

Reading Lesson

B2 Science: International Student Council on International Trade

Reading

Read the text about global trade and the environment. What drastic measures are needed to reduce carbon footprints?

International Student Council on International Trade

International Student Council on International Trade is a group of economics and science students from universities all over the world. We collaborate to promote policies that support the global exchange of technology and scientific research aimed at reducing carbon emissions to a sustainable level. Below is our analysis of the impact of global trade on the environment.

Policy Paper #27: Global Trade—Positive or Negative for the Environment?

January 2021

There are good reasons for the average person, and even members of the scientific community, to believe that global trade is a major cause of carbon emissions leading to global warming. They base their arguments primarily on two factors—the difference in emissions standards between highly developed and developing countries and the transportation of goods around the world creating an enormous carbon footprint.

It is true that highly developed countries tend to look the other way when developing countries do not comply with international emissions standards because they enjoy the benefit of inexpensive products produced in those countries. When pressure is put on developing countries to make their industries cleaner, they say that they cannot produce the goods at the prices consumers want if they have to put in expensive new equipment with pollution controls and follow strict international regulations.

This paper will address the issue of carbon emissions from transportation. The vast majority of goods that are transported from source countries to international markets are carried on ships. According to an expert in low-carbon shipping at the University College London, cargo ships have much lower carbon emissions per ton than airplanes do. Furthermore, research by the World Resources Institute has shown that cars and trucks are by far the biggest sources of carbon emissions. Carbon emissions from shipping represent a relatively small percentage compared to the percentage from airplanes and automobiles.

While it is true that unequal emissions standards and carbon emissions from the transport of goods from the source country to markets in other countries do have negative effects on the environment, it would be very short-sighted to simply block trade with developing countries. International trade is much more complex than just manufacturing goods in one country and selling them in others. Good trade policies also promote the exchange of technical knowledge and equipment that can help developing countries update their industrial and energy sectors to make them more environmentally friendly. Increased international trade promotes economic growth in developing countries. As a country's economy improves, education and social welfare also improve, and the population begins to demand better environmental policies. Furthermore, as manufacturing countries develop stronger economies, they have more money to replace old factories with new, cleaner production methods.



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Clearly, making the drastic changes needed to reduce the world's carbon emissions to a sustainable level is a process, and highly developed, wealthy countries have a responsibility to decide to what extent they will participate in promoting the development of green industries in emerging economies. Just imposing economic sanctions or tariffs on countries or industries that pollute is not enough and may even have negative rather than positive effects. On the other hand, providing expert technical advisors, educational opportunities, and money or equipment to help developing countries reach international environmental standards faster will benefit not only the countries receiving the aid but the entire planet.

The UN Environment Programme cites an example of a growing success story in a country with enormous environmental challenges—India. A technical university in Hyderabad is teaching the most up-to-date technology to future engineers and using the technology itself to make the campus an oasis of renewable resources. The campus gets its power from a combination of many solar panels and a biogas plant. The equipment and technology for this project were made possible through a cooperative effort from China, the US, the EU, Australia, and India itself. Industries in those countries made money while at the same time providing knowledge and infrastructure that help reduce pollution.

The example above is the sort of international effort that will be necessary on a large scale if we want to solve the global problem of carbon emissions. Citizens of developed countries often complain that helping developing countries costs money, and there are many problems in their own countries that need to be solved. The reality is that high-tech companies that provide expertise and equipment to developing countries make money by doing it, which is good for the economies of the developed countries and their tech industries. Furthermore, the consequences of not trying to help developing countries raise their environmental standards as quickly as possible are too serious to ignore, whatever the short-term costs.

carbon emissions (n): carbon dioxide and carbon monoxide in the atmosphere, produced by vehicles and industrial processes

carbon footprint (n): the amount of carbon emissions produced by a specific person, group, or activity

emerging economy (n): an economy that is growing and progressing toward becoming a highly developed economy

tariff (n): a tax on goods that are imported or exported

Vocabulary

Match the definitions to phrases from the box.

comply with look the other way short-sighted short-term to what extent

1. _____: without the will or ability to consider future events or consequences
2. _____: the question of how far an action will be taken
3. _____: pretend not to see something wrong or illegal
4. _____: occurring over a short period of time
5. _____: to do something according to a rule or law

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Comprehension

Choose the correct option.

1. What is the probable purpose of the text?
 - a for a lecture in a university class
 - b for publication on the editorial page of a large city newspaper
 - c for publication in the journal of an international economics forum
2. Which is not cited as a negative aspect of global trade?
 - a There is sometimes not enough quality control of goods produced in developing countries.
 - b Developing countries often have lower environmental standards.
 - c The international transport of goods contributes to carbon emissions.
3. According to the paper, why is the international transport of goods not one of the worst sources of carbon emissions? Because ...
 - a fuels do not pollute as much as they used to.
 - b a relatively small number of products are shipped to international markets.
 - c ships produce a smaller percentage of total carbon emissions than airplanes or automobiles.
4. According to the paper, what can good trade policies do?
 - a help reduce global carbon emissions
 - b help raise the economic, educational, and social development in manufacturing countries
 - c the things listed in both a and b
5. In general, what is the argument of the paper?
 - a International trade should be limited because of negative effects on the environment.
 - b International trade can have more positive than negative effects on the environments.
 - c Developing countries have the greatest responsibility to help the environment.

Thinking

Is your country primarily a producer of goods for export or a consumer of imported goods? What do you think your country can do to help promote the reduction of carbon emissions on the planet?