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ASSESSMENT OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION'S CONCERNS IN ADDRESSING GLOBAL ENVIRONMENTAL CHALLENGES

ОЦІНКА ЗАНЕПОКОЄННЯ СВІТОВОЇ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЇ ТОРГІВЛІ ЩОДО ВИРІШЕННЯ ГЛОБАЛЬНИХ ЕКОЛОГІЧНИХ ПРОБЛЕМ

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Оруджов Е. Оцінка занепокоєння Світової Організації Торгівлі щодо вирішення глобальних екологічних проблем. Науково-методична стаття.

У цій статті розглядається роль СОТ у вирішенні глобальних екологічних проблем, таких як зміна клімату, втрата біорізноманіття та забруднення. У ній аналізується, як поточна торговельна політика впливає на екологічні цілі, та визначаються прогалини в рамках СОТ. У дослідженні розглядаються угоди СОТ щодо ціноутворення на викиди вуглецю, субсидій на викопне паливо, торгівлі видами, що перебувають під загрозою зникнення, та контролю за забрудненням довкілля. Висновки свідчать про частковий прогрес, але підкреслюють серйозні недоліки, такі як нечіткі правила коригування вуглецевих квот, слабе регулювання субсидій та конфлікти між торгівлею та охороною довкілля. У статті зроблено висновок, що політика СОТ потребує суттєвого реформування для узгодження з цілями сталого розвитку. Рекомендації включають чіткіші правила, сильнішу співпрацю та більшу прозорість для посилення ролі СОТ у підтримці екологічно відповідальної торгівлі.

Ключові слова: Світова Організація Торгівлі, екологічні виклики, торговельна політика, глобальне співробітництво, сталий розвиток

Orujov E. Assessment of the World Trade Organization's Concerns in Addressing Global Environmental Challenges. Scientific and methodical article.

This article examines the WTO's role in addressing global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution. It analyzes how current trade policies impact environmental goals and identifies gaps in WTO frameworks. The study reviews WTO agreements in relation to carbon pricing, fossil fuel subsidies, endangered species trade, and pollution controls. Findings reveal partial progress but highlight major shortcomings—such as unclear rules on carbon border adjustments, weak subsidy regulations, and trade-conservation conflicts. The article concludes that WTO policies require substantial reform to align with sustainability goals. Recommendations include clearer rules, stronger cooperation, and greater transparency to enhance the WTO's role in supporting environmentally responsible trade.

Keywords: World Trade Organization, environmental challenges, trade policy, global cooperation, sustainability

The World Trade Organization (WTO), established in 1995, serves as the principal global institution governing international trade.

Its primary mandate is to facilitate smooth and predictable trade flows, reduce trade barriers, and ensure that trade policies are transparent and equitable. However, the pressing global environmental challenges of the 21st century – such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution – pose significant questions about the WTO's role and effectiveness in promoting sustainability. The urgency of addressing these environmental issues has never been more critical. Climate change, driven by greenhouse gas emissions, threatens to disrupt global weather patterns, sea levels, and ecosystems. Biodiversity loss, accelerated by habitat destruction, overexploitation, and pollution, jeopardizes ecosystem stability and human livelihoods. Pollution, encompassing air, water, and soil contamination, exacerbates health problems and environmental degradation. As these challenges become increasingly severe, the interplay between international trade and environmental sustainability is coming under greater scrutiny.

The WTO's approach to these issues is rooted in its core principles: non-discrimination, national treatment, and the prohibition of unjustified trade restrictions. While these principles aim to create a level playing field in global trade, they sometimes conflict with environmental goals. For instance, carbon pricing mechanisms such as carbon taxes or cap-and-trade systems, designed to mitigate climate change, may be perceived as trade barriers under WTO rules. Similarly, efforts to curb biodiversity loss and manage pollution can be complicated by the need to avoid discriminatory trade practices. The intersection of trade and environmental policies presents a complex landscape. On one hand, trade liberalization can facilitate the diffusion of green technologies and sustainable practices across borders. On the other hand, it can exacerbate environmental issues if not carefully regulated. The WTO's existing agreements and frameworks, such as the Agreement on Technical

Barriers to Trade (TBT) and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM), offer some tools for addressing environmental concerns. However, these frameworks have been criticized for their lack of specificity and effectiveness in promoting true environmental sustainability.

