

## Agreement on Agriculture and Food Sovereignty:

# Perspectives from Mesoamerica and Asia

By Arze Glipo, Laura Carlsen, Azra Talat Sayeed, Jayson Cainglet & Rita Schwentesius | September 2003

Steeped in the rhetoric of free trade that promised expanded agricultural trade and growth for developing countries, the Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) took effect in 1995 under the World Trade Organization. Since then, AoA measures to liberalize trade in agriculture have had a tremendous negative impact on agriculture and the livelihoods of poor peasants in the South.

In many developing countries, agriculture is the major source of rural livelihoods and provides employment for over half of the labor force. Despite a declining share of GDP, agriculture remains a major pillar of these economies. In the past decades, many such countries have struggled to raise their agricultural production to meet the increasing food needs of their populations.

But the neoliberal economic reforms imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank on developing countries, particularly since the Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs) of the 80s, have reoriented domestic agriculture away from food production and increasingly integrated it into the world market. The WTO-AoA locked in these policies, reinforced the export-oriented model of third world agriculture, and forced open domestic markets to dumped imports.

The devastating impact of the AoA on small-scale farming, food security, and rural employment calls for urgent and serious attention in the agriculture negotiations at the upcoming WTO Fifth Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, Mexico.

### The Stakes at Cancun

Agriculture negotiations mandated under Article 20 of the AoA and begun in 2000 aim to continue the “reforms” in global agriculture trade. The negotiations, currently in their third stage, are supposed to define the modalities for drawing up new rules in global trade in agriculture. These modalities should have been finalized by March and new rules and further commitments by members are supposed to be signed in September 2003 at Cancun. With barely a month left to reach agreement on these modalities, the outcome of the negotiations looks extremely bleak, particularly for developing countries that have pinned their hopes on developing a process to address the existing inequities and imbalances in the agreement.

The revised Harbinson text on the modalities for a new agreement does not depart much from the AoA's nearly exclusive focus on market access, even as it continues to provide protection to trade-distorting subsidies and agricultural dumping practices of developed countries. It clearly fails to address the fundamental imbalances of the AoA. While it provides conditions for Special and Differential Treatment (SDT) among developing countries, these remain inconsequential, as the roots of their marginalization in the global market are not attacked. In fact, dumping and massive distortion of the markets will be perpetuated under the Harbinson modalities.

The Harbinson text, like the AoA, will have the same devastating impact on developing countries, because it fails to take into account existing asymmetries and does little to curb dumping and export subsidies in developed countries.

The stakes at Cancun are high. More than 800 million people in developing countries continue to suffer from hunger and starvation. Millions of small-scale farmers are being displaced by imports. Massive poverty and high unemployment rates confront developing countries that have pinned their economic recovery hopes on increased trade and investments. Agriculture, the traditional source of subsistence and livelihood for the majority of people in developing countries, is being battered by an unjust international trading environment that recognizes only profits for transnational corporations. Oftentimes, it is further stunted by national government wholesale support and even active defense of the neoliberal policies of IMF-WB and the WTO. These considerations make the agriculture negotiations at Cancun its most crucial and difficult development concern.

### Anticipated Changes to the AoA

With barely a month left before Cancun, the agriculture negotiations remain at a standstill. The Harbinson's



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memo that came out in early July pointed to many unresolved issues that still hound the negotiations, three years after they began. Harbinson's proposed modalities remain unacceptable to the major players, primarily the EU and Japan. Developing countries view it as a betrayal of the Doha mandate to incorporate specific, effective, and operational SDT provisions for developing countries so that their development concerns are substantially taken into account in the negotiations.

Although highly controversial, the Harbinson text on modalities remains fundamentally attuned to the "fair competition" paradigm of the U.S. and the developed countries, which seeks expanded market access and lower trade barriers for their agricultural exports even as it remains religiously loyal to the rich country agenda of protecting their trade-distorting subsidies. While the text seeks the elimination of export subsidies, it offers a gradual phasing-out period that could provide developed countries ample time to shift their subsidies elsewhere. It is likewise surprisingly silent on domestic support, particularly on Green Box subsidies, where highly trade-distorting support to agriculture in the U.S. and EU has been effectively hidden. It is also silent on another major issue: the use of food aid and export credits as instruments to provide subsidies for U.S. agriculture exports. Its proposal for a harmonized formula for tariff reduction, which seeks deeper tariff cuts for higher tariffs, reflects the aggressive U.S. trade liberalization agenda. This is supported primarily by the Cairns group of agricultural exporting countries.

