

## Leverhulme Doctoral Scholarships Programme for Interdisciplinary Resilience Studies (PIRS) University of Southampton

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**RECRUITMENT CYCLE for studentships starting: October 2024**

### **SUPERVISORY TEAM**

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### **STUDENTSHIP PROJECT TITLE**

**Understanding the resilience of trade policies to climate change in  
facilitating sustainable development**

### **OVERVIEW**

Trade policy between developed and developing states has tended to avoid inclusion of environmental *and* social justice dimensions. This project will explore the implications of this on the contribution of trade policy to sustainable development, focused on agriculture in developing states, and how policies can be developed to be more resilient to climate change.

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### **SUMMARY**

The project seeks to understand the complex connections between trade policy and sustainable development, how climate influences these connections and how trade, via more holistic policy development, can be more resilient in the face of climate change. The project will involve analysis of current policies, focusing on developing states and trade with regional partners and the EU/UK. The connection between trade and climate variability will be analysed to understand how climate affects trade and the impacts of trade on climate mitigation and resource use, such as water. These analyses will be used to develop conceptual models of how trade intersects with sustainable development as climate varies. There will be potential to focus the research on one or more case studies to test the conceptual framework, and to understand how trade policy can be developed to facilitate sustainable development that incorporates dimensions of environmental sustainability (green transition) and economic development for the poorest (social justice transition).

The project will be co-supervised by academics in the School of Geography and Environmental Science and Southampton Law School to provide the necessary multidisciplinary expertise to help the student develop the project and provide the necessary training. Prof Justin Sheffield provides expertise in climate science and its impacts on agricultural production, use of resources and other environmental impacts. Prof Emily Reid provides expertise in international trade law and connections with sustainable development including environmental policy. The PhD student will sit within a cohort of other students researching a diverse range of topics on important global challenges, and will therefore have opportunities for peer-learning, in addition to the bespoke CDT training programme.

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## **PROJECT CONCEPT**

### **Rationale**

Trade policy is developed with the goal of facilitating trade between two or more states, and increasingly includes considerations of environmental sustainability, such as environmental standards or sustainable use of resources in the production of goods and services that are traded. This can have certain advantages, such as encouraging producer states to improve environmental standards, provide efficiencies in production and transition to renewables, but can also lead to focusing of poor environmental practice in certain states with less stringent agreements. At the same time, trade policy can facilitate economic development, for example, via zero duty on imported goods and services, with the expectation of distribution of benefits and poverty alleviation. However, there is little understanding and empirical evidence about whether trade policy positively impacts on the poorest to effectively drive social justice transition and help deliver poverty alleviation goals.

Whilst these two aspects of environment and (social) development may help towards sustainable development, they are rarely incorporated together into

trade policy, generally because of the complexities of shifting policy within the boundaries of international law and trying to do this at multi-lateral scale. The implication is that trade policy, as a key lever to facilitate sustainable development (including SDG 17 – Partnerships for the Goals) and underlying many of the UN SDGs (including explicitly goals 8 and 10), is unable to deliver on both environmental and economic development agendas. With climate change, these uncertainties are exacerbated as states try on one hand to maintain trade in climate sensitive products and services whilst mitigating their climate emissions, and on the other hand try to improve poverty and food security outcomes which are also climate sensitive, especially for the most socio-economically disadvantaged who tend to be engaged in the agricultural sector.

### ***Key objectives***

The overall aim of the project is to understand how consideration of environmental and development outcomes in trade policy can improve sustainable development and whether this can be resilient to climate change. The key objectives are:

- 1) To understand current consideration of environment and development dimensions in trade policy.
- 2) To understand how trade is impacted by climate variability and change, and how trade influences climate mitigation and resource use.
- 3) To develop a conceptual understanding of how trade and policy intersect with environmental and development outcomes in the face of climate change, including the trade-offs.
- 4) To apply and test a conceptual framework in one or more case studies to understand how policy can be developed towards multi-objectives of economic development, social justice and environmental sustainability, and minimizing trade-offs.

