



SESSION 4 SUMMARY

SESSION TITLE: CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT: KEY POLICY ASPIRATIONS

SPEAKERS:

Thierry D. Buchs, Head of the Trade Promotion Division, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs SECO

Hendrik Schmitz Guinote, Counsellor, Development Policy, Permanent Mission of the Federal Republic of Germany to the Office of the UN in Geneva

Silvia Formentini, Team Coordinator for Trade and Sustainable Development, Directorate-General for Trade, European Commission

Xinhua Sun, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of China to the WTO

Jason Pearson, Executive Director, Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council (video message)

(Moderator) **Joseph Wozniak**, Head, Trade for Sustainable Development Programme, ITC

CONCLUSION:

Discussions at the during the 2015 Trade for Sustainable Development Forum revealed that:

Governments – and the public sector in general – bear great potential to shape the public debate to make sustainable production the norm rather than the exception. Consumer information initiatives, transparency and innovation in the form of new technologies and improved methodologies are some of the key factors.

Policy frameworks are essential in bringing farmers and exporters to better capacity levels and trading performance.

QUOTES FROM EACH SPEAKER:

Jason Pearson:

- “The U.S. federal **government is increasingly seeking to use its economic influence to advance policy objectives**, and is seeking to **prioritize its sustainable purchasing actions** by identifying a set of priority purchasing categories.”
 - o This has been recently enshrined in U.S. policy frameworks.
- “**The federal government is so far more focused on its work on sustainable purchasing**, on environmental supply chain risk, than on other social or economic aspects of supply chain risk.”

Thierry Buchs:

- “**We have learned that standards are at a critical juncture – after many years of existence, what is at stake is the sustainability of the sustainability standards.**”
- Certified production is often sold as non-certified, because buyers are interested in cheaper products.
- “There is a lot to be done inside, but also outside of the certification schemes. Hence the term “**beyond certification.**”
- **The way forward for SECO involves two pillars: transparency and innovation.** On the first, the T4SD database should become indeed the global database of voluntary sustainability standards; on the latter, efforts should go towards new technologies for better data collection and analyses and ultimately increased traceability.



Hendrik Schmitz-Guinote:

- **“In essentially every SDG, one can find an element related to voluntary sustainability standards.”**
- Red thread of “increased transparency”: consumer information on social and environmental standards is the way the German government is leading
- A recent **G7 declaration highlights the importance of responsible supply chains**, multi-stakeholder networks to deliver on sustainability goals, as well as transparency.
- Germany is about to host a G7 meeting of labour ministers – in the run up, one of the most discussed issues was the creation of multi-stakeholder networks as a way to support sustainability, or to support developing countries in this way by providing policy guidance and advice, among other things.

Silvia Formentini:

- The issue of **voluntary sustainability standards has to be tackled in a holistic manner**, including in the context of **trade policy**.
- Foreign trade agreements can be a powerful tool to promote corporate social responsibility and VSS.

Xinhua Sun:

- **Private schemes owners need to follow some basic “codes of good practice”**, such as transparency, science and credibility. This could also be important for private standards in not becoming subject to national laws and regulations in specific areas, and, importantly, for **their “reputation gains” and sustainable growth in the long run**.
- **Joint efforts of the private and public sectors should be strengthened to build the capacity of SMEs** to participate in global value chains by facilitating their compliance with the requirements of voluntary sustainability standards.

QUOTES FROM THE FLOOR

“When you harmonize the public-private partnership properly, then we can deliver on the SDGs (SDG17). The collaboration between ITC and the various agencies is an example of how to bring about real change on the ground.”

RECOMMENDATIONS:

What sustainability trends do governments see in the future? The continuous improvement of sustainability initiatives is important in forming and updating public-sector frameworks. The public sector seems to be increasingly aware of the power it holds in making sustainable change happen through policies and dialogue with the private sector.

At the same time, key stakeholders reconfirmed that greater transparency – including access to information for consumers – and innovation in technology, data collection and analysis, are the areas where future efforts and assistance will be, and should be, directed.