Given the increasing importance of integrating environmental considerations into trade policy, this article seeks to assess the WTO's current role and effectiveness in addressing global environmental challenges. It evaluates how WTO frameworks address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, and discusses the implications for global trade and environmental protection. The analysis highlights the need for enhanced integration of environmental objectives within trade policies and offers recommendations for a more cohesive approach to addressing the dual goals of trade liberalization and environmental sustainability.

Analysis of recent research and publications

Climate Change and Trade Policy.

Climate change represents one of the most significant global environmental challenges, influencing trade patterns and necessitating substantial policy responses. The WTO's involvement in climate-related issues primarily revolves around the compatibility of trade rules with climate action. Key issues include:

Carbon pricing and Trade barriers. Carbon pricing mechanisms, such as carbon taxes and cap-and-trade systems, aim to internalize the environmental costs of carbon emissions. However, these mechanisms can potentially conflict with WTO rules. The principle of non-discrimination in trade agreements prohibits countries from imposing trade barriers based solely on the origin of goods. Border carbon adjustments (BCAs), which impose tariffs on imports from countries with less stringent climate policies, are one proposed solution to this issue. While BCAs could address carbon leakage—where companies shift production to countries with looser emissions regulations—they also raise questions about their compatibility with WTO rules. Research indicates that while BCAs could be permissible under WTO rules if they are implemented as part of a consistent and transparent climate policy, they remain contentious and are subject to potential trade disputes (Zeng, 2022).

Subsidies and Trade implications. Subsidies for fossil fuels can undermine climate goals by encouraging continued reliance on carbon-intensive energy sources. The WTO's Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM) addresses the issue of subsidies but does not specifically target environmental concerns. The challenge is to reform subsidy policies to align with climate objectives while ensuring compliance with trade rules. Recent discussions within the WTO have explored how to integrate environmental criteria into subsidy regulations, yet substantial progress is needed to reconcile trade and climate objectives (Goh, 2023).

Biodiversity and Trade.

Biodiversity loss is a critical issue that intersects with trade through the global movement of goods and natural resources. The WTO's role in this area involves ensuring that trade practices support rather than harm biodiversity conservation. Key aspects include:

Trade in Endangered Species. The Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) regulates the international trade of endangered species to prevent their extinction. CITES operates alongside WTO rules, and conflicts can arise when trade restrictions aimed at protecting species are perceived as trade barriers. The WTO's Committee on Trade and Environment has examined the interaction between CITES and trade rules, emphasizing the need for coherence between conservation efforts and trade practices (Scholz, 2023).

Sustainable Resource Management. Trade in natural resources, such as timber and fish, has significant implications for biodiversity. The WTO's agreements do not explicitly address the sustainability of resource use, leading to potential overexploitation and habitat destruction. Initiatives such as the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) process seek to promote sustainable timber trade, but broader integration of sustainability criteria into trade agreements remains a challenge. The WTO's engagement in discussions on sustainable resource management highlights the need for more comprehensive policies that align trade with biodiversity conservation (Klein, 2023).

Pollution and Trade.

Pollution, encompassing air, water, and soil contamination, is another area where trade and environmental concerns intersect. The WTO's approach to pollution involves ensuring that environmental regulations do not become disguised trade barriers. Key considerations include:

Environmental Standards and Trade. Environmental standards, such as regulations on emissions and waste management, can affect trade by influencing production costs and market access. The WTO's Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) addresses the relationship between trade and environmental standards, ensuring that regulations are not more trade-restrictive than necessary. However, the challenge lies in balancing the need for effective environmental protection with the potential for trade restrictions. The WTO has been criticized for its approach to environmental standards, with calls for more robust mechanisms to align trade rules with pollution control objectives (Baker, 2023).

