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IMPULSANDO EL DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE: UN ANÁLISIS DEL ACUERDO COMERCIAL ENTRE EL ECUADOR Y REINO UNIDO (PERIODO 2015 A 2022)

Promoting sustainable development: an analysis of the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom (period 2015 to 2022)

 **Juan Salvador Erazo Mena**, Investigador independiente (Ecuador)
(juansalvadorerazo@gmail.com) (<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1020-0977>)

 **Gabriela Belén Bonilla Chumbi**, Universidad del Azuay (Ecuador)
(gabrielabonilla@uazuay.edu.ec) (<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3525-8637>)

Resumen

El comercio es una herramienta fundamental para la consecución del desarrollo sostenible, y por tal motivo el presente trabajo busca analizar si el acuerdo comercial entre Ecuador y Reino Unido contribuye al desarrollo del Ecuador. Para llevar a cabo el estudio, se aplicó una metodología de análisis de datos secundarios que incorporó enfoques exploratorio y descriptivo. Como principales hallazgos se encuentra que este acuerdo representa una amplia contribución al Ecuador, en los temas comercial, laboral y ambiental. Sin embargo, existen limitaciones y áreas de mejora que afectan la operatividad de este acuerdo, definidas como la dificultad de encontrar evidencia clara y estadística sobre el cumplimiento de los ODS, y la falta de coercitividad que el apartado sobre comercio y desarrollo sostenible tiene, a fin de hacerse cumplir. No obstante, este acuerdo, en esencia, sienta las bases para una mayor cooperación y un enfoque conjunto hacia un desarrollo sostenible en ambos países.

Palabras clave

Acuerdo comercial, desarrollo sostenible, Ecuador, Reino Unido, relación internacional.

Keywords

International relations, sustainable development, Ecuador, United Kingdom, trade agreement

Abstract

Trade is a fundamental tool for achieving sustainable development, and for this reason, this paper seeks to analyze whether the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom contributes to Ecuador's development. To carry out this study, a methodology based on secondary data analysis was used, incorporating exploratory and descriptive approaches. The main findings are that this agreement represents a significant contribution to Ecuador in trade, labor, and environmental issues. However, there are limitations and areas for improvement that affect the operability of this agreement, defined as the difficulty of finding clear and statistical evidence on compliance with the SDGs and the lack of coerciveness that the section on trade and sustainable development has in order to be enforced. Nevertheless, this agreement, in essence, lays the groundwork for greater cooperation and an approach to sustainable development in both countries.

1.

Introduction & state of the art

This research examines the contribution of the trade agreement signed in 2019 between Ecuador and the United Kingdom to Ecuador's sustainable development. The study focuses on two fundamental issues: sustainable development and international trade, both of which are crucial for the formulation of policies and agreements at the global level. While international trade can be a tool for economic growth, the analysis reveals limitations in trade agreements in terms of effectively integrating sustainable development. Sustainable development is a key concept in the international arena, as it implies the integration of social, economic, and environmental aspects to ensure progress without compromising the availability of resources for future generations. World leaders have promoted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a framework for addressing global challenges, including hunger, poverty, and improving access to water and decent work. International trade, meanwhile, facilitates global access to goods and services, serving as an engine of integration, cooperation, and economic growth for countries.

In this context, the study examines the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, focusing on its relationship with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the impact of Brexit on the continuity of bilateral relations between the two countries. The research is structured around the identification of the problem, the literature review, the analysis of relevant SDG indicators, and the presentation of the discussion and conclusions. To assess the impact of the agreement, the concepts of

human development and sustainable development, as well as their interrelation with international trade, are explored.

On Development

Human development, understood as the expansion of people's choices, encompasses aspects that transcend purely economic considerations. These options include access to education, better nutrition and health, secure livelihoods, protection from violence, and political and cultural freedoms (Ul Haq, 1995). This humanistic approach to development provides a basis for analyzing how policies, including trade agreements, can influence the holistic well-being of individuals and communities.

On Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Within this framework, sustainable development, introduced by the Brundtland Commission in 1987, broadens the perspective by integrating economic, social, and environmental objectives. This approach seeks to meet present needs without compromising those of future generations (ECLAC, 2022). In this context, the 17 SDGs of the 2030 Agenda emerge as a global action plan that involves governments, the private sector, and civil society in eradicating poverty, protecting the planet, and promoting inclusive prosperity (Gamez, 2022). These goals not only guide development policies but also highlight the interdependence between local actions and global challenges.

