

# Global research partnerships for sustainable trade policy

The Trade Knowledge Network



**iisd**

International  
Institute for  
Sustainable  
Development

Institut  
international du  
développement  
durable

# The four pillars of the TKN



## Strengthening research capacity in the South

- TKN supports the training and development of researchers and communicators in the developing world.
- TKN coordinates an internship programme for young professionals from developing countries.

“It is clear that every developing country has a range of important sustainable development interests at stake in the trading system. The TKN encourages its partners to look at the broader macro-economic policies and factors that most undermine sustainable development, and to design policy responses to make the two mutually supportive.”

Mark Halle, Executive Director, IISD Europe



## Generating targeted and innovative policy research

- TKN facilitates collaboration across regions, in order to produce comparative research and encourage the exchange of ideas and experiences.

“In the course of our TKN research, we had a chance to share ideas, concepts and research methodologies with experts from other countries in the region. We have learned a lot both in terms of research methods and policy implications.”

Vu Xuan Nguyet Hong, Central Institute for Economic Management, Viet Nam



## Connecting with policy-makers

- From inception, each research project is designed with a clear policy goal in mind and an influencing strategy to achieve it.
- Findings and recommendations are disseminated on-line, through conferences, workshops, research papers and policy briefs.

“The TKN is not just about doctrinal research. The network concentrates on the distribution of topical information and provides conceptual clarity to a wide range of professionals in an engaging manner. For me this was new... to inform and be informed by various players in civil society through small workshops, concentrated training programmes, sustained interaction with policy-makers and the media.”

Suryapratim Roy, TKN Intern, The South African Institute of International Affairs, South Africa



## Building an effective global research network

Through collaborative management, joint projects and information sharing, TKN projects develop regional networks of individuals and organizations working on issues of trade, investment and sustainable development.

“The TKN provides the ideal space for policy researchers from around the globe to jointly make a positive change for sustainable development.”

Heike Baumüller, Coordinator, Trade Knowledge Network, Southeast Asia

# Influencing policy through research



“For development to be sustainable, it must be earned and not gifted. In this regard, trade and investment are crucial for Malawi.”

Nelson Nsiku, University of Malawi, Malawi

## A global research network on trade, investment and sustainable development

The Trade Knowledge Network (TKN) is a global collaboration of research institutions across Africa, Asia, Europe and the Americas that share the goal of promoting sustainable development through supportive trade and investment policies. Coordinated since 1998 by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), the TKN can draw on a decade of experience in strengthening research capacities in developing countries and generating cutting-edge policy analysis that addresses the impacts of trade and investment on sustainable development.

## Trade and investment policies that work, sustainably

International trade and foreign investment have enormous potential to foster sustainable development. By allowing for specialization, trade can boost incomes and contribute to increased well-being on a scale unreachable by dwindling traditional official development assistance. Meanwhile, investment and trade can introduce new technologies while opening markets for developing country exports. Yet international trade can also be destructive, resulting in rapid environmental degradation and rising inequality with few economic benefits for the poorest segments of society.

Policies that maximize the benefits and minimize the costs from international trade and investment require objective and accurate analysis. Encouragingly, the capacity of many developing countries to undertake such research has grown significantly over the last decade. Today, many institutes focus on trade policy. Those organizations are better distributed across the developing world, and the results of their research have a much stronger voice in multilateral trade-policy circles. Nonetheless, capacity lags far behind that of developed countries, despite the fact that developing countries have the most to gain, or lose, from international trade.

# From research to impact

TKN partners work on a wide range of economic policy issues that underpin sustainable development: commodities, investment, regional integration, subsidies, standards, market access, the environmental impact of trade and the on-going WTO negotiations. Here are some snapshots of recent TKN projects:



## Regional trade integration and conflict prevention

In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in the number and scope of regional trade agreements. They have created entirely new levels of governance and an alternate route to trade liberalization. A multi-continent study by TKN partners investigated what this means for political stability around the world.



## Tackling the commodity price problem

With 2.5 billion people around the world reliant on the production of primary commodities, their highly volatile price is not an abstract economic issue. TKN partners conducted a series of country case studies to learn how different countries have tackled the commodity price problem.



## A Green Revolution for Africa?

The combination of population growth, rising food prices and falling crop yields forecast as a result of land degradation and climate change mean that large parts of Africa face growing problems of food security. TKN partners presented country briefs at a regional future scenarios workshop to chart the threats and opportunities for African agriculture.



## Leading the investment dance

Countries across Southeast Asia compete to attract foreign direct investment with various incentives such as tax breaks and infrastructure subsidies. TKN partners investigated the costs and benefits of these investment incentives for sustainable development in the region.

“Our research on investment incentives has revealed that they can play an important role in attracting foreign investment, therefore fostering Indonesia’s economic growth. However, policy-makers need to carefully weigh the cost of the incentives against the expected returns.”

Sri Adiningsih, Center for Asia Pacific Studies at  
Gadjah Mada University, Indonesia

<http://www.tradeknowledgenetwork.net>

A woman is walking away from the camera on a reddish-brown dirt path. She is carrying a large, shallow, yellowish-orange basket on her head, which is filled with dark, leafy vegetables. On top of the basket, there is a silver metal pot. She is wearing a blue sleeveless top and a long, patterned skirt with geometric and floral designs in blue, red, yellow, and green. The background is a lush green field with some trees and a fence line.

