

End of the Doha Round – A Wasted Opportunity

In September 2001, in Doha, Qatar, the world embarked on an ambitious set of negotiations to reform the rules of trade. Rich countries promised to help developing countries reap more of the benefits of global trade. They declared the “Doha Round” of negotiations to be a “development round”, with the goal of correcting a global trading system that was grossly biased in favour of the rich. The idea was that, with more equitable rules in place, trade could play a huge part in the development of poor countries and could help millions of people to prosper.

Nearly five years on, the negotiations have been suspended. Stubborn self-interest by rich countries – in particular, the United States (US) and those in the European Union (EU) – has led to this failure to deliver new rules and trade-driven development. The rich potential of the Doha Round is indefinitely delayed because rich countries didn't get what they wanted.

For trade to work for global development, rich countries needed to cut heavily into their most harmful agricultural subsidies. They didn't. They needed to give better access to their markets to developing countries. They didn't. And while offering nothing, rich countries were unfairly demanding that developing countries open up their markets in a way that could be very damaging to development.

The losers in this game of rigged rules and double standards are the millions of poor farmers, small-scale producers, and workers in developing countries whose permanent route out of poverty is dependant on a trading system that's fair to them – or even tipped in their favour.

Despite considerable pressure, developing countries have shown great strength and unity in refusing to sign up to a mediocre deal or a bad deal which would exacerbate not help poverty. This outcome is a huge disappointment and a betrayal of the promise of the Doha Round. Developing countries are prepared to keep negotiating to get what they were promised. This may take a while. But it is still better to talk another day than be bullied today into a bad deal, or be forced to accept a collapse in the talks.

Oxfam's *Make Trade Fair* campaign – and its successes, 2001 - 2005

Oxfam launched its *Make Trade Fair* campaign in 2001. One of *Make Trade Fair's* aims was to create a massive global petition, “The Big Noise”. So far, twenty million people have signed up to demand that global trade rules be made to work for the poor. The Big Noise is owned and shared by individuals and civil society organisations across the globe. This has been the key to its success.

Many celebrities have joined the campaign, with Chris Martin from Coldplay leading the way. Colin Firth, Thom Yorke, Angelique Kido and many more agreed to have agricultural products poured on their heads, and the campaign has used these popular images to get across the point that dumping is ruinous to poor farmers. At

the same time, tens of thousands of activists and supporters have taken action, publicised the campaign and helped to build the movement.

Make Trade Fair has repeatedly highlighted the unfairness of the current trading arrangements between rich and poor countries and has never stopped challenging rich countries' rigged rules and double standards. Through well-reasoned and evidence-based argument, intense lobbying, strong support from the media and the ability to demonstrate widespread public concern, *Make Trade Fair* has contributed to significant progress.

Our main successes to date include the following:

Intellectual property

In 2001, all members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) acknowledged, for the first time, that WTO rules on patents were preventing people in developing countries from getting the medicines they need. At the same time, they agreed that public health should be prioritized over patents, and they promised to ensure that WTO rules would not hurt public health. Pressure from Oxfam, other NGOs, and governments of developing countries to keep this promise led, in 2003, to an agreement to amend WTO patent rules. The amendment will allow the poorest countries – those which can't produce cheap copies of medicines ("generics") and which are too poor to import costly patented drugs – to obtain affordable life-saving medicines. The recognition by all WTO members that public health should override patent rights has given developing countries the space to produce and to buy generics without fear of reprisals (from the USA or multi-national pharmaceutical companies).

Investment rules

During this current round of talks, the EU wanted the WTO to create rules that would reduce the power of governments to regulate business. The proposed set of rules would have restricted the ability of developing countries to harness investment for development needs. Oxfam and other NGOs supported the developing countries' successful fight against the imposition of such rules, and the EU ultimately withdrew its proposals.

Agricultural dumping

Many of the subsidies paid by rich countries to their agricultural producers are harmful because they encourage overproduction. World prices are depressed by the dumping of this surplus on international markets, and the lower prices hit farmers in developing countries particularly hard. *Make Trade Fair* has been a persistent advocate for an immediate end to dumping and has contributed significantly to changing the terms of this debate. *Make Trade Fair* has helped to expose how weak the EU/US arguments in defense of trade-distorting subsidies really are, and has contributed to a softening of their position on the issue. For instance, public pressure contributed to the eventual agreement by the EU to eliminate export subsidies by 2013 and forced the US to reconsider its own position on subsidies. However, due to

the suspension of the talks, it remains unclear how and when these commitments will be fulfilled.

Make Trade Fair's work and focus on highlighting the adverse impact of unfair trade rules on the livelihoods of millions of farmers in developing countries has contributed to changing the terms of the debate and ensured that the issues of food security and poverty reduction cannot be ignored in trade negotiations.

Assertiveness of developing countries

Make Trade Fair helped strengthen the resolve of developing countries at the WTO, as part of a broad and powerful alliance. By 2005, the collective voice of so many developing countries changed the power balance at the WTO – and led to their refusal to agree to a trade deal that they deemed unjust and not in the interests of their people. Oxfam's briefing and media notes have been a proven asset for developing countries in assessing rich countries' proposals in the negotiations and in resisting unreasonable pressure from them.

Civil society

In some developing countries, governments had a negative view of NGOs. *Make Trade Fair* has helped bridge this gap, and in many places governments are now putting much more positive effort into linking up with their own civil societies. Our work with small-scale cotton farmers has helped them to realise the importance of advocacy, since they've seen that they *can* talk to their governments about issues that are affecting them. Where governments now recognise the value of the work of civil society, they are developing stronger reciprocal relationships.

Still much more to do...

Our campaigning did not result in the pro-development breakthrough in the Doha Round that we had hoped for. Nonetheless, we cannot let the progress that has been made during the last five years disappear and be forgotten.

The WTO negotiations will continue in some form, sooner or later. Decisions taken at the WTO will affect the lives of millions of poor people – for better or for worse. *Make Trade Fair* must continue to challenge the negotiators at the table: every decision made by them must work for poor people, not just for the rich and powerful.

Trade negotiations between rich and poor countries are now shifting from global trade talks, at the WTO, to regional and country-to-country trade agreements. Poor countries have so far stood firm - and most importantly, together - at the WTO. They need continuing support in order to withstand pressure when negotiating trade deals on their own, or in much smaller groups, with the US and EU.

Already, in the Americas, the US is trying to force through deals that favour its own manufacturing and agricultural sectors at the expense of poor people in developing countries. At the same time, the EU is negotiating free trade deals with the poorest countries in the world, pushing them to accept terms favourable to the EU. *Make Trade Fair* will need your support to ensure that any proposed regional or country-to-

country trade agreements which are not in the interest of poor people are stopped – and replaced by deals that instead demonstrate a genuine commitment by rich countries to help reduce poverty.

While fighting for fair regional and country-to-country trade deals, we will also be challenging rich countries and pharmaceutical companies to change the rules that cause life-saving medicines to be priced out of the reach of – or made inaccessible to – those who need them so desperately; people who are living with HIV/AIDS or who are suffering from chronic ill-health.

There is so much more still to do. Please take action now – and commit to campaign with us in the future. By working together, our global *Big Noise* will continue to get louder and louder.

We won't stop until we have persuaded rich countries to make trade fair.