While contentious issues between and among the major players dominate and continue to bog down the agriculture negotiations, these are in fact secondary. Despite them, developed countries collectively are still determined to further open up and expand markets in developing countries to counter the persistent crisis of overproduction in their own countries. The real conflict lies between developed, surplus-producing nations and the developing countries. Nonetheless, in many cases developing country interests have been split by their governments' narrow pursuit of trade interests while ignoring the non-export sector. Their position not only weakens them vis-à-vis the powerful developed countries, but also runs the long-term risk of disarticulating the production of basic foods.

The lack of progress in the negotiations so far, in terms of substantially addressing the development concerns of poorer countries, may clearly have dire consequences for food and livelihood security among the rural poor. Developed countries, led by the U.S. and EU, while extolling fair com-

petition and calling for the elimination of trade distortions, continue to resist developing country proposals for reforms and rebalancing mechanisms in the new AoA.

Earlier proposals by developing countries to address the existing imbalances in the agreement have been effectively sidelined in the negotiations. Even those that have been accepted have been severely watered down. For example, the proposal by the Philippines and Argentina on countervailing mechanisms that would allow developing countries to impose higher tariffs on subsidized imports to an amount equivalent to the trade-distorting subsidies provided by the North was completely disregarded in the Harbinson text. Nor was the proposal by a group of developing countries from Latin America and South Asia for a new Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) that would allow poor countries to take temporary measures in the event of import surges or drastic decline in world prices considered.

Instead, what the Harbinson text has produced are very much weaker proposals on Special and Differential Treatment in the form of Special Products (SP) that allow developing countries a short list of Special or Strategic Products, which they can slap with a lower tariff reduction. But this ignores the fact that many developing countries already have very low tariff rates that have been unable to protect their small farmers from import surges and dumping. The Harbinson proposed SSM is available only for the short list of strategic products declared by member developing countries. But such access to the SSM is also conditional upon a review of the current SSG and also allows the possibility of extending the use of this mechanism by developed countries.

Developing countries, who earlier in the negotiations showed stronger determination to address the imbalances hounding the AoA, have now retreated to a more pragmatic position. Many are now hinging their positions on Harbinson's proposal for SP and SSM, but with the added provision that SP should be self-declared and self-determined and that both mechanisms should be the exclusive recourse of developing countries. The U.S. actively opposes both these demands.

The Philippines, Indonesia, and 14 other developing countries have recently formed the Alliance for SP and SSM amidst criticisms from both developed countries, led by Australia, and developing countries in the Cairns group that these mechanisms are grossly protectionist and regressive.

Given the rabidly pro-trade liberalization stance of the U.S. and developed countries, and their strong resistance to even limited AoA reforms, the prospect of achieving a

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well-meaning and effective SDT for developing countries is growing dimmer. Many developing country negotiators have already expressed their disgust and frustration over how the negotiations are being steered toward meeting the developed countries' interests while remaining blind to the development needs of poorer countries.

Thus, proposals for more substantial reforms within the WTO such as the Development Box and Food Security mechanism, which would allow developing countries to exempt their strategic and food security crops from further tariff reduction, may find it doubly hard to be translated into developing country positions due to the undemocratic nature and the under-representation of poor countries in the WTO. Even if they do get adopted, this would only tend to create exemptions and conditions within the general logic of market access without challenging the fundamental priority of corporate globalization. In the case of developing nations, the driving logic should therefore be development and human welfare rather than market access. This has been amply demonstrated in the Mexican case where trade increased while basic social indices dropped.