Trade and Pollution Havens. Trade can contribute to pollution through the relocation of production to countries with less stringent environmental regulations – a phenomenon known as pollution havens. The WTO's rules do not specifically address pollution havens, raising concerns about the potential for trade to exacerbate environmental degradation. Addressing this issue requires a nuanced approach that considers both trade and environmental impacts, with potential solutions including enhanced international cooperation and integration of environmental criteria into trade agreements (Li, 2024).

Assessment and Recommendations.

The WTO's approach to global environmental challenges reflects an ongoing struggle to balance trade liberalization with the need for environmental protection. While the organization has made efforts to address climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, several areas require further attention:

Enhanced Integration of Environmental objectives. The WTO should work towards a more integrated approach that aligns trade policies with environmental goals. This includes developing guidelines for incorporating environmental considerations into trade agreements and ensuring that trade practices support sustainability. Clear mechanisms for addressing conflicts between trade and environmental objectives are essential for promoting coherence between these areas.

Strengthened multilateral cooperation. Addressing global environmental challenges requires multilateral cooperation beyond the WTO. The organization should collaborate with other international bodies, such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), to develop integrated policies that address both trade and environmental issues. Enhanced cooperation can help ensure that trade practices support global environmental goals.

Greater transparency and stakeholder engagement. Increasing transparency and engaging a broader range of stakeholders, including environmental organizations

and the public, can improve the WTO's approach to environmental challenges. This includes incorporating diverse perspectives into policy discussions and ensuring that environmental impacts are adequately assessed and addressed. Greater stakeholder involvement can enhance the effectiveness and legitimacy of trade and environmental policies.

The main part

The interplay between trade and environmental policies has become increasingly complex as global environmental challenges mount. The WTO's efforts to balance trade facilitation with environmental sustainability have yielded mixed results, reflecting both progress and ongoing challenges. This section discusses the implications of current policies, explores the broader context of trade-environment interactions, and considers the potential pathways for integrating environmental concerns more effectively into the WTO's framework.

Implications of current WTO policies.

The WTO's current approach to integrating environmental considerations into trade policies demonstrates both strengths and limitations. The organization's frameworks, such as the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM), provide a basis for addressing environmental issues but often fall short in terms of specificity and enforcement.

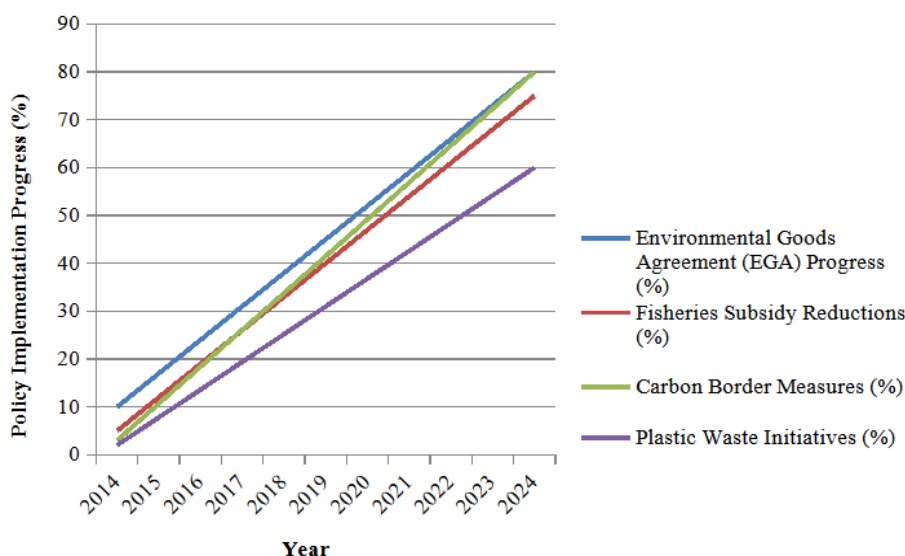


Figure 1. WTO policies and their environmental impact from 2014 to 2024
 Source: the author's own elaboration

The chart illustrates the progress of key WTO policies and their environmental impact from 2014 to 2024. It highlights advancements in areas such as the Environmental Goods Agreement (EGA), fisheries subsidy reductions, carbon border measures, and plastic waste initiatives.