On trade and trade agreements

International trade and trade agreements play a crucial role in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly in promoting inclusive economic growth and reducing poverty. Adam Smith's theory of international trade highlights how open markets and the division of labor encourage productivity and economic growth. According to Smith, international trade results from differences in absolute production costs between countries, which facilitates specialization and exchange (Lugones et al., 2012). Trade agreements, such as the one between

Ecuador and the United Kingdom, formalize the intention of States to cooperate in trade matters under the principles of non-discrimination and mutual benefit (Ministerio de Economía y Finanzas, 2022). The World Trade Organization (WTO) also emphasizes the role of trade as a key financial tool for developing countries, thereby enhancing the efforts of both the public and private sectors to achieve sustainable development (WTO, 2018). In this sense, the analysis of the agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom is framed by the need to assess its contribution to the SDGs and its potential to reduce economic asymmetries between the two countries.

Below are studies and articles related to “sustainable development as a central theme in trade agreements and relations between Ecuador and the United Kingdom.” The current context of the agreement under study is detailed, influenced by Brexit and the need to sign a continuity document. Additionally, the importance of including a chapter on “Trade and Sustainable Development,” as in European Union agreements, is highlighted. Brexit is an acronym for “Britain” and “exit,” referring to the process of the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union, regulated by Article 50 of the Treaty on European Union (La Moncloa, 2020). According to Astroza (2019), a direct consequence of Brexit for Latin America has been the United Kingdom’s decision to negotiate with other countries in order to maintain commercial and legal relations. Since many of the United Kingdom’s agreements were through the EU, they will cease to have effect after its withdrawal, which has led the United Kingdom to propose “continuity agreements” to avoid conflicts.

To understand the origins of the trade agreement between Ecuador and the UK, Table 1 outlines the stages through which each document has evolved, ultimately leading to the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom.

Table 1

Evolution of official documents on trade relations between Ecuador and the United Kingdom

Year	Document	Signatories	Context
2012	Trade Agreement between the European Union (EU) and its Member States, on the one hand, and Colombia and Peru, on the other.	European Union, Colombia, and Peru.	The EU, Colombia, and Peru sign the base document that will serve to achieve the next two agreements.
2016	Protocol of Accession of Ecuador to the Trade Agreement between the European Union and its Member States, and Colombia and Peru, on the other hand.	European Union, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador.	Ecuador adheres to the previous agreement, with some modifications, mainly regarding terminology.
2019	Trade Agreement between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, on the one hand, and the Republic of Colombia, the Republic of Ecuador, and the Republic of Peru, on the other hand.	United Kingdom, Colombia, Peru, and Ecuador.	After Brexit (1), the United Kingdom signs a trade agreement with the three Andean countries that would maintain the same rights and obligations, based on the first agreement mentioned.

Source: Publications Office of the European Union (2012), European Commission (2016), and Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment and Fisheries (2019).

Note: This table outlines the trade agreements that provide the background to the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, detailing their evolution. (1): Brexit refers to the United Kingdom’s withdrawal from the European Union.

Taking this information into account, the trade agreement between Ecuador and the EU establishes a general framework to facilitate access to markets in the region, considering differences in levels of development and promoting gradual and asymmetric liberalization. It also addresses sensitive issues such as agriculture, the liberalization of services, and the promotion of sustainable development, through a commitment by both parties to respect national labor rights (Cornejo, 2017).

On May 15, 2019, a new agreement was signed between the United Kingdom and the Andean countries (Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador). According to George Hollingbery, UK Minister for Trade Policy, this agreement offers guarantees to British companies trading with the region, allowing them to continue trading as before after the UK's departure from the EU. This ensures that consumers and investors continue to benefit, with the expectation of further strengthening this trade and investment partnership in the future, working closely with the Andean countries (UK Government, 2019). To understand the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, it is essential to cite Article 1 of the agreement, which establishes the objective of preserving the rights and obligations between the parties, as provided for in the agreement between the EU and the Andean countries, following the United Kingdom's departure from the EU (Ministry of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment, and Fisheries, 2019, p.1).

According to Flores and Segarra (2022), implementing continuity agreements, such as the one signed in 2019 between the United Kingdom and the Andean countries (Peru, Colombia, and Ecuador), is crucial to mitigate negative economic impacts, particularly in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which complicated international trade. The United Kingdom seeks to maintain its trade relations and avoid conflicts after Brexit by proposing "continuity agreements" with these countries (Astroza, 2019). From a sustainable development perspective, Ecuador and Peru have updated the implementation of the "Trade and Sustainable Development" chapter in this agreement. Ecuador has proposed legal frameworks to mitigate ecological degradation, while Peru has proposed policies on the circular economy and climate change (UK Government, 2022).

The agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom is a continuation of the agreement with the EU, including commitments on labor and environmental legislation to reinforce globalization, such as decent work, labor equality for migrants, and environmental assessment (European External Action Service, 2017). Martínez (2020) argues that one of the main challenges in these chapters is to strengthen them to prevent violations, as conflict resolution mechanisms are limited and lack the power to impose sanctions. Raess (2018) suggests that the labor provisions in these treaties are linked to a decrease in labor rights violations in developing countries; however, the EU's soft approach has less impact on environmental protection compared to more coercive models, such as those of the US in NAFTA. Manero (2020) highlights that these chapters promote sustainable development by including non-trade aspects in the treaties, which benefits the relationship between the parties through a monitoring committee and mechanisms for dialogue with civil society. However, these chapters lack coercive elements and are outside the scope of trade dispute resolution mechanisms.

2.

Methods

In this research, secondary data analysis was used, adopting an exploratory and descriptive approach. This design enabled a comprehensive analysis of existing information on the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom for the period from 2015 to 2022. The exploratory approach of the study facilitated the identification of trends, challenges, and opportunities, while the descriptive nature allowed for a detailed characterization of the patterns and results observed in bilateral trade, thus contributing to a comprehensive understanding of its impact on sustainable development. The exploratory approach focused on the content analysis of the

“Trade and Sustainable Development” chapter of the trade agreement. A comprehensive review of the 20 articles that comprise this chapter was conducted, identifying commitments and acknowledgments related to sustainable development. Additionally, documentary analysis was employed to examine reports, policies, and official statements from both parties, thereby contextualizing and deepening the interpretation of the results. A descriptive approach was used to analyze statistical data related to bilateral trade between 2015 and 2022, encompassing imports, exports, and the trade balance. This analysis enabled the objective evaluation of trends and variations in trade flows between the two countries, and it determined whether the agreement has influenced trade growth and balance.

The combination of these methodological approaches enabled the triangulation of information, thereby strengthening the validity of the findings and providing a more comprehensive view of the trade agreement’s contribution to Ecuador’s sustainable development. Specifically, a matrix was implemented to correlate and contrast four key indicators: the articles in the chapter on “Trade and Sustainable Development,” the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the analysis of each point, and the thematic area to which each article relates (trade, social and international cooperation, labor, and environment). This process facilitated the identification of patterns, similarities, and contrasts between the provisions of the agreement and the achievement of the SDGs.

nable Development,” which contains 20 articles on commitments and recognitions related to sustainable development. The agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom supports both trade facilitation and sustainable development, demonstrating its link to the SDGs. The second indicator is the review of data on trade between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, including imports, exports, and trade balance between 2015 and 2022. This will help determine whether the agreement has influenced trade flows and assess whether it contributes to more balanced growth, considering the differences in national development between the two countries.

3.1 Analysis of the chapter “Trade and Sustainable Development”

This section aims to ensure that the analysis reflects purposeful and useful information in the field of sustainable development. To this end, a matrix will be implemented to correlate and contrast four relevant indicators: the chapter on “Trade and Sustainable Development (CSD)”, the Sustainable Development Goals, the analysis of each point, and the area to which each article relates. It should be noted that there are 20 articles covered under Title IX “Trade and Sustainable Development (CSD)” of the 2012 Trade Agreement. It is also worth mentioning that the fourth indicator is useful for grouping the articles respectively related into four dimensions: Trade, Social and International Cooperation, Labor, and Environment. This matrix is based on a content analysis to find and define patterns of similarity and contrast.

3.

Results

This section is based on two general analysis indicators. First, to assess whether the trade agreement contributes to sustainable development in Ecuador, we will analyze the chapter on “Trade and Sustain-

Table 2

Correlation between the articles of Title IX “Trade and Sustainable Development” and the SDGs..

A. C. Ecu - UK		Sustainable Development	Analysis	Subject
Title IX: Trade and Sustainable Development		Sustainable Development Goals	Explanation	
No.	Article	No.		
267	Context and Goals	Related to all SDGs	It sets out the commitment of the parties to the provisions of the following articles.	Commercial
271	Trade that promotes sustainable development	8 and 12	Recognition of trade, labor, foreign investment, and responsible practices policies is closely related to the promotion of sustainable development.	
277	Maintaining levels of protection	11 and 16	Maintaining adequate levels of environmental and labor protection contributes to the construction of fair and equitable societies. By ensuring high standards of protection, equal opportunities, and non-discrimination are promoted, and the exploitation of natural resources and workers is prevented.	
286	Cooperation on trade and sustainable development	Related to all SDGs	It sets out the commitment of the parties to the provisions of the previous articles.	