Given all these considerations, the possibility of failing to reach an agreement on the modalities at Cancun looms large. A missed deadline will seriously set back the trade "reform" agenda that is being pushed by the U.S. and the EU. Hence, we see vigorous efforts from the WTO and the developed countries to move the negotiations forward—bilateral agreements, the mini-ministerial in Montreal, etc.—in the run up to Cancun. Developing countries must expect to receive increased pressure from Washington. As in past negotiations, we may see hard-hitting negotiators withdrawn suddenly from their Geneva offices, and development aid, military assistance, and other forms of bribery, including bullying tactics that only an opaque and undemocratic institution like the WTO can resort to, employed as means to soften the position of developing countries. And if no substantial agreement can be reached on the agriculture modalities before and at Cancun, the meeting can still produce a political declaration in favor of the U.S. and developed countries' position that will move the negotiations forward.

The challenge at Cancun is therefore to intensify pressure at the national government level so that they can steadfastly defend the rights of their peoples to food security and food sovereignty. Developing countries need to close and strengthen their ranks to assert their national interests in favor of their poor farmers and agricultural workers. There is also an urgent need for developing countries to block the new issues of government procurement,

investments, and competition, as these will severely limit their control and management of their economies.

Development is achieved not by begging for crumbs from the giants in global trade, but by instituting one's own development policies and programs free from the dictates of an international trading regime that caters only to the desire for profit of transnational corporations. Genuine rural development that meets not only the basic needs of small farmers and women but enables them to exercise their rights and freedoms to achieve their full potential as human beings while also protecting the resource base for sustainable production, can only come from truly democratic governments exercising their political will to protect their agriculture and economies from the onslaught of trade liberalization. Hence the challenge is not only to rectify a grossly unjust trading regime ruled by the WTO but to transform political and economic structures at the national level that continue to prop up elite, undemocratic, and anti-poor governments.

The scenario of a complete breakdown of the WTO process, as in Seattle, is one tactical rallying cry among NGOs and social movements. This would have the desired effect of both prohibiting further one-sided agricultural trade liberalization and blocking the dangerous expansion of WTO powers into other areas that also have a profound impact on agriculture and food, such as intellectual property and services. It would also force a more fundamental debate on the impact and direction of globalization. On the other hand, we must realize that a breakdown could leave a regulatory gap that would require the proposal of serious alternatives.

While a lack of consensus at the coming meeting will temporarily derail the goal of the WTO for more expansive powers, such an outcome would raise other possibilities that civil society groups need to factor in. For example, in the context of growing U.S. unilateralism and military hegemony, the U.S. may not actually need multilateral regulation to enforce its trade agenda. Being the country with the highest stake in free trade, U.S. policy and strategy has been increasingly to negotiate bilateral trade agreements. In the event of WTO failure to enforce its police powers, the U.S. will have other cards to play. This demonstrates the perils of leaving developing nations to negotiate individually.

It also underscores the need for a multilateral system for international trade that rejects the narrow framework of the WTO's free trade paradigm. The new trade regulations should necessarily reflect the desire of nations, particularly the poorer nations, to economic self-determination and sustainable and mutually beneficial trade.

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## Issues and Demands

The impact not only of the AoA but also of the market liberalization agenda of the Northern states and Bretton Woods institutions have wreaked havoc on third world agriculture. In response, social movements and farmer organizations in Asia and Mesoamerica have put forward concrete demands and proposals to confront this global crisis.

### 1. Mesoamerica

For most Mexican farmers, NAFTA has been the most visible manifestation of trade liberalization and the agreement that has most directly affected them. As Mexico prepares to host the WTO Ministerial Meeting in Cancun, many are linking the WTO process with the regional trade agreement. Recognizing that both share the ruling principles of market access, the globalization of trade and production of food, and double standards for developed and developing countries, these groups are becoming more vocal in their opposition to the WTO Agreement on Agriculture negotiations.

Mexican small farmer organizations and civil society groups have called for an immediate end to dumping, the elimination of export subsidies in all forms, and for governments to exercise the right to apply safeguard mechanisms or protective measures when deemed necessary. In February 2003, over 100,000 small farmers and supporters marched in the nation's capital to protest conditions in the countryside. For the first time in a major mobilization, trade issues figured among the major demands. The movement, called "The Countryside Can't Stand Anymore," demanded renegotiation of the agricultural terms of NAFTA and emergency government support programs.<sup>1</sup> Mexican members of Via Campesina have reiterated their position in favor of removing agriculture from the WTO altogether,<sup>2</sup> while organizations that form part of the movement traditionally allied with the former ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) advocated reforms to the WTO.<sup>3</sup>

Either way, the Mexican experience with NAFTA shows that if WTO protests are not coupled with resistance to iniquitous bilateral and regional trade agreements, the end result for developing country farmers is the same or worse. Therefore, the struggle to renegotiate NAFTA and defeat the proposed Free Trade Agreement of the Americas remains a top priority.

