



Agri-food trade and non-tariff measures

Fabio Gaetano Santeramo

To cite this article: Fabio Gaetano Santeramo (2019) Agri-food trade and non-tariff measures, *Agrekon*, 58:4, 387-388, DOI: [10.1080/03031853.2019.1679478](https://doi.org/10.1080/03031853.2019.1679478)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03031853.2019.1679478>



Published online: 18 Nov 2019.



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EDITORIAL



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The volume of non-tariff measures (NTMs) impacting on agricultural trade has increased considerably during the last decades. In particular, a large volume of NTMs has been established (and has potential trade effects) between North-South countries and even between countries in the Global South. Yet, the empirical literature provides contrasting and heterogeneous evidence on the effects of NTMs on trade: some studies support the ‘standards as catalysts’ view, while others favour the ‘standards as barriers’ explanation. A recent review by Santeramo and Lamonaca (2019a) underlines the large heterogeneity in estimates, and concludes that the effects of NTMs vary across types of NTM, proxies used for NTMs, levels of detail of studies, and that the estimated effects may differ due to different methodological approaches and publication processes.

This special issue is dedicated to topics related to the relationships between agri-food trade and NTMs, with particular emphasis on how NTMs influence trade between African countries, for which the empirical literature is very limited (cf. Gebrehiwet et al., 2007; Scheepers et al., 2007; Shepherd and Wilson, 2013, among others). The issue contains several papers (authored by scholars from well-established institutions) that analyse, by means of very diverse approaches, the impacts of NTMs on trade of African countries. *In lieu* of the above-mentioned heterogeneity of results, potentially driven by heterogeneity in methodologies, the variety of approaches (e.g. meta-analysis, time series models, CGE models) enable readers to appreciate the impacts of NTMs from different perspectives.

The first paper, by Santeramo and Lamonaca, opens the issue by reviewing, using a meta-analysis approach, the effects of NTMs on African agri-food trade. The broad view provided by the article allows us to conclude that for African countries the vast majority of NTMs are trade-impeding, although a marked heterogeneity is due to different methodological approaches, types of NTMs and analysed commodities. The results contrast with the broader picture described in earlier review studies and justify further specific analyses.

Two papers are built on computable general equilibrium (CGE) models. The paper by Schuenemann and Kerr focuses on the effects of biofuel production, exports to the EU, and NTMs. The authors show that biofuel production stimulates both economic growth and rural development. Following a similar approach, Muchopa et al. evaluate the impact of tariff rate quota on trade and welfare. They found that the increase in exports (and in welfare) is greater with the removal of NTMs than with tariff removal.

A very different approach is adopted by Liu et al., who rely on a Vector Autoregressive Model to investigate the impacts on NTMs on trade. According to their findings, they conclude that NMTs have contributed to a significant reduction in agri-food trade volume in Africa.

A different perspective animates Kerr in exploring the potential effects, for genomic-based crops that are cultivated in Africa and exported to the EU, of a relatively open regulatory regime that may replace the set of NTMs currently in place. Despite the fact that the analysis is built of different assumptions and following a different methodology, the conclusions are unaltered: the NTMs are detrimental for trade of African countries.

Last but not least, Bennett and Rich present an interviews-based case study for Namibia, Botswana and Norway to investigate whether market access to high-value markets for livestock products has developmental benefits. They conclude that market access to high-value markets tends to increase investments in infrastructure and capacity to meet international quality standards.

To sum up, the papers in this special issue illustrate different features of the NTMs, analyse different aspects and adopt diverse methodologies but in all cases allow us to conclude that standards are barriers. Put differently, in line with recent reviews (Santeramo and Lamonaca, 2019b), the non-tariff measures on trade seem to be detrimental for African countries, a premise from which it seems natural to conclude that trade liberalization should be targeted.

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Fabio Gaetano Santeramo
University of Foggia, Italy

 fabio.santeramo@unifg.it