268	Right to regulate and levels of protection	17	Focused on respecting the right of each party to establish its own policies on sustainable development, and therefore, by signing the agreement, this recognition is being ratified.	
279	Review of impacts on sustainability	17	These three articles address the issue of review and monitoring by the signatories to the agreement, demonstrating the scope of SDG 17 on partnership and cooperation for process management.	Social and international cooperation
280	Institutional and monitoring mechanism	17		
281	National mechanisms	17		
282	Dialogue with civil society	16 and 17	Here we find a factor related to cooperation and dialogue that promotes agreement, in terms of sustainable development considerations.	
283	Government consultations	17	These four discuss what the Subcommittee on Trade and Sustainable Development entails, as a platform for periodic review of the progress of this agreement and its impact.	
284	Group of experts	17		
285	Report of the Group of Experts	17		
269	Multilateral labor standards and agreements	5 and 8	It emphasizes decent work and gender equality, so data on adequate employment and participation of men and women can be analyzed.	Labor
276	Migrant workers	1, 5, and 8	It distinguishes the importance of promoting equal treatment in working conditions, with a view to eliminating any discrimination in this regard against any worker, including migrant workers legally employed in their territories.	

270	Multilateral environmental standards and agreements	7, 13, 14, 15, and 17	It explores the applicability of environmental standards, taking into account biodiversity, pollution, and climate change. However, it only does so in the sense of recognizing those standards.	
272	Biological diversity	14 and 15	It recognizes the importance of the conservation and sustainable use of species and habitat diversity, which is essential for achieving international goals.	
273	Trade in forest products	15	Seeks to promote the sustainable management of forest resources; the parties recognize the importance of practices that comply with internal procedures and legislation.	Environmental
274	Trade in fishery products	14	It values the need to conserve and manage fishery resources in a rational and responsible manner.	
275	Climate change	3 and 13	It commits to improving efforts on climate change, led by developed countries, through adaptation policies and their influence on developing countries.	
278	Scientific information	9	This relationship is based on the logic of inclusive education and training, as well as the transfer of technology and knowledge.	Environmental and Social

Source: Publications Office of the European Union, 2012.

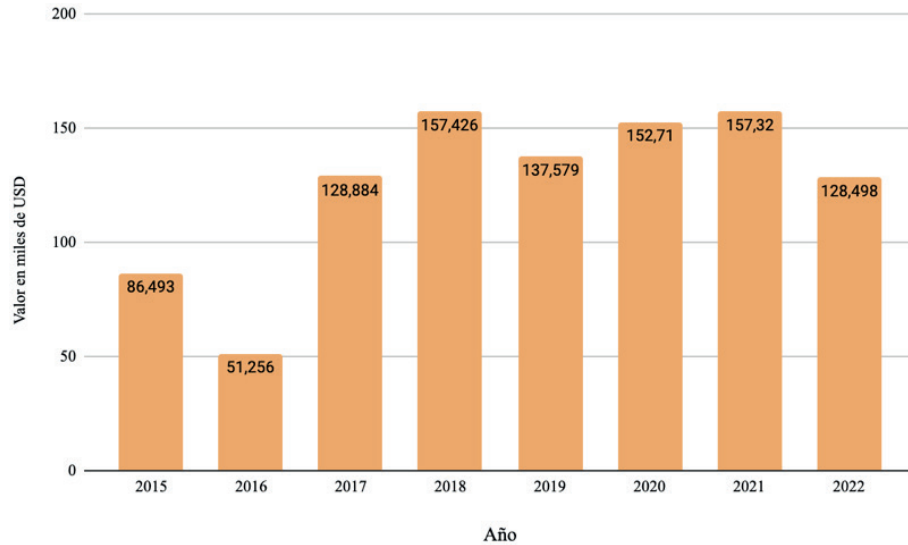
The table presented illustrates how the articles of the trade agreement relate to the SDGs, highlighting similar elements that facilitate an assessment of their alignment. For example, terms such as “labor rights” are linked to SDG 8, on decent work. In addition, Table 2 includes descriptive and thematic analyses in the last two sections, which identify patterns and define the dimensions of the articles. Below, a detailed analysis of each area will be carried out, mentioning articles, SDGs, and evidence from news and official documents.

3.1.1 Trade

Articles related to cooperation in trade and sustainable development highlight the relevance of cooperation and how joint activities are potential mechanisms for improving policies related to environmental and labor impact, monitoring and supervision, studies on climate change adaptation and mitigation, the role of trade and investment, incentives and support from developed countries for the benefit of developing countries, compliance with international standards and frameworks, among others. In this regard, the following graphs show Ecuador’s trade relationship with the United Kingdom from 2015 to 2022, a period during which Ecuador joined the agreement with the European Union and also experienced Brexit. This period is helpful for research as it allows us to understand the phenomena that affect the trade balance as relevant factors for analysis. Figure 1 shows the values that Ecuador has handled based on imports of goods from the United Kingdom.

Figure 1

Ecuadorian imports from the United Kingdom 2015 - 2022.