### 2. Asia

In Asia, a growing movement demands that the WTO withdraw from the domain of food and agriculture. For

these organizations, reforming the WTO, however meaningful it might be, would be insufficient since it is inherently flawed due to its trade liberalization mandate.

In the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh where rapid trade liberalization has practically demolished small-scale agriculture, popular support for agriculture to be removed from the WTO is emerging from the ranks of national farmer organizations, small fishermen's associations, indigenous communities, and rural women's movements. National peasant movements are strong in these countries and are leading the movement to dismantle the WTO and its oppressive trade agreements, particularly the AoA and the TRIPs agreements.

Social movements, networks, and organizations at the regional level generally support this call. This position, advanced by the Focus on the Global South, is situated within the strategic goal of halting and reversing trade liberalization by "unhinging the game plan" of free traders to further expand the powers of the WTO at Cancun.<sup>4</sup> The tactical plan is to prevent countries from reaching agreement during the Ministerial Meeting in any of the areas that are being negotiated or about to be negotiated, including agriculture, industrial tariffs, services, and the new issues.

Other groups, notably the Asia-Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty (APNFS), a regional network of national peasant organizations, social movements, development NGOs, and consumer groups, call for advancing the people's right to food sovereignty as a way of removing WTO from the domain of food and agriculture. The specific content of their call includes the following:

- Expose the WTO-AoA, its inherent flaws and inequalities, and the proposed modalities as "more of the same" AoA.
- Develop national policies on agriculture and trade within the alternative framework for food sovereignty. These policies should be able to protect small farmers' rights and livelihoods and strengthen their access to and control of their productive assets. Most immediately, to halt massive import surges and protect small producers from dumping, national governments need to install protective measures such as higher tariffs, imposition of import quotas, and other safeguard measures. Further, governments should seek the exemption of staple food crops and other crops strategic to food security and the livelihood security of small farmers from the AoA.
- Demand the immediate elimination of domestic support and export subsidies in developed countries that result in chronic dumping of agricultural commodities.

- Demand greater accountability and transparency in policy formulation whether at the multilateral or national policy levels.
- Demand increased support and subsidies in agriculture to secure food sovereignty, address hunger, and improve incomes of small farmers. There should be strengthened public sector investments in agriculture, particularly in the food crop sector. Policies on price stabilization, price support, food stockholding, food distribution, and public investments in agriculture need to be revived and strengthened as these measures are critical to achieving rural development, food security, and food sovereignty. Demand an immediate halt to the privatization of state food trading and distribution enterprises.
- Demand the immediate implementation of a genuine agrarian program [“land to the tiller”]. Farmers should have control over capital and productive assets. This should also include the development of ecologically based or sustainable agriculture systems to improve small farmers and artisan fishermen’s livelihoods.<sup>5</sup>

## The Food Sovereignty Paradigm

Farmers’ groups around the world have pioneered the term “food sovereignty,” among them the Pesticide Action Network (PAN), IBON, and Via Campesina. Like all groups calling for the dismantling of the WTO, they believe that small farmers and landless peasants can never compete within the corporate agriculture paradigm of the WTO and, indeed, to force them to do so would jeopardize basic social goods provided by small-scale agriculture, including rural employment, agricultural and biological diversity, and a secure food supply. Under the AoA, the double whammy of allowing subsidies for the Northern producers and traders (especially, transnational corporations), and then granting these very traders access to Southern markets, takes away any chance for small farmers and peasants to compete. Hence, these groups demand *the right to food sovereignty—the fundamental right of the tillers to retain control over all means of production including land, seed, water, and other natural resources*.

