

# Making trade work for the environment, prosperity and resilience



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# Foreword

**D**uring the past few decades, trade has powered huge advances in economic development around the world. As the world economy has grown, however, so too have environmental challenges, which in turn risk undermining wellbeing, development, health and economic growth itself.

Trade that supports a healthy environment and sustainable development is critical. This report, by the World Trade Organization and UN Environment, illustrates how trade can support action by governments, companies, innovators and consumers to improve our economies and protect our environment at the same time.

The 2030 Agenda calls on all countries to put trade at the service of a more sustainable, inclusive and resilient world. To this end, we

must seize the positive momentum of countless win-win ideas and actions springing up all around the world.

In India, a start-up that repurposes waste into furniture, clothing and accessories sells these products over the internet. A young entrepreneur from the Caribbean has developed a cutting edge technology to extend the life of lithium-ion batteries for reuse around the world. Meanwhile in Madagascar, men and women in a small village have created an export-oriented business from eco-friendly seaweed farming.

**“If we all come together and work together, there is no limit to what we can achieve on planet Earth.”**

**Erik Solheim, UN Environment  
Executive Director and Under-Secretary-  
General of the United Nations**



01



02



01 Erik Solheim UN  
Environment Executive  
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Secretary-General of  
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02 Roberto Azevêdo  
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Organization

Trade can help green business expand and flourish. It can promote environmental conservation and economic efficiency, and improve access to clean technologies at a lower cost. To make sure trade delivers these benefits and works for people and the environment, countries around the world will have to better align trade, environment and sustainable development policies.

We are committed to building on the strong foundation of cooperation between our organizations to help countries, businesses and people to meet these challenges.

In 2018, we jointly launched an initiative to broaden and deepen the dialogue among governments, the private sector and civil society on practical ways to use trade to strengthen the global economy and the environment, and to ensure a future for people whose livelihoods depend directly on natural resources.

Our aim is to shine a light on opportunities to bring trade and environment closer together, and to highlight the importance of close collaboration between governments, entrepreneurs, investors, scientists, environmental activists and civil society at large.

In this way, we hope to strengthen the contribution of our two organizations towards the sustainable, resilient and prosperous world we all want.

**“By working together, we hope to provide a useful resource to explore practical ways to expand trade opportunities that are good for the economy and for the environment.”**

**Roberto Azevêdo**, Director-General,  
World Trade Organization

**Erik Solheim**  
UN Environment Executive Director  
and Under-Secretary-General of the  
United Nations

**Roberto Azevêdo**  
Director-General,  
World Trade Organization

# Executive summary

## **International trade offers unique opportunities to build a prosperous, climate resilient and environmentally sustainable world.**

**T**he world is much more interconnected than ever before. The rise of production networks across countries has transformed the trade and business landscape, influencing how and where goods and services are produced and consumed. Many developing countries are playing an increasing role in international trade, but others remain excluded due to lack of financial resources, knowledge and infrastructure.

At the same time, the world faces growing environmental pressures including air pollution, land degradation and overfishing. Climate change, in particular, has intensified the frequency and magnitude of weather-related events such as tropical cyclones, which can trigger natural disasters and widespread emergencies. Such disruptions, not least to production and transport networks, pose risks to trade and prosperity more generally.

Proactive and forward-looking trade approaches can be part of a coordinated and effective solution in tackling mounting environmental challenges while fostering economic and social prosperity. International trade is unique in that it promotes specialization, competition, economies of scale and innovation globally. These powerful forces can, if properly harnessed, help make the world economy more sustainable and resilient to environmental risks while having positive effects on prosperity, jobs and equality, in line with the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Trade can help bridge relative differences in resource endowments across countries, relieving resource scarcities in some regions and allowing for a more economically and environmentally efficient allocation of resources globally. With the growing impacts of climate change and resource scarcity – felt in varying magnitudes across different parts of the world – this role of trade can help foster environmental sustainability and resilience and is likely to play an even more prominent role in the coming decades.

## **Open, predictable and equitable trade relations among countries can accelerate the diffusion of environmental goods and services and facilitate the creation and expansion of markets for sustainable products.**

International trade can accelerate the diffusion of environmental goods and services to those places where they are most needed and help stimulate productive local capacity. Environmental goods and services perform a variety of functions essential to tackling environmental challenges, regenerating the natural environment and making production and consumption more sustainable. They consist of goods and services needed to, for example, produce clean and renewable energy, improve resource and energy efficiency, and reduce waste and abolish air, water and soil pollution, among other important functions.

A larger, competitive and integrated global market gives companies, governments and consumers around the world access to better and more efficient goods and services to protect the environment. At the same time, it can drive down costs, making it easier for





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