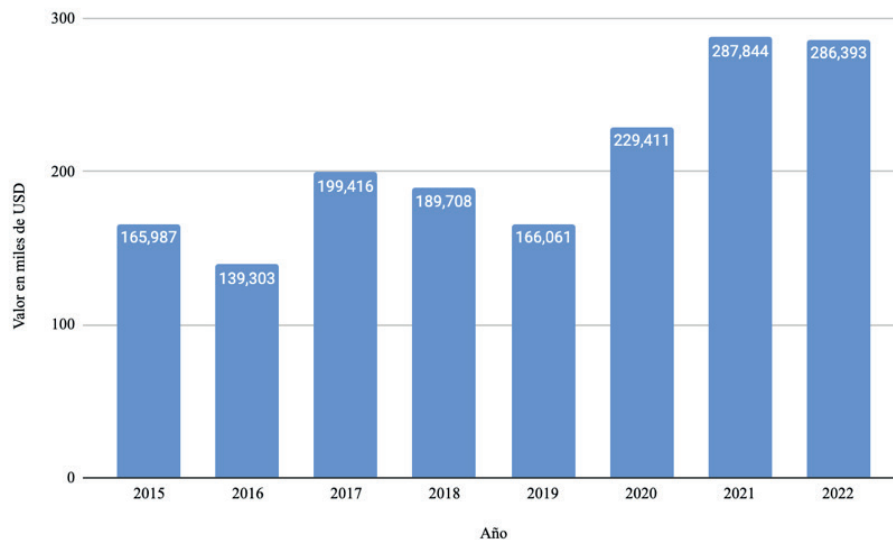


Source: Trade Map, 2023a.

As the graph shows, in 2017, there was a 151% increase in imports compared to 2016, primarily due to Ecuador's accession to the agreement with the EU, which occurred after the United Kingdom's departure from the bloc. Since then, and until 2022, import values have remained stable, with no sudden changes. This suggests that the 2019 trade agreement, which came into force in 2021, has kept import levels constant, without increasing them. In 2022, the main products imported from the United Kingdom were: alcoholic beverages and liquids (USD 28,060,000), pharmaceutical products (USD 16,206,000), and mechanical machinery and appliances (USD 15,346,000), most of which were manufactured. The following data chart shows Ecuador's export values to the United Kingdom from 2015 to 2022. This chart shows the evolution of values influenced by the trade agreements signed during this period.

Figure 2

Ecuadorian exports to the United Kingdom 2015 - 2022.

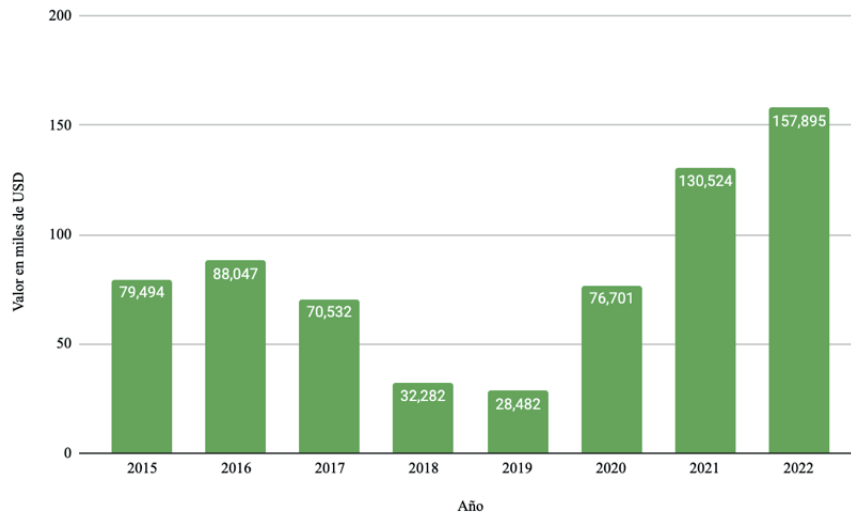


Source: Trade Map, 2023b.

It is clear that by 2020, there will be a 38% increase in exports compared to 2019, which suggests that by signing a more direct agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, trade between the two parties will become more dynamic. As can be seen for 2021, when this trade agreement comes into force, there will be a 25% increase compared to 2020. In other words, during the period in which the agreement begins to take effect, there is an increase in trade from Ecuador to the United Kingdom. It should be noted that among the most exported products are: meat preparations (worth USD 108,652,000), fish and crustaceans, fruit, textile fibres, live plants (worth USD 71,892,000), and various food preparations (worth USD 6,936,000) (Trade Map, 2023b). This indicates that Ecuador bases its exportable supply on raw materials or products that undergo minimal processing, unlike the manufactured products exported by the United Kingdom. To conclude this section, two graphs will be presented, showing the trade balance between the signatories to the agreement for the period from 2015 to 2022. The two figures presented are complementary, as the first illustrates the difference between exports and imports, while the second displays the values of each commercial activity separately, aiming to assess and distinguish how favorable the trade relationship is for Ecuador, particularly in the context of trade agreements.