Food sovereignty encompasses the rights of small farmers, farm workers, and other dispossessed rural sectors to sustainable and secure livelihoods; to own and control land and other productive resources; and to have access to adequate, nutritious, and safe food at all times. Moreover, food sovereignty secures the sovereign rights of nations and peoples to define food, land, fishing, and agriculture policies that are ecologically, socially, economically, and

culturally appropriate to their unique circumstances, needs, and demands. In sum, food sovereignty is the primacy of people and community rights to food and food production, over trade concerns and business profits.

Food sovereignty also includes nations’ and farmers’ capacity to engage in cooperation with other nations and communities for mutually beneficial and sustainable agriculture, trade, and production. Food sovereignty therefore does not negate trade but promotes trade that genuinely meets the criteria of food security, livelihood security, sustainability, and rural development.

In many developing countries, the key to achieving food sovereignty is land reform. In Asia, the challenge of implementing a truly redistributive land reform program is enormous, as rural poverty and underdevelopment have been traced to centuries-old feudal bondage of tillers. In Mexico, where land reform measures left a mosaic of small private farms, collective farms, and indigenous communal lands—but relatively fewer landless peasants—food sovereignty means protecting against tendencies toward land concentration and privatization propelled by the collusion of NAFTA, WTO, and World Bank-IMF policies. For both regions, the food sovereignty concept challenges the TRIPs agreement and the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), both of which allow the privatization of resources like seeds and water, which are critical inputs in agriculture production.

In challenging the export-oriented industrial model of agriculture, the food sovereignty paradigm promotes sustainable farming methods as well as agro-ecological models of food production and community-based practices in natural resource conservation and management. The concept relies on the key role played by small-scale farmers, particularly women, in promoting sustainable methods of farming that make use of traditional knowledge and practices. The intensive use of chemicals in modern mechanized farming, which has resulted in increasing pest attacks as well as massive increases in input costs leading to a phenomenal debt crisis in rural economies in the South, has created a mistrust of the new knowledge systems.

It also requires a fundamental shift from the dominant free trade paradigm, and is basically different from the food security position being advocated by some NGOs, most notably in the North. Advocacy for food security has its roots in widespread opposition to SAPs and the export-oriented model of agriculture they imposed on developing countries in the 80s. With the enforcement of AoA in the mid-90s, this position focused on the devastating impact of WTO on small farmers’ livelihoods and food security. It there-

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fore advocated substantial reforms to the agriculture agreement to make it work for the poor.

A recent FAO definition for food security reads “Food security exists when all people at all times have physical, social, and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”<sup>6</sup> This definition has been considered contentious as it allows dumping of imported cheap foods as well as providing food through aid in Southern markets. It also ignores farmers’ rights to produce. This makes small producers vulnerable, as they are unable to compete with highly subsidized agricultural production controlled by the powerful transnational corporations of North America and Europe.

Moreover, this definition fails to address the insecurity of relying on the international market and foreign aid for basic foods. Many factors can jeopardize the flow of needed imports, including: 1) reliance on a single producing region and extremely limited varieties that leads to increased vulnerability to climatic changes, pests, and disease; 2) financial crisis creating a lack of foreign reserves to pay for imports and; 3) politically motivated embargoes or the potential for trade conditionality, especially now in the context of the U.S. antiterrorism campaign.

Partly in reaction to misuse of the food security concept by the WTO and international food institutions such as the FAO, many anti-WTO activists started to use a more precise term that would capture their advocacies and struggle against the WTO as well as the global structures of economic dominance and control. Thus, food sovereignty came popularly to mean not only the struggle for food security and food self-sufficiency, but more comprehensively the assertion of people’s rights to chart their own food and agriculture policies, to protect and regulate domestic production, and to have access to and control of their land and productive resources to achieve sustainable development objectives.

To the degree that food sovereignty incorporates fundamental questions of economic sovereignty, land reform, women’s rights, and small farmers’ rights, it has become a more comprehensive platform for advocacy among those seeking fundamental changes in the national and global order. To the extent that it advocates a new development paradigm that rejects the rigidity of free trade and the export-oriented industrial agriculture model of the North, many accept its relevance to third world conditions.

