stronger monitoring, capacity-building, and stakeholder participation.



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4. Implications for EU Policy & Trade Governance

- **Integrate binding sustainability clauses** in all EU trade agreements.
- **Ensure that sustainability provisions are enforceable**, with clear penalties for non-compliance.
- **Develop a centralised monitoring system** for sustainability outcomes in EU trade agreements.
- **Provide targeted financial support** to smallholders and local businesses in partner countries.
- **Expand sustainability training programs** to enhance local knowledge and capacity.
- **Facilitate access to technical assistance** for meeting sustainability standards.
- **Increase transparency in trade negotiations**, allowing for greater stakeholder input.
- **Establish multi-stakeholder platforms** to monitor sustainability outcomes.
- Ensure that trade agreements include **clear mechanisms for stakeholder consultation**.

5. Conclusion

This study highlights the need for stronger enforcement of MEA provisions in trade agreements to ensure that sustainability goals are met.

Key takeaways:

- **MEA provisions must be enforceable**, with clear monitoring and compliance mechanisms.
- **Smallholder farmers and local businesses require targeted support** to comply with sustainability standards.
- **Stakeholder engagement is critical** for ensuring that sustainability provisions reflect local realities.

This Project Brief is based on **Deliverable 6.1** of the TRADE4SD project.

Trade4SD is a 4-year project devoted to research on a topic which is high on the domestic as well as multilateral, EU and bilateral trade policy agenda. The ambition of the project is to explore and foster the positive linkages between trade and sustainable development is to provide policy recommendations for the creation of new opportunities for agents involved in the global, regional and national agri-food value chains, and to define conditions for sustainable livelihoods of farm producers in the EU and developing partner countries. Trade is a central factor in shaping global, regional and local development. Increased trade, empowered by the growth of Global Value Chains (GVCs), has boosted productivity and incomes in many countries.



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