Figure 3

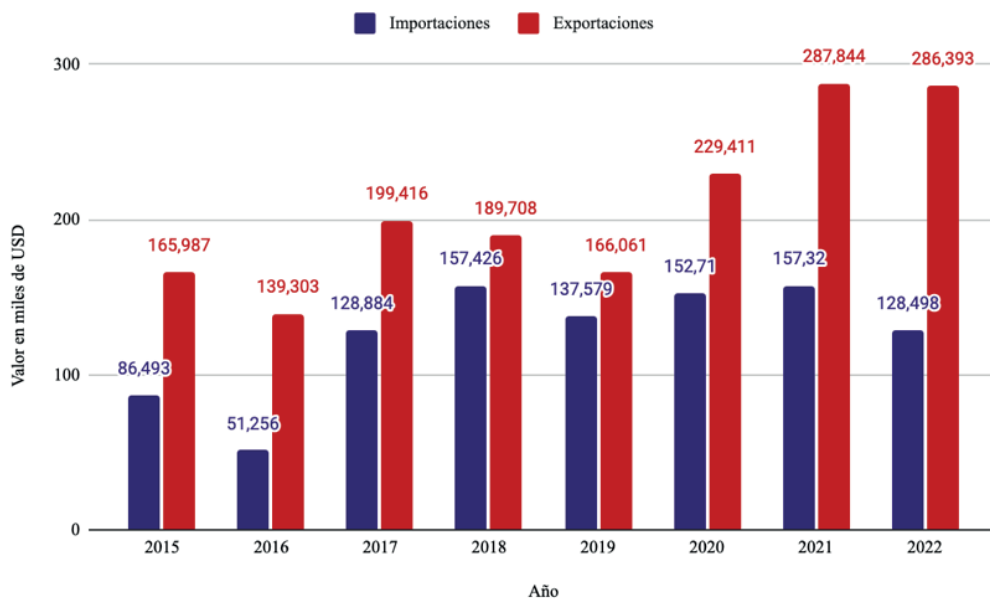
Trade Balance between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, 2015 -2022.



Source: Trade Map, 2023c.

Figure 4

Comparison of Ecuadorian exports and imports to the United Kingdom.



Source: Trade Map, 2023c.

The graphs show the evolution of Ecuador's trade balance with the United Kingdom. It can be seen that Ecuador has had a favorable balance in all the years analyzed. It is important to note that, following the entry into force of trade agreements with the EU in 2017 and with the United Kingdom in 2021, there have been significant and opposing impacts. In 2017, due to increased imports, the trade balance decreased by 20% compared to 2016. In contrast, between 2020 and 2021, the trade balance experienced a 70% increase, mainly due to exports exceeding imports by a significant margin. This result demonstrates the success of Ecuador's trade objectives with the agreements. In addition, Iván Ontaneda, former Minister of Production, Foreign Trade, Investment, and Fisheries of Ecuador, attributed the record non-oil exports in 2020 to international trade policy and measures to strengthen investment and foreign trade, especially with countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, and Chile (El Comercio, 2021). During the period analyzed, the value of Ecuadorian exports has consistently exceeded that of imports from the United Kingdom. The difference varies between 21% and 123%, with the smallest difference in 2019 and the largest in 2022.

Although these analyses focus mainly on trade aspects, their positive impact on Ecuador's sustainable development is evident, particularly regarding SDG 10, aimed at "Reducing Inequalities." The 2030 Agenda, in section 10. a, establishes the importance of developed countries providing support to developing countries through special and differentiated treatment that facilitates their access to international markets. In the case of the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom, this approach enables Ecuador to enjoy greater trade facilities, which not only strengthens its participation in the global market but also contributes to reducing the economic inequality gap between an economic power and a developing country, thereby advancing toward sustainable development goals (CEPAL, 2018).

3.1.2 Social issues and international cooperation

Articles 268, 279, 280, 281, 282, 283, 284, and 285 address certain aspects related to monitoring, supervision, dialogue, and regulation of compliance with and implementation of the section on

sustainable development, based on the trade agreement and its operation in both countries. It is therefore important to establish a Subcommittee on Trade and Sustainable Development, with powers to consult and deal with matters concerning one or all of the members of the agreement, and to monitor the progress and implementation of this international treaty, using dialogue, cooperation, appropriate recommendations for each period, and the search for solutions that are beneficial to all. It is a body that promotes transparency and joint participation in decision-making and formalization. Having understood the scope of these articles, it is worthwhile to compare them with SDG 17, which focuses on partnerships to achieve the goals and strengthen implementation mechanisms. This SDG encompasses a wide range of sectors and therefore aligns perfectly with the articles in question, as they share content about partnerships among governments, civil society, and the private sector to establish foundations for sustainable development cooperation.