Within advocacy for food security, there are also groups using the “human rights” approach. The “right to food” is

located within international human rights law, which provides the legal framework under which the right to food could be enforced. Under this framework, states are liable if the rights of citizens are not met. The right to food approach has been used in various countries in the region including India. As the country suffered from drought in the past few years, various organizations have used Article 21 of the Indian Constitution that promises “right to life” to advocate the right to food. Organizations have demanded the use of surplus food stored by the Indian government in warehouses to relieve hunger among drought victims in Orissa. However, this position has been criticized as individualistic and ignoring community or family paradigms. In addition, it does not consider the fact that agriculture and food production are both a science and an art practiced by millions in the South. Hence along with the right to food must come the right to livelihood to produce one’s own food.<sup>7</sup>

## **Free Trade vs. National Development**

In addition to food sovereignty, an alternative framework must begin by replacing blind allegiance to the market with national development goals. At root, the development debate is not a debate between free trade and protectionism. It is a debate between the imposition of free trade rules and the need to pursue national development and well-being in the context of globalization. As free trade steers developing countries toward increasing inequity, and concentration and polarization of wealth, developing nations need to respond with policies that assure each citizen a basic standard of living. The Agreement on Agriculture, like NAFTA, binds national policymaking in a strait jacket just when developing countries must respond to new and dangerous challenges. At the same time, it exacerbates threats to food sovereignty, and eliminates important strategies of survival in the countryside that not only guarantee livelihoods but also support cultural, agricultural, and biological biodiversity.

Even optimal international trade rules will not solve problems of rural development due to the complexity of local and regional conditions and non-trade concerns. Only national integral development policies can turn back the dangerous tendencies. Domestic policy is a battle that must be fought on its own turf by the rural citizenry in the context of a responsive and democratic state. By tying the hands of national governments, the WTO will only exacerbate the crisis in the countryside and undermine democratic processes.

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## Sustainable Production

Sustainable agriculture requires low-cost inputs, and often entails lower productivity. According to Madeley, the purest form of low external-input agriculture is permaculture, which makes no use of inputs outside a farm's immediate locality. Permaculture is based on the "careful mix of trees and crops to obtain maximum yields, the use of mulches, the integration of livestock and crops, use of green manure to protect soil and build up soil fertility."<sup>8</sup> It has been observed that permaculture is practiced most often by small farmers who have little access to cash. Thus, small farmers are in the best position to make the best possible use of natural resources, combining innovative modern methods with traditional knowledge to increase their productivity while maintaining low levels of inputs. These techniques are now being used in many different parts of South Asia including Nepal, Bangladesh, and India.<sup>9</sup> In Bangladesh more than 65,000 families practice community-based organic farming known as Nayakrishi Andolon.<sup>10</sup> Due to the efforts of its small, indigenous farmers, Mexico is the world's leading producer of organic coffee.

Small-scale production systems also enhance gender equity and allow peasants and indigenous communities—who constitute the vast majority of the world's farmers despite being consistently portrayed as backward—more space to practice sustainable agriculture. This form of agriculture is the very basis for keeping ecosystems free from poisons. As soon as large-scale, mechanized, chemical-intensive farming becomes the order of the day, women are marginalized, being considered backward and illiterate, and patriarchal norms of making men the decisionmakers and practitioners of modern technology comes into force with a vengeance.

The food sovereignty concept is in essence a more scientific basis for increasing productivity as well as (re)creating a healthy environment, which under green revolution production techniques has been intensely violated. The farming practices of small producers have shown that they do not only run more productive units in the long term, but also that the marginalized sectors of societies are assured better access to resources by taking better care of those resources based on a higher regard for their environment.

## Coming Together

Although many differences in paradigms and tactics exist between farmers' groups campaigning against the

WTO—particularly between those who are advocating reforms within the present model (e.g. food security and development box proposals) and those who want a fundamentally different paradigm (WTO out of agriculture)—common ground has been developed around exposing and opposing the WTO, and pressuring national governments to push for progressive positions in the trade negotiations. On many occasions, these groups have collaborated on campaigns and lobbying work. Recently, these organizations have been brought closer through the organizing processes leading up to Cancun.