The implementation of carbon pricing mechanisms and border carbon adjustments (BCAs) illustrates a proactive approach to addressing climate change. However, the WTO's rules on non-discrimination and

national treatment create significant hurdles. While BCAs have the potential to reduce carbon leakage and incentivize global climate action, their design and application must be carefully managed to avoid trade disputes and ensure compliance with WTO regulations (Zeng, 2022).

The lack of specific provisions in the ASCM for addressing the environmental impact of fossil fuel subsidies highlights a significant gap in the WTO's approach. While the organization has made some

progress in addressing subsidies, there remains a need for more targeted measures that align with climate objectives. The challenge lies in reforming subsidy policies without disrupting global trade or facing resistance from vested interests (Goh, 2023).

The interaction between CITES and WTO rules underscores the need for coherence between conservation and trade policies. While CITES provides essential protection for endangered species, ensuring that trade measures do not conflict with conservation goals requires careful coordination. The potential for trade disputes and the need for clear guidelines highlight the complexity of aligning these frameworks (Scholz, 2023).

Broader context of trade-environment interactions

The broader context of trade-environment interactions reveals both opportunities and challenges. Trade can have significant environmental impacts, both positive and negative. On one hand, trade can promote the diffusion of environmentally friendly technologies and practices. On the other hand, it can lead to increased environmental degradation if not properly managed.

Trade can facilitate access to green technologies and environmentally friendly products, supporting global efforts to address environmental challenges. For instance, the spread of renewable energy technologies and energy-efficient products through international trade can contribute to climate mitigation. Additionally, trade can foster international cooperation on environmental standards and regulations, promoting best practices across borders (Baker, 2023).

Conversely, trade can exacerbate environmental problems if not aligned with sustainability goals. Pollution havens, where production shifts to countries with weaker environmental regulations, represent a significant concern. Additionally, the overexploitation of natural resources driven by trade demands can lead to biodiversity loss and environmental degradation. Addressing these negative impacts requires a comprehensive approach that integrates environmental considerations into trade policies and practices (Li, 2024).

Pathways for effective integration of environmental concerns.

To address the challenges and opportunities associated with trade and environmental sustainability, several pathways can be pursued. These include enhancing the WTO's policies, fostering multilateral cooperation, and increasing transparency and stakeholder engagement. The WTO's policies must evolve to better integrate environmental concerns. This includes revising existing agreements to incorporate environmental criteria, developing new guidelines for sustainable trade practices, and ensuring that trade measures support rather than undermine environmental goals. For instance, the TBT Agreement could be updated to better accommodate environmental standards without creating unnecessary trade barriers (Baker, 2023).

Multilateral cooperation is essential for addressing global environmental challenges effectively. The WTO should collaborate with other international organizations, such as the UNFCCC and CBD, to develop coherent policies that address both trade and environmental issues. Joint initiatives and agreements can help align trade practices with global sustainability goals and promote shared approaches to environmental protection (Goh, 2023).

Transparency and stakeholder engagement are critical for improving the WTO's approach to environmental issues. Implementing mechanisms for regular consultations with environmental organizations, industry representatives, and the public can enhance the effectiveness of trade and environmental policies. A public reporting system on the environmental impact of trade policies can also promote accountability and ensure that diverse perspectives are considered in decision-making (Li, 2024).

The future of WTO and environmental integration

Looking ahead, the WTO's role in addressing global environmental challenges will likely continue to evolve. As environmental concerns become more central to international policy discussions, the WTO will need to adapt its frameworks and practices to better integrate sustainability goals. This may involve adopting new approaches to trade regulation, developing innovative solutions to emerging environmental issues, and fostering greater collaboration with other international bodies.

The WTO must remain responsive to emerging environmental issues, such as plastic pollution and ecosystem degradation. Developing adaptable and forward-looking policies will be crucial for addressing these challenges effectively. The organization's ability to anticipate and respond to new environmental threats will shape its role in promoting global sustainability (Scholz, 2023).

