



**Topic A: Exploring sustainable trade practices to  
enhance resilience in global value chains**



**UNCTAD**  
**United Nations**  
**Conference on Trade**  
**and Development**



## I. Committee Background

The United Nations Committee on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) is a UN body dedicated to promoting global trade that benefits all nations, particularly developing countries. It conducts research, offers policy analysis, and provides technical assistance to enhance trade, investment, and sustainable development. UNCTAD aims to reduce inequalities and promote inclusive economic growth on a global scale. At BISH MUN, delegates will be focusing on exploring sustainable trade practices to enhance resilience in global value chains. Exploring sustainable trade practices enhances resilience in global value chains by reducing vulnerabilities to disruptions. Sustainable practices, like responsible resource management and ethical labor standards, mitigate environmental and social risks. This resilience safeguards the continuity of trade, ensuring economic stability and maintaining the flow of essential goods, especially in times of crisis, ultimately benefiting economies and societies worldwide.

## II. History of the Topic

Throughout the colonial era, trade often involved resource extraction and exploitation of both natural resources and human labor, leading to environmental degradation and social injustices. This established a pattern of prioritizing short-term gains over long-term sustainability. This established a pattern of prioritizing short-term gains over long-term sustainability.

This form of short-term thinking continued in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the rise of heavy industries led to widespread environmental pollution, highlighting the need for cleaner production methods and responsible waste management in trade practices. The rapid expansion of global trade in the latter half of the 20th century exposed inequalities between developed and developing nations. Concerns arose about unfair trade practices, exploitation of labor, and the vulnerability of developing economies to external shocks.

All of the destruction emerging from these unsustainable practices led to the concept of sustainable development, emerging in the late 20th century, recognized the need to balance economic growth with environmental and social considerations. This marked a shift towards more responsible trade practices. Initiatives like fair trade certifications and international environmental standards aimed to promote fairer trade practices and encourage more sustainable production methods. This has all led to increased public awareness and consumer demand for sustainable products pushing businesses to consider the environmental and social impacts of their trade practices.

## III. Current Issues:



Building resilient and sustainable global value chains (GVCs) is a challenge with numerous issues that demand our attention. Some of these include:

### **Fragmentation and Complexity**

GVCs are complex networks and systems that have a diverse range of actors across various geographical and legal landscapes. Implementing uniform sustainability practices across this complex web is quite challenging, and hence requires innovative solutions and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

### **Cost and Investment**

Transitioning to sustainable practices often requires upfront investments in new technologies, resource-efficient methods, and training. This creates a barrier for smaller businesses and developing countries, potentially exacerbating existing inequalities.

### **Measurement and Reporting**

Lack of standardized metrics and transparent reporting methods for environmental and social impacts makes it difficult to assess the true effectiveness of sustainability initiatives and compare performance across actors. This can hinder progress and accountability.

### **Policy Coherence**



Divergences between trade policies and sustainability goals can lead to conflicting outcomes that hinder progress. For example, government subsidies for unsustainable practices or a lack of environmental regulations can undermine efforts to promote cleaner resource production and resource efficiency.

### Addressing Social Issues

While environmental sustainability gains traction, social issues like fair labor practices, gender equality, and human rights violations in GVCs still require continued attention. Effective enforcement mechanisms and robust monitoring systems are crucial to ensure respect for human rights and fair treatment of workers throughout the chain.

### IV. UN Action

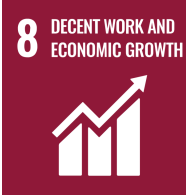
Over the past two decades, the UN has undertaken various initiatives and developed policies to promote sustainable trade practices and enhance resilience in the global chain. The foundation for these efforts was laid in groundbreaking documents like Agenda 21, adopted in 1992, which acknowledged the intricate link between trade liberalization and environmental protection. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), established in 2000, further cemented this connection by integrating poverty reduction and environmental sustainability into trade policy considerations. Finally, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), adopted in 2015, provide a clear roadmap for action with specific targets related to sustainable trade, responsible consumption and production, and decent work.

These overarching frameworks set the stage for concrete actions undertaken by various UN agencies. The UN Environment Program (UNEP) champions "green growth" and resource efficiency within GVCs, promoting circular economy approaches to minimize waste and maximize resource use. Simultaneously, UNCTAD develops guidelines for sustainable trade practices, analyzes trade-environment linkages, and provides technical assistance to developing countries on implementation.

The International Labor Organization (ILO) plays a crucial role in establishing international labor standards, promoting decent work in GVCs, and facilitating social dialogue among stakeholders. The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) focuses on sustainable agriculture practices, combating food waste, and promoting fair trade in agricultural products. Additionally, the UN Global Compact serves as a platform for businesses to commit to corporate social responsibility and contribute to sustainable development.



Despite these commendable efforts, significant challenges remain. Uneven implementation and lack of universal enforcement of standards hamper progress. Limited resources pose a hurdle for developing countries transitioning to sustainable practices. Navigating the complexities of the global system, with its multitude of actors and vested interests, proves challenging. Furthermore, robust monitoring and evaluation mechanisms are needed to effectively measure the impact of implemented policies and initiatives.



## V. Essential Questions

1. How can we address the fragmented and complex nature of GVCs to ensure comprehensive implementation of sustainable practices across all actors and geographies?
2. Can we bridge the gap between short-term profit motivations and long-term investments in sustainability, ensuring shared value creation for all stakeholders?
3. How can we foster policy coherence between trade agreements, environmental regulations, and social standards to avoid conflicting goals and unintended consequences?
4. What metrics and reporting methods are most effective in measuring the impact of sustainable trade practices and ensuring transparency throughout GVCs?
5. How can we incentivize and support developing countries in transitioning towards sustainable practices while addressing their economic vulnerabilities?
6. What technological solutions can be leveraged to enhance traceability, promote responsible sourcing, and empower consumers to make informed choices?
7. How can we ensure fair labor practices, uphold human rights, and empower workers throughout GVCs, particularly in vulnerable segments?
8. What strategies can we adopt to minimize environmental impact, address climate change concerns, and promote resource efficiency within GVCs?
9. What multi-stakeholder partnerships are needed to effectively advance sustainable trade practices and GVC resilience, involving governments, businesses, civil society, and academia?
10. How can we strengthen enforcement mechanisms and accountability measures to ensure adherence to sustainability standards and commitments?
11. What role can international organizations like the UN or regional trade bodies play in facilitating dialogue, sharing best practices, and providing technical assistance?
12. How can we invest in innovation and technological advancements to support the transition towards more sustainable and ethical trade practices?



## **VI. Committee Members**

1. Afghanistan
2. Brazil
3. Canada
4. Colombia
5. Democratic Republic of the Congo
6. France
7. Germany
8. Guatemala
9. Honduras
10. Iraq
11. Japan
12. Mexico
13. North Korea
14. Poland
15. Somalia
16. South Sudan
17. Syria
18. United States
19. Venezuela
20. Yemen



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<https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

UN Environment Programme (UNEP): <https://www.unep.org/>: <https://www.unep.org/>

UN Trade and Development Conference (UNCTAD): <https://unctad.org/>: <https://unctad.org/>