



National University of Lesotho (NUL) in collaboration with the Africa Trade Group (ATG) of the World Trade Organisation- Chairs Programme (WCP)

WTO Chairs Programme – 4th Annual Conference

Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho; 8th - 10th October 2025

Conference Theme: *Climate-Friendly Trade Policies: Balancing Growth and
Environmental Sustainability in Africa.*

CONCEPT NOTE – CALL FOR FULL PAPERS

The relationship between Environmental sustainability and economic growth have become increasingly important due to the climate change effects that are being experienced globally and particularly in Africa. Notable weather related anomalies due to climate change that have been witnessed recently in Africa include: the catastrophic floods in South Sudan in 2024 that affected 735,000 people¹; severe drought in East Africa (with over 20 million at risk of famine across 5 countries)² and Madagascar between 2021 and 2022; and significant heat waves in North Africa with temperatures soaring to 49°C³. In 2022, the South African floods killed 544 people, with the World Weather Attribution stating that greenhouse gas and aerosol emissions are at least partially responsible for the observed increases in rainfall⁴. In addition, a report by CarbonBrief posited that Africa's extreme weather has killed at least 15,000 people in 2023 only⁵. These extreme weather events have crucial implications for the economy besides its direct effect on life itself.

Specifically, they could potentially affect international trade in terms of the disruption of supply chains, reduced agricultural output, increased transportation costs, plausible damage on manufacturing and industrial facilities, increased insurance costs, increased commodity price volatility, port closures and shipping delays, labour productivity decline, shifts in trade routes and partners, and increased trade barriers and export restrictions. On the other hand, international trade may have direct and indirect influence on extreme weather events such as deforestation and land use changes due to new trade patterns, increased greenhouse gas emissions, growth in energy-intensive industries, resource depletion & overexploitation, as

¹ Associated Press. (2025, January 3). *As flooding becomes a yearly disaster in South Sudan, thousands survive on the edge of a canal*. Associated Press.

² United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (2024). <https://www.undrr.org/resource/horn-africa-floods-and-drought-2020-2023-forensic-analysis#:~:text=Across%20Ethiopia%2C%20Kenya%20and%20Somalia%2C%20the%202020%2D2022,at%20least%20four%20consecutive%20failed%20rainfall%20seasons.&text=The%20drought%20has%20severely%20impacted%20communities'%20access,of%20water%20pans%20drying%20up%20in%202022.>

³ World Meteorological Organisation (2023). [https://wmo.int/media/news/heatwaves-wildfires-mark-summer-of-extremes#:~:text=In%20Algeria%20and%20Tunisia%2C%20the,and%20Kairouan\)%20on%202023%20July.](https://wmo.int/media/news/heatwaves-wildfires-mark-summer-of-extremes#:~:text=In%20Algeria%20and%20Tunisia%2C%20the,and%20Kairouan)%20on%202023%20July.)

⁴ <https://yaleclimateconnections.org/2023/05.>

⁵ CarbonBrief (2023). <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-africas-extreme-weather-have-killed-at-least-15000-people-in-2023/#:~:text=go%20'unreported'?,Wildfires,:%20Xinhua%20/%20Alamy%20Stock%20Photo.>

well as waste and carbon leakage. This therefore highlights a significant and symbiotic relationship between climate change and international trade. On one hand, there is need to institute adaptation and mitigation strategies to address climate change challenges. On the other hand, international trade policies must address climate change concerns in an effort to balance the need to grow with the reality of climate change and its consequences.

The relationship between environmental sustainability and international trade is therefore evident and has significant implication for economic growth. This relationship is also recognised and highlighted in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). While SDG 6 (Water), SDG 7 (Clean Energy), SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities), SDG 12 (Sustainable Consumption), SDG 13 (Climate Action), SDG 14 (Oceans), and SDG 15 (Forests & Biodiversity) make reference to environmental sustainability; SDG 8 (economic growth), SDG 9 (industry), SDG 10 (inequality), SDG 12, 14, 15, and SDG 17 (global partnerships) all highlight the relevance of international trade for economic growth and sustainability. More importantly, several SDG targets highlight the relationship between international trade and environmental sustainability for balance growth, some of which are cited below.

- ❖ Target 8.B: Increase Aid for Trade support for developing countries, particularly in promoting Enhanced Integrated Framework for Trade-related Technical Assistance to Least Developed Countries.
- ❖ Target 12.6: Encourage companies, especially multinational corporations, to adopt sustainable business and trade practices and to integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycle.
- ❖ Target 13.2: Integrate climate change measures into national policies, strategies, and trade agreements.
- ❖ Target 14.4: Regulate harvesting and end overfishing, illegal fishing, and harmful fisheries subsidies.
- ❖ Target 15.6: Promote fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from the use of genetic resources, and promote appropriate access to such resources, as internationally agreed.
- ❖ Target 17.12: Ensure duty-free and quota-free market access for least developed countries, on a lasting basis [especially for eco-friendly product].