Integrating environmental concerns into trade policies aligns with the broader goal of sustainable development. The WTO has an opportunity to contribute to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting trade practices that support environmental protection and sustainable resource management. By aligning its policies with these global objectives, the WTO can enhance its role in fostering a sustainable and equitable global economy (Zeng, 2022).

Chart illustrates the projected future of WTO and environmental integration from 2025 to 2050. It highlights the increasing integration of environmental considerations into trade and the growth of environmental policies within the WTO framework.

One of the new approaches of the WTO is green trade policies. The WTO can develop and promote trade policies that favor environmentally friendly products and technologies. This could include reducing tariffs on renewable energy technologies and green goods while promoting circular economy practices (Scholz, 2023).

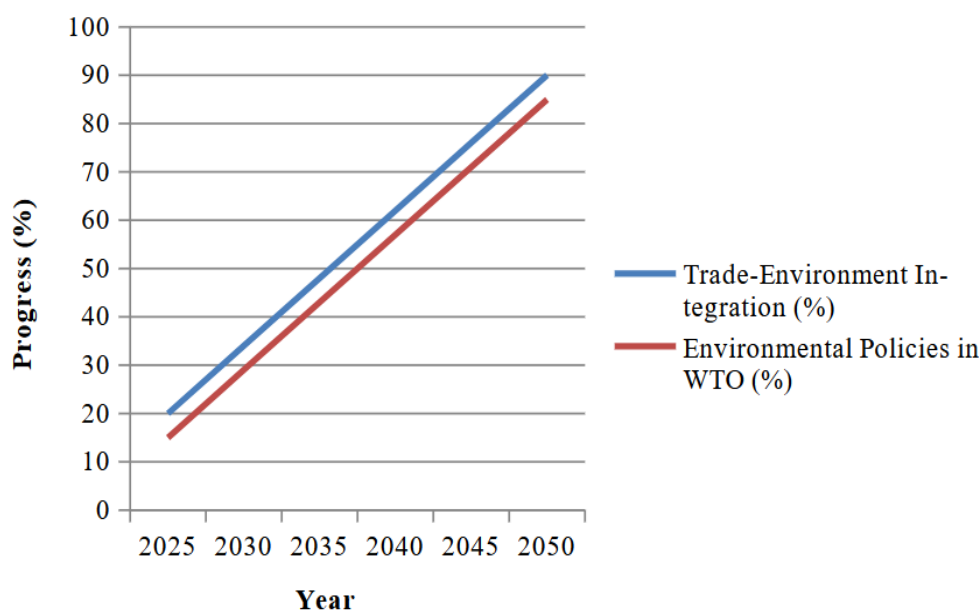


Figure 2. Future of WTO and environmental integration from 2025 to 2050

Source: the author's own elaboration

Another approach is carbon border adjustments. Introducing mechanisms like carbon border taxes to address the carbon footprint of imported goods could help mitigate competitive disadvantages for countries with stringent environmental regulations (Zeng, 2022). WTO can align with some of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs):

SDG 12 (Responsible Consumption and Production): The WTO can promote trade policies that encourage efficient resource use and waste reduction, supporting the goal of responsible consumption and production.

SDG 13 (Climate Action): Trade policies that support the transition to low-carbon technologies and promote climate resilience align with SDG 13.

SDG 14 (Life Below Water) and SDG 15 (Life on Land): Addressing trade practices that impact marine and terrestrial ecosystems is crucial for achieving SDGs related to ocean conservation and land degradation (Zeng, 2022).

Future directions of the WTO can be followings:

Adaptability: The WTO needs to be flexible in its approach, continuously updating policies to respond to new environmental threats and scientific advancements (Scholz, 2023).

Stakeholder engagement: Engaging with diverse stakeholders, including environmental NGOs, industry leaders, and policy experts, will ensure that trade policies are balanced and effective (Kolk, 2021).

Monitoring and evaluation: Establishing robust mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the environmental impacts of trade policies will be essential for assessing their effectiveness and making necessary adjustments (Rüth, 2021).