Besides broadening the opposition to WTO and reversing its aggressive trade liberalization agenda, cooperation between North and South NGOs to increase pressure on developing country governments to cease any further commitments to the AoA need to be strengthened. Significantly, the social movement's widespread critique and opposition to WTO-AoA rules at the national level has compelled governments to present well-meaning positions in the negotiations. Research and lobbying by international NGOs has also contributed to strengthening the capacities of developing country negotiators, and in encouraging positions that favor small farmers in the South. However, both these efforts should be strengthened to develop a system that provides greater protection to poor peasants.

Another important area for cooperation would be to bring pressure to bear on developed country governments. Northern NGOs can help to educate and encourage their progressive politicians to push for sustainable production and trade that will benefit small-scale farmers in the South, and to reverse policies that lead to massive dumping and trade barriers through such criteria as environmental standards and phytosanitary measures. A common advocacy would have to be developed that would reduce unsustainable production in the North that relies on massive external inputs and monocultures.

## Toward Sustainable & Just Trade

Trade is important and can contribute to development within the context of strengthening capacities of developing countries to meet the needs of their peoples—food, medicine, raw materials, industrial products, etc. However, trade rules must respect the sovereign rights of nations, protect the rights of the majority to livelihood, promote greater equality within and between nations, promote gender equality, enhance the natural resource base, and support and protect farmers' ownership and control of land and other means of production.

The United Nations Development Program recently listed four principles of trade that have been largely forgotten in current debates on market access: 1) Trade is a means to an end, not an end in itself; 2) Trade rules must allow for diverse national institutional standards; 3) Countries have the right to protect their institutions and development priorities; 4) Countries do not have the right to impose their institutional preferences on others.<sup>11</sup>

A report by the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) "Alternatives to Economic Globalization" that came out in 2002 affirms the need for just and sustainable trade. It asserts that people, communities, and nations should own the productive assets on which their livelihoods depend, be free from illegitimate foreign debts, and have the right and ability to manage the flow of goods and money across their borders that is essential to setting their own economic priorities and to maintaining high social and environmental standards consistent with community well-being. The vision of a just and sustainable system precludes rich countries from demanding access to markets and resources of weaker and less affluent countries and any corporation from having such a right.<sup>12</sup>

This system may be realized in a new international framework for multilateral regulation that recognizes the rights of peoples and countries to determine their own economic and development policies and priorities and their right to sustainable, just, and mutually beneficial trade between and among equals.

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## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Carlsen, Laura "The Mexican Farmers' Movements: Exposing the Myths of Free Trade," at: [www.americaspolicy.org](http://www.americaspolicy.org).
- <sup>2</sup> Declaration Via Campesina August 2003
- <sup>3</sup> Perez, Mathilde. "Productores rurales de América rechazan el ALCA, que privilegiará a EU." *La Jornada*, 24 August 2003.
- <sup>4</sup> Bello, Walden. *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*. Zed Books, London, 2002.
- <sup>5</sup> Asia-Pacific Network on Food Sovereignty. *Statement of Unity during the APNFS Regional Conference*. Bangkok, May 26-28, 2003.
- <sup>6</sup> Kunnemann, Rolf. "Food security: evading the human right to food?" *Fian Magazine*, January, 2002, p. 4.
- <sup>7</sup> Nevertheless it is argued by groups using the "right to food" approach that 1. the debate on "the right to food" has started to get more ground than here reflected and that social movements have already started to use the rights terminology ("farmers rights," "right to food sovereignty"). 2. The need to see "the right to food" for vulnerable or marginal groups as a collective right has been already agreed in the human rights setting. Nevertheless the "right to food" has also to be individualistic because even in family settings, many discriminations can be found (i.e. it are mostly women and girls who have no right to access to land and get the least portion of food in the family).
- <sup>8</sup> Madeley, John. *Food for all: the need for a new agriculture*. The University Press, Bangladesh, 2002, p. 43.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid*, p. 44.
- <sup>10</sup> Nair, Prabhakar. *Past roots future of foods*. Pesticide Action Network, 2003, p. 18.
- <sup>11</sup> UNDP, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Rockefeller Brothers Found, Rockefeller Foundation, Wallace Global Found. *Making Global Trade Work for People*. Earthscan Publications. London 2003.
- <sup>12</sup> International Forum on Globalization. *Alternatives to Economic Globalization*. edited by Arze Glipo.

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