The implementation of a subcommittee, as mentioned above, is concrete evidence of compliance with SDG 17, particularly in section 17.14, which promotes the strengthening of policy coherence for sustainable development (ECLAC, 2018). This body has already begun to operate, and as a sign of their commitment, the Andean countries and the United Kingdom held a meeting on April 7-8, 2022, where they exchanged information and jointly addressed priority issues, such as environmental and labor protection (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022). This demonstrates that effective mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation are being generated, in line with the principles of the 2030 Agenda.

3.1.3 Labor issues

Starting with the topic of labor and addressing Articles 269 and 276, which refer to recognizing international instruments on decent work, the commitment of the parties to the effective application of the standards contained in the International Labor Organization (hereinafter ILO), and the exchange of information on the situation of each party, it is possible to outline the direct relationship between these articles and SDG 5 and SDG 8.

SDG 5 focuses on gender equality, which also applies to labor issues. In short, it is about empowering women to be protagonists at all levels of society, from the workplace to high-level political positions. Thus, at the meeting of the Subcommittee on Sustainable Development and Trade between the UK and the Andean countries, Ecuador reiterated its commitment to the ILO conventions and has also promoted the inclusion of women in the labor market (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022). SDG 8 on decent work and economic growth is relevant as it covers most of the aspects mentioned in Article 269 and complements it. To illustrate this case, the 2030 Agenda details the targets and indicators covered by each Sustainable Development Goal, and SDG 8, in section 8.3, establishes that in order to support productive activity, generate decent jobs, promote entrepreneurship, and encourage formal processes, it is necessary to promote policies aimed at labor development. And in relation to the Subcommittee mentioned above, it also mentions the implementation of employment policy, which has achieved, for example, the eradication of child labor and a 6.25% increase in the base salary, starting in 2021 (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022).

3.1.4 Environmental issues

Articles 270, 272, 273, 274, and 275 of the agreement focus on multilateral environmental agreements and standards. These articles highlight the importance of adhering to international standards and instruments while respecting the local autonomy of each government. Given the current context of environmental problems, cooperation in trade is crucial to addressing issues such as environmental impact, climate change, and the implementation of international agreements. Agreements such as the Montreal Protocol, the Basel Convention, and the Kyoto Protocol are mentioned, which are relevant to environmental protection and international cooperation.

SDG 7: This SDG, which deals with affordable and clean energy, is related to article 270, which emphasizes minimizing pollution in energy production. The Ministry of Energy and Mines (2021) reports that the UK ambassador and

Ecuador's Minister of Energy discussed the strengthening of the energy sector in Ecuador, including the incorporation of renewable energies in the Galapagos Islands.

SDG 9: In relation to industry, innovation, and infrastructure, Article 272 reflects the importance of sustainability in trade and investment. The agreement signed between Ecuador and the United Kingdom for cooperation in infrastructure exemplifies this commitment, facilitating the identification of partners in public and private investment (Secretariat of Public-Private Investment, 2023).

SDG 13: This SDG focuses on climate action. Article 275 addresses the implementation of the Kyoto Protocol in state laws and policies to mitigate climate change. The 2030 Agenda, in point 13.b, highlights the promotion of practices for climate change adaptation and mitigation in less developed countries. The Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition reports on a workshop to exchange experiences on decarbonization, which involved the UK Climate Change Committee and the UK ambassador, focusing on strategies for green jobs and energy security (Ministry of Environment, Water, and Ecological Transition, 2023).

SDG 14: The Sustainable Development Goal focusing on life below water is important because of the crucial role that the oceans play in human life and commerce. Ecuador and the United Kingdom have collaborated to create the "Hermandad" marine reserve in the Galápagos Islands, allocating USD 20 million to research and conserve the Ecuadorian Amazon. This investment mechanism supports local communities in environmental conservation (El Comercio, 2022).

SDG 15: The trade agreement does not directly address combating deforestation or desertification related to life on land, although it promotes biodiversity. Determining which products are exportable and which are not may limit the trade of natural species. In this context, the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) is a relevant framework.

3.1.5 Social and environmental issues

Article 278 is closely related to the exchange of scientific information that the Parties may provide to each other, and in this sense, training in commercial, environmental, labor, and other matters is relevant. This topic, in terms of sustainable development, aligns with SDG 9 on “Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure,” specifically point 9.a, which highlights the need for financial, technological, and technical support for the least developed countries by global powers. In this regard, the United Kingdom, as a pioneer in sustainable development practices, has been able to support Ecuador in several related areas. A clear example is the memorandum of understanding signed between Ecuador’s National Agency for Regulation, Control, and Sanitary Surveillance (ARCSA) and British Ambassador Chris Campbell, aimed at providing technical assistance to ARCSA, carrying out specific projects with field experts, offering recommendations, providing funding and/or hiring consultancy services, and undertaking other actions that promote the strengthening of Ecuador’s sanitary institution in line with its legal duties and responsibilities (ARCSA, 2021).

