



News item

Trade key vehicle to achieve sustainable use of biodiversity-based resources, meeting told

The role of trade in safeguarding biodiversity, and particularly its role in enhancing livelihoods in developing countries, was highlighted at a side event held on 5 February in New York during the eighth session of the Open Working Group on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) .

Organized jointly by UNCTAD, CITES and OAS, the theme of the side event, “Sustainability at the intersection of trade, environment and development”, was discussed during a panel session chaired by the Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations, H.E. Mr. Gustavo Meza-Cuadra.

Opening the discussion, Mr Fernando Ocampo, Vice Minister of Trade of Costa Rica, said that, “Strong, open and sound market economies could be a complement to sustainability efforts” and added that “this approach had been put in practice in Costa Rica in sectors such as ecotourism and had been discussed in the context of recent initiative on liberalizing trade in environmental goods which was recently launched at the World Economic Forum in Davos”.

Mr. Braulio Dias, Executive Director of the CBD, indicated that, “Biodiversity is receiving significant attention in the construction of the SDGs. Trade is critical in this construction, as it can be a vehicle for sustainable use”. He also mentioned that new Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) rules under the Nagoya Protocol provided legal certainty and can enable trade flows of genetic resources. Mr. Dias called for UNCTAD’s BioTrade Initiative to be extended to a larger number of countries and for greater adoption of BioTrade principles and criteria.

Ms. Arancha Gonzalez, Executive Director of the ITC, emphasized the essential role of sustainability in the SMEs business model and added that “Engaging SMEs in sustainable production can assist them to overcome non-tariff measures and ensure that producers become key actors in local resource conservation and management”.

Ms. Claudia de Windt of the OAS Secretariat stated that “Sustainable use and environmental conservation could also form the basis for the enjoyment of other basic rights such as the right to a healthy environment, social justice, economic welfare and rule of law”.

Mr. Juan Carlos Vasquez, speaking on behalf of the CITES Secretary-General Mr. John E. Scanlon, said that seven billion people consumed biodiversity-based products every day in the form of medicines, food, clothes, furniture, perfumes and luxury goods. With globalization, the consumption of biodiversity-based products was growing at an unprecedented rate, placing sustainability at the centre of the debate. Mr. Vasquez added that this had to be made visible and understandable to the general public and policymakers.

As an example, Mr. Vasquez presented the story of the Andean vicuña, a rare mountain mammal related to the llama and alpaca. In the 1960s, vicuñas had been hunted to near extinction before being protected under CITES in 1975. By 1987, some populations had recovered so significantly that trade in vicuña wool was permitted. By 2012, the number of vicuñas had increased to over 450,000 so that now the species was soundly managed and local communities benefited directly from the trade in highly valuable vicuña wool.

Mr. Bonapas Onguglo, OIC of the Trade, Environment, Climate Change and Sustainable Development Branch at UNCTAD said that “the three pillars of sustainable development – economic development, social development and environmental protection – could not be unbundled and should, on the contrary, be coherently integrated in the post-2015 development agenda”. He added that UNCTAD’s BioTrade Initiative had been a clear response to the UN’s Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020 and a key way of advancing the biodiversity targets and “International trade can enable the conservation, sustainable use and benefit-sharing of biodiversity-based resources in many different ways. For example”.

Chairing the meeting, Ambassador Gustavo Meza-Cuadra, Permanent Representative of Peru to the United Nations, concluded that biodiversity must be mainstreamed in future sustainable development goals.