

Summary of discussions in the ISDRS Conference 2018, track 5d on Value Chains and Trade,
Wednesday 13th and Friday 15th June 29-018

Chaired by Valerie Nelson and Walter Vermeulen

In two sessions we had 10 papers presented addressing diverse product groups (cotton, salmon, cement, cocoa/chocolate and dairy), produced in various continents. Most shared the focus on assessing the full (Planet, People, Prosperity) range of sustainability aspects, while a few made steps towards monetary evaluation of this. Some had a focus on the role of lead companies or a wide review perspective. A common theme emerging across the presentations was the weaker than anticipated impact of many sustainable supply chain initiatives vis-à-vis their own stated goals and those delineated by the UN SDGs. To achieve greater impact and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs, it may be necessary to identify complementary or even alternative, non-voluntary measures.

[Matilda Axelson](#) (Vrije Universiteit Brussel) presented her paper on **The true cost of “green”: Quantifying the economic impact of sustainable cement in consumer goods**. She presented some first results from a case study of three product groups of sustainably branded concrete products (including their correspondent cement content), versus high-carbon alternatives. The intention to develop a monetary assessment of the ‘true price’.

[John E Hermansen](#) (NTNU: Norwegian University of Science and Technology) presented a paper on **Interaction between UN SDG associated to the production and consumption value chain of Norwegian salmon farming industry**. The key message was that the sustainability assessment needs to address the full value chain of salmon products.

[Agnieszka Czaplicka-Kotas](#) (AGH University of Science and Technology) presented a paper on **International trade in the environmental goods and service – Poland and the EU**, co-authored with [Joanna Kulczycka](#) and [Piotr Olczak](#) (Polish Academy of Sciences) and [Natalia Iwaszczuk](#) (AGH University of Science and Technology), discussing the growing export of environmentally sound product from Poland, using the available statistical data.

[Marzia Traverso](#) (RWTH Aachen University) presented a paper **Towards a life cycle sustainability assessment of cotton - state of the art** co-authored with [Sabrina Neugebauer](#) and [Rose Mankaa](#). It discusses the integrated assessment of all sustainability aspects in cotton production using a case of Hugo Boss, illustrating how a full set of indicators on sustainability aspects of cotton can serve to push towards harmonization in assessing cotton production and products and provide a clear picture on country-specific hotspots enabling a comparison of the different production locations.

[Verina Ingram](#) (Wageningen University) presented a paper titled **Value chains and deforestation: The myth of zero cocoa deforestation?** - Reviewing the available research literature, she examined how and if current governance arrangements are a sustainable business model in catalysing sustainable land-based development. She challenged the often-hazy definitions to clarify what cocoa deforestation and degradation really means, and highlighted the underlying logic and assumptions, by building a Theory of Change.

[Manuela D’Eusanio](#) presented on **‘Supply Chain Management: The role of social decision support tools’** (a presentation co-authored with [Silvia Di Cesare](#) and [Luigia Petti](#)). Based on a systematic review of the literature, Manuela explored the potential for Social Life Cycle Assessment (LCA) to support companies in moving towards sustainability in their supply chains.

[Amanda Berlan](#)'s presentation on **'Governance and Change: An analysis of sectoral needs and sustainability in the global chocolate industry'** reviewed the on-going major social, economic and environmental challenges for this industry. Specific challenges for smallholder cocoa producers continue to be a problem, particularly the volatility in cocoa prices on world markets which affect producers in the region. Certain issues such as the worst forms of child labour continue to affect the industry and farming households, but newer issues are also gaining attention such as water usage.

[David Bek](#) presented his work with Jill Timms (both from the University of Coventry) entitled: **'Configuring governance in sustainable cut flower value chains'**. African flower industries have evolved over time. A key new trend is the growth in demand from the global South, with potential implications for sustainability standards requirements. Global Production Networks (GPNs) theory focuses on nodes in the chain, but also addresses the governance role played by other actors. Empirical analysis of the evolution of the flower industry in Africa from a governance perspective suggests that governance is 'fuzzy' in practice. A detailed case study of sustainable wildflowers shows a wide variety of initiatives seeking to achieve sustainability in wildflower in harvesting and trade, but in practice many of the buyers only offer vague commitments and so the question arises as to whether wildflower production is in fact sustainable even where it is claimed as such.

[Annala Afzal](#) presented her and [Sisira Jayasuriy](#)'s work on the **'Impact of integrating rural producers into modern agricultural value chains and gender inequality: Lessons from Nestle's dairy project in Pakistan'**. Testing the recent concepts of shared value in supply chain development, Annala analysed an on-going case study based on investments by Nestle in small-scale, female dairy producers. The company reports positive outcomes for producers who have participated in capacity strengthening activities and for the company who is benefitting in terms of a stronger supply base. Initial empirical findings suggest that the outcomes may not be quite so positive for women: the initiative is implemented in a context of gender inequality and intersecting discriminations relating to purdah and restricted mobility for women. Thus, while income benefits are being obtained by the household, due to women's participation, is not clear whether women can control the income generated.

On **'Responsible Business Initiatives: Effectiveness, Impact and Systemic Barriers'**, [Valerie Nelson](#), of the Natural Resources Institute, University of Greenwich discussed the numerous voluntary, non-governmental organisations that seek to influence corporate behaviour toward greater responsibility and more sustainable outcomes and their relative effectiveness and impact. Developing a theory of change for RBIs in generally, but also more detailed ones for the different kinds of mechanisms used by such organisations (singly or in combination), Valerie then discussed the limits of available evidence and pointed to the need for alternative levers which tackle root cause, systemic issues in global production networks.