### ***Methods***

The project will use a combination of methods including doctrinal (analysis of existing law and legal instruments) and socio-legal (evaluating law and policy in its social context). The principal focus of the doctrinal analysis will be bilateral and multilateral trade cooperation agreements, law, and policy applying among developing states, with their regional partners, and with the EU/UK and the World Trade Organization Agreements. This will focus in particular upon the inclusion of sustainable development provisions, including environmental and climate, with a view to establishing the extent to which existing trade law and policy is capable of accommodating the policy developments necessary to secure resilience in the face of the impacts of climate change. The socio-legal dimension will build on this, in particular identifying normative proposals for law and policy development to ensure trade cooperation fulfils its potential as an instrument contributing to just and green transition.

The connection between trade and climate variability will be analysed to understand how climate affects trade (e.g. of key export crops) via impacts on production and imposition of trade barriers, and the impacts of trade on climate mitigation and resource use (e.g. water/land-intensive products).

This will draw from existing trade and climate data at national scale but refined by sub-regional analysis where data are available.

These analyses will be used to develop conceptual models of how trade intersects with sustainable development as climate varies, incorporating characterization of key dimensions such as land and resource use, market access and poverty levels. The framework will be developed to incorporate the impact of policy shocks on these dimensions.

The research will focus on one or more case studies (such as bilateral or regional trade) with available data to go into more depth and test the conceptual framework. The framework will be used to identify trade-offs between sustainable development outcomes and how this varies with the influence of a variable and changing climate. It will be used to understand how trade policy can be developed to facilitate sustainable development that incorporates dimensions of environmental sustainability (green transition) and economic development for the poorest (social justice transition) and minimizes trade-offs. This will include consideration of future climate change and impacts on agricultural production and resource use.

### ***Wider implications and potential impact***

The outcomes of this project will help to understand the connections between trade policy and climate change in the context of sustainable development. It will seek to provide recommendations on how policy can be developed more holistically to improve sustainable development outcomes, especially for the most disadvantaged. Whilst changing international trade policy is extremely difficult from a political and legal viewpoint, especially for multilateral agreements, progress has been made in recent years to incorporate dimensions of environmental sustainability and economic development. The question is how the dial can be shifted to incorporate dimensions of environment, economic development and social justice in a more holistic and joined up way, and ensure resilience to climate change. It is expected that analysis of benefits and trade-offs will open discussion for how more holistic thinking can improve policy development and where there is most potential, such as via bilateral or regional trade agreements.

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### **Contribution to interdisciplinary resilience studies:**

Understanding how trade intersects with environmental sustainability *and* social justice in the context of development requires an interdisciplinary approach that brings together aspects of law, international relations, international development, sustainability, climate, water and agriculture. The approach proposed is focused on characterizing the essential components of a complex set of interactions between trade, climate, environment and development, for which empirical evidence is generally lacking or too focused on one dimension. The development of a conceptual framework to tie this together requires broader systems thinking and the likely combination of data-driven relationships with more qualitative insights. The goal is to provide an overall systems picture, whilst the case study(s) may

help test and refine the conceptual model to provide critical insights into how policy can be more effective.

Ultimately, the focus of the project will depend on the interests and background of the student and the collaborative design with the supervisors. In any case, the project will aim to understand the resilience of trade to climate change within the studied systems and how this can facilitate sustainable development, but will likely take interesting directions in its focus. For example, a key question for the student in the project development stage is: resilience to what and resilience of whom?

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**Please list and describe any specific/additional technical training or support to undertake and successfully deliver this project. *Note that students recruited into this programme will undertake a bespoke training curriculum. Students and their supervisory teams will also identify generic skills gaps to address through training courses offered by the University's Doctoral College.***

Given that this is an interdisciplinary project, it is expected that the exact direction will depend on the background and experience of the student, and how the project is shaped in the development stage. Training will therefore depend on this direction and which methods of analysis are required. Sheffield can provide training in data analysis relating to climate impacts, agricultural production and trade. Reid can provide training in relevant doctrinal and socio-legal method. Empirical methods training can also be provided as necessary.

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