4.

Discussion

The chapter on ‘Trade and Sustainable Development’ has been examined in relation to the SDGs through an analysis of secondary data using an exploratory and descriptive approach. Each article in this chapter is aligned with several of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals. However, when narrowing down the SDGs specifically appropriate for each analysis, a recurring emphasis on SDG 17, which relates to partnerships and cooperation, stands out. This repetition reflects the soft law nature of

the chapter, as it offers an important approach to trade and sustainable development but lacks the clarity, conciseness, and enforceability necessary to significantly influence the trade flow generated by the agreement.

The research confirms that the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom contributes to Ecuador’s sustainable development across social, environmental, and economic dimensions, improving the country’s labor, social, commercial, and economic conditions. This supports the notion that international trade agreements are key tools for promoting and achieving sustainable development. Despite these advances, certain limitations have also been identified. The chapter on “Trade and Sustainable Development” is written under a logic of recommendations and suggestions, reflected in the use of terms such as “recognition.” This indicates that, although the agreement can have a positive influence in certain contexts, it does not guarantee the adoption of the proposed measures. This soft law characteristic limits the agreement’s reach, which would be more effective if its articles were binding and enforceable. Furthermore, the lack of information and research on the sustainable impacts of the agreement makes it difficult to quantify and qualify its effects. It is necessary for the involved parties to increase their commitment to analyzing the impacts of the treaty and to provide detailed reports on progress in sustainable development.

Various authors offer valuable perspectives on trade agreements and sustainable development. Martínez (2020) emphasizes the need to strengthen sections of the agreement to prevent violations, highlighting the absence of dispute resolution clauses. This observation is relevant, as the analysis shows that the enforceability of the articles in this treaty is virtually nonexistent. Raess (2018) points out that labor clauses can strengthen trade and benefit developing countries, suggesting that greater coordination between trade actors and the use of robust labor enforcement mechanisms, such as those present in some EU treaties, can improve outcomes. Although Raess’s study focuses on the EU, his observations are applicable to the agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom.

Manero (2020) highlights the relevance of chapters that promote sustainable development, such as the creation of a Trade and Sustainable Development Committee. Despite the lack of coercive elements, these chapters aim to monitor compliance with sustainable development commitments. However, it is necessary to assess their effectiveness in more detail and to promote accountability. This study agrees with Manero that the Subcommittee serves as a dialogue platform and suggests the need to enhance its effectiveness.

Finally, de Lucio (2019) observes that the direct economic impact of trade agreements may be smaller in developed countries, which seek to exert geostrategic influence over their less developed partners. Although world powers prioritize geopolitical dominance, this study concludes that, after Brexit, the United Kingdom is driven by the need to maintain strong trade relations with its partners. Trade facilitation and sustainable development are now key concerns in its foreign policy, reflecting a balanced approach beyond geopolitical dominance.

5.

Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the impact of the trade agreement on Ecuador's sustainable development, based on the "Trade and Sustainable Development" chapter and trade data, shows a substantial trade benefit for Ecuador. In 2021, the country achieved a positive trade balance and a 70% increase in export value, demonstrating compliance with SDG 10 in terms of reducing inequalities. In the sphere of social and international cooperation, the creation of a Subcommittee on Trade and Sustainable Development has facilitated discussions on labor and environmental issues in joint meetings among Ecuador, Peru, and the United Kingdom. Regarding labor rights, progress has been made in the

protection of workers, especially women, in line with ILO conventions. In the environmental sphere, investments have been made in the protection of the Galápagos Islands and the Amazon, as well as in decarbonization projects and sustainable infrastructure. Additionally, scientific exchange and cooperation on technological and regulatory matters strengthen the bilateral relationship and benefit Ecuador's sustainable development.

This trade agreement, as a continuation of the pre-Brexit relationship, offers stability and continuity in the commercial ties between the two countries. Although certain limitations are identified, such as the lack of detailed information on the specific impact on sustainable development and the absence of coercive mechanisms, the agreement establishes important foundations for enhanced cooperation and a shared approach to sustainable development. It is recommended that the academic community continue to research and expand the study framework on trade and sustainable development, in order to obtain more precise data and establish a more robust analysis. In summary, the trade agreement between Ecuador and the United Kingdom represents a significant contribution to sustainable development in commercial, labor, and environmental areas. Despite the identified limitations—such as the lack of clear evidence regarding SDG compliance and the absence of enforcement mechanisms—the agreement lays the groundwork for greater cooperation and a joint approach to sustainable development in both countries.

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