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### INVESTING IN AGRICULTURE IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES The world says yes, the WTO says no

This article updates a report we printed in the Bulletin, November 2013, titled *Food security for developing countries is a right*.

Farmers, development activists and food security advocates alike are united in the need for resilient, agro-ecological local food systems to realise world-wide people's right to food. But there are still international obstacles to be overcome: Global rules governing agriculture (not just for trade but also for domestic consumption) set in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) are appallingly unfair and antiquated.

Fortunately, we now have the best chance in 20 years of changing the most damaging of the WTO rules: those that prohibit developing countries from investing in their own farmers.

#### **The problem: antiquated and unfair WTO rules**

The Agreement on Agriculture, which became a foundational part of the WTO, was finalised in 1994. It was agreed then that agricultural subsidies would be capped at their then-current levels, and would be gradually reduced. At that time, it was overwhelmingly rich countries that were subsidising agricultural production; and the rules and allowable exemptions were written by them to apply to their circumstances. (Developing countries, by and large, were either too poor, or were bound by International Monetary Fund or World Bank restrictions on agricultural subsidies.) These same rules twenty years later are not applicable to the circumstances of food insecurity in developing countries today and, indeed, are grossly unjust to them.

It was argued that countries would be better off producing cash crops like coffee or sugar

cane for export, and then buying food in the global market far cheaper than they could produce it at home. But things did not work out that way. Prices for cash crops in the global market fell as a result of a number of factors, including:

- many countries producing the same commodity leading to oversupply;
- aggressive competition dominated by the most powerful.

And food prices became volatile, at times soaring high, as speculators manipulated the global food markets, enriching themselves at the expense of poor producers and consumers.

Clearly, the rules in the WTO were, and still are, explicitly designed to increase trade in food rather than facilitate global food security. Over the years since 1994, there have been a number of global economic, financial, food and climate crises. There is now a growing acknowledgment that human rights, food security, financial stability and climate survival must be dealt with by the public sector with a focus on the public good, and not dictated by corporate craving for private profits. Yet the WTO rules remain unchanged.

#### **Towards global consensus: invest in domestic production**

Every international body that deals with agriculture has come to recognise the need to prioritise food security over simply promoting trade. The 2009 World Summit on Food Security placed emphasis on national investment in agriculture. The African Union announced in its 2004 *Maputo Declaration* a commitment by each country to invest 10% of national budgets in agricultural production, which it reiterated last year in launching the Year of Food Security. In the proposed Sustainable Development Goals being negotiated

at the United Nations, the need for developing countries to invest in food production is highlighted as a priority more than half a dozen times. Olivier de Schutter, the former UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, caused an uproar in the WTO in 2011, when he detailed how WTO policies are incompatible with the right to food; and highlighted the importance of developing countries' maintaining food reserves.

Some developing countries are taking action. In India, more than half of the population depends on very small agricultural holdings and hundreds of millions suffer from a lack of access to adequate food. The Indian Food Security Act (2013) is intended to reduce poverty among both producers and consumers. It purchases food from poor farmers at a Minimum Support Price (MSP), and then distributes that food to the poor through a Public Distribution System (PDS) in what is called a public stockholding program. Countries as diverse as Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Morocco, Nepal, Senegal, Tanzania, Tunisia, Zambia, Zimbabwe have public stockholding programs. Many more countries are currently developing them.

At the WTO Ministerial meeting in Bali, Indonesia