



Sustainability Assessments

Sustainability Assessments have a central role to play in the delivery of trade policies that support environment and development goals. Member countries should move ahead of the Ministerial Declaration at Cancun and commit themselves to undertake sustainability assessments of their WTO negotiating positions.

While a number of important issues relating specifically to environment and trade are scheduled to be discussed in the Doha round of WTO negotiations, there is general recognition that environmental consequences must also be considered as part of the more widespread negotiations – environmental issues must be ‘mainstreamed’ in WTO decision-making. A number of approaches have been developed by which the long-term developmental and environmental implications of trade agreements can be more centrally incorporated into decision-making, key among these sustainability assessments.

Sustainability assessments attempt to evaluate the environmental and developmental consequences of proposed trade rules. Importantly, sustainability assessments are concerned to include as broad a range of interests as possible in decision-making on trade policy. The EU has undertaken a series of sustainability assessments of some aspects of the current WTO negotiations.

While sustainability assessments have a crucial contribution to make to the delivery of sustainable trade policies, the WTO does not have the expertise or competence to undertake sustainability assessments itself. Countries and regional organisations should commit themselves to undertaking sustainability assessments of their WTO negotiating positions, and to sharing the results of these assessments. This represents an area where willing member states can move ahead at Cancun. There needs to be recognition of the need for an increase in capacity building and support of developing countries seeking to undertake sustainability assessment.

What should happen at Cancún?

1. Individual members should commit themselves to conducting sustainability assessments of their WTO negotiating positions.
2. Developed country members should agree an increase in the technical and financial support to developing countries in conducting sustainability assessments. Such resources should be ‘new’ – they should not be diverted from current assistance budgets.
3. Individual members should use their plenary statements, and opportunities presented by side-events, to affirm their commitment to sustainability assessments.