

Local Markets, Global Chains: How is Sustainability Created in Seafood Supply Chains from Asia to Europe?

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Abstract

The fairness and inclusiveness of globalization in seafood trade is coming under increased scrutiny due to economic, social and environmental impacts created as trade has expanded, often leading to imbalances among nations. The European Union is the most important world market for the consumption of seafood. Despite the construction of a single market it is far from homogenous and unsurprisingly reflects traditional tastes, cultural values and patterns of production that have evolved under complex phenomena within the marketing environment. To present a clearer perspective on its contemporary morphology, this paper uses data collected from 40 interviews with seafood value chain participants in key importing and consuming countries (Germany, France, the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands), conducted between September and December 2011. A number of suppliers of these downstream actors, based in Bangladesh and Thailand, were earlier interviewed in order to provide greater insight along the value chain. The interviews investigated how market positions, legislation, media stories, NGO pressure on companies to source from sustainable sources, certification schemes, inter alia, contributed to creating sustainability in seafood supply. Considerations of internal initiatives were also incorporated that mitigate risks in supply chains and partnerships with suppliers. The paper finds that a firm's market position remains one of the major determinants of its commitment to sustainable trade. However it is argued that in an increasingly scrutinized marketing environment firms cannot afford to rest upon past achievements and must be more proactive in promoting holistic solutions along the chain.