The African Union (AU) and the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) have implemented several policies that interlink international trade with environmental sustainability. For example, the Green Recovery Action Plan (GRAP) is an African Union initiative that was adopted in February 2022, and serves as a blueprint to facilitate member countries' transition to green recovery, emphasizing sustainable environmental practices alongside economic growth. Additionally, the AfCFTA's Protocol on Environmental Sustainability, recognises the interconnectedness of economic development and environmental sustainability, and it integrate environmental concerns into trade policies and practices, promoting sustainable development.

Though the impact of climate change on international trade is evident and global policies recognise its importance, the lived experience across African countries show relatively inadequate efforts in meeting these targets. A 2024 United Nations Development report posits that less than six percent of the 32 measurable SDG targets are on track to be achieved by 2030 in Africa. Specifically, the continent has regressed in areas including decent work and

economic growth (SDG 8), responsible consumption and production (SDG 12), climate action (SDG 13), and life on land (SDG 15), all of which are integral to environmental sustainability and trade. Many African nations struggle with regulatory gaps, weak enforcement of environmental policies, and limited access to green technologies. Furthermore, Africa's heavy reliance on natural resource exports exposes it to environmental vulnerabilities, making it imperative to design trade policies that integrate climate consideration.

Projections of the AfCFTA indicate that it could significantly boost intra-African trade by eliminating import duties and tariffs, increasing Africa's income by \$450 billion by 2035; and growing Africa's exports by \$560 billion⁶. However, it's crucial to address potential environmental impacts, such as increased carbon emissions, by incorporating climate change and environmental considerations into the agreement's implementation.

The 4th Annual Conference of the WTO Research Chair at the National University of Lesotho in conjunction with the Africa Trade Group of the World Trade Organisation Chairs Programme (WCP) invites the submission of conference papers that enrich the existing literature on this important theme. Specifically, the call is interested in, but not limited to the following sub-themes:

1. Eco-Friendly Supply Chains
2. Renewable Energy, international Trade, and Green Industrialization
3. Carbon Footprint of Trade
4. Green Investments, Climate Funds, and Financing Sustainable Trade
5. Illegal Trade in Natural Resources and institutional factors
6. Technology and Innovation for Climate-Friendly Trade in Africa
7. International Trade Agreements, regional integrations and Climate Action
8. Harmonization of Trade and Environmental Policies
9. Biotechnology and Trade
10. Trade and Climate Change Technologies
11. Eco-Labeling and Standards in Africa's Export Markets
12. Public-Private Partnerships in Advancing Climate-Responsive Trade Policies
13. Sustainable Urbanization and Trade:
14. Climate Risks in Cross-Border Commerce and Resilient Trade Systems

The Conference will take place in a hybrid mode (virtual and physical in NUL, Roma). The conference promises to provide interdisciplinary engagement from researchers in Science and Technology, Social sciences, Law, Humanities, and related disciplines. The conference papers shall be selected based on academic quality and relevance to the conference theme via a double-blind peer review process. This year, the main conference will be held on the 8th and 9th of October 2025. The 10th of October will be reserved to presentations of MSc and PhD complete (preferred) papers that are related to the theme. The session for the 10th will be completely online. The conference is planned to run according to the following timelines:

Launch of the Call	-	15 th March 2025
Deadline for receiving full papers	-	15 th July 2025
Notification of accepted full papers	-	15 th August 2025
Conference (hybrid)	-	8 th -9 th October 2025
Special session for PhDs and MSc students-		10 th October 2025
Deadline for all revised conference papers-		30 th October 2025
Preparation of conference proceedings	-	1 st – 30 th November 2025

⁶ World Bank (2020). The AfCFTA. <https://www.worldbank.org/en/topic/trade/publication>



Full papers should be submitted through the following [link](#). The full papers should range between 5 000 and 8,000 words and be written following the APA referencing guide/style. There is limited sponsorship for travel and accommodation for contributors within the SADC region. All contributors whose papers will finally be accepted for the main conference or special session will be eligible for a modest stipend and the papers will be part of the conference proceeding. Young and female researchers are particularly encouraged to submit papers. Any other inquiries could be sent to: wtochair@nul.ls and cc: chilunjika@gmail.com.

The Annual Conference is organised by the National University of Lesotho in collaboration with the African Trade Group of the WTO Chairs Programme (WCP) which include WTO Chairs in Benin, Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Morocco, Rwanda, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Tunisia.