Conclusion

The WTO plays a critical role in shaping global trade, and its approach to environmental challenges will significantly impact the world's ability to address

pressing environmental issues. While the organization has made progress in addressing climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution, there is a need for a more cohesive and integrated approach that balances trade liberalization with environmental sustainability. By strengthening the integration of environmental objectives, promoting multilateral cooperation, and enhancing transparency, the WTO can better align its policies with the urgent need for environmental protection and sustainability.

The current WTO frameworks, including the Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) and the Agreement on Subsidies and Countervailing Measures (ASCM), provide a basis for addressing environmental issues but are insufficient in fully supporting sustainability objectives. Issues such as the compatibility of border carbon adjustments (BCAs) with WTO rules, the need for more stringent regulations on fossil fuel subsidies, and the management of trade conflicts related to endangered species underscore the limitations of existing policies. Moreover, the challenge of pollution havens, where trade can exacerbate environmental degradation, further highlights the need for a revised approach. The WTO's principles of non-discrimination and national treatment, while crucial for fair trade, sometimes hinder the implementation of effective environmental policies. This tension calls for a reassessment of how trade rules can better accommodate environmental goals without compromising the core objectives of the organization.

Proposals:

1. Enhance policy integration: The WTO should develop and implement clear guidelines for integrating environmental objectives into trade agreements. This involves revising existing agreements, such as the TBT and ASCM, to include specific provisions that support environmental sustainability. For instance, establishing clearer rules for the implementation of BCAs could

help balance climate goals with trade regulations, ensuring that such measures are transparent, non-discriminatory, and aligned with WTO principles.

2. Promote multilateral cooperation: Greater collaboration with international environmental organizations, such as the UNFCCC and CBD, is essential. The WTO should facilitate joint initiatives that align trade practices with global sustainability objectives. This includes supporting international efforts to harmonize carbon pricing mechanisms and environmental standards to reduce conflicts and promote coherent policies across borders.

3. Increase transparency and stakeholder engagement: The WTO should enhance transparency in its decision-making processes related to environmental issues. Implementing regular consultations with environmental organizations, industry representatives, and the public will provide

diverse perspectives and improve policy effectiveness. Additionally, a public reporting system on the environmental impact of trade policies can promote accountability and ensure that environmental considerations are adequately addressed.

4. Address emerging environmental challenges: The WTO must stay responsive to emerging environmental threats, such as plastic pollution and ecosystem degradation. Developing adaptable policies and innovative solutions will be crucial for addressing these challenges while promoting sustainable trade practices.

By adopting these proposals, the WTO can better align its policies with the urgent need for global environmental sustainability, ensuring that trade and environmental goals are mutually supportive rather than conflicting.

Abstract

Problem urgency: Global environmental challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, and pollution are intensifying, creating significant threats to ecological and human systems. The WTO established to oversee and facilitate international trade, must navigate these challenges while balancing trade liberalization with environmental sustainability. The urgency stems from the need to reassess and potentially reform WTO policies to ensure they support global environmental goals rather than undermine them.

Purpose: This article aims to evaluate the WTO's current role and effectiveness in addressing global environmental challenges. It seeks to analyze how existing trade policies impact climate change, biodiversity, and pollution, and to identify potential gaps and opportunities for better integration of environmental objectives into WTO frameworks.

Methods: The study examines WTO agreements and their interactions with environmental issues, including carbon pricing, fossil fuel subsidies, trade in endangered species, and pollution controls.

Results: The findings indicate that while the WTO has made some progress in addressing environmental concerns, significant gaps remain. Issues such as the compatibility of border carbon adjustments with WTO rules, the inadequacy of subsidy regulations for climate goals, and conflicts between trade and conservation measures were highlighted. Recommendations include clearer guidelines, enhanced multilateral cooperation, and improved transparency.

Conclusions: The WTO's current policies need significant reform to better align with global environmental sustainability goals. Enhancing integration of environmental objectives, fostering international cooperation, and increasing stakeholder engagement are crucial steps. By addressing these issues, the WTO can improve its role in promoting sustainable trade practices and supporting global environmental protection.

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