## Key elements of the TKN approach

### **A Southern-driven approach to policy making**

The TKN works on the premise that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to designing sustainable trade and investment policies. Intelligent policies require intimate knowledge of the local context, which is why TKN research is developed and executed in the countries and regions in which it is applied. Coordinators based in each region are responsible for managing their own research agenda, with support from national-level research institutes. From a project's conception to its dissemination, the process is rooted in the South.

### **A broad perspective on trade and investment**

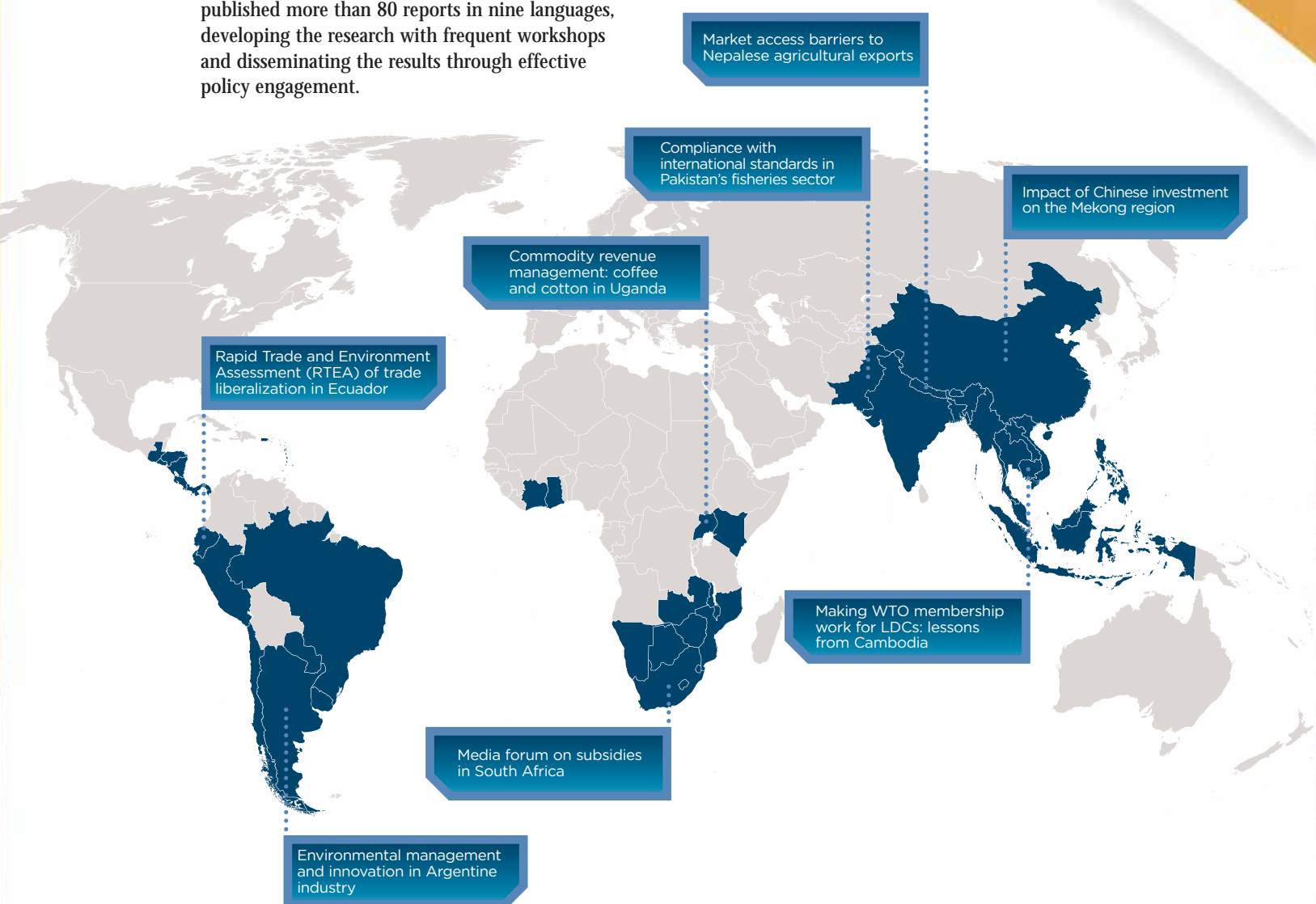
The TKN's research agenda takes a broad view of trade and investment, which cannot be addressed in isolation from a range of related policy areas. TKN partners consider the broader macro-economic context and promote recommendations that ensure that trade and investment policies support sustainable development.

### **A focus on influencing policy**

Solid research does not automatically lead to changes in policy. The TKN makes a serious effort to build capacity not only on research, but also on policy-influencing tactics. This approach includes strategies for communicating with key policy-makers at the domestic and international level. It also involves working closely with journalists, building their capacity to communicate how trade-related issues are affecting citizens in their country. In short, the research is never an end to itself; positive policy changes are the goal.

# The Trade Knowledge Network: Global research partnerships for sustainable trade policy

Since 1998 the Trade Knowledge Network has partnered with more than 35 institutions in 28 countries and is working to further expand its reach around the globe. To date the TKN has published more than 80 reports in nine languages, developing the research with frequent workshops and disseminating the results through effective policy engagement.



#### For more information:

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The Trade Knowledge Network is coordinated by the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), a non-profit organization with offices in Canada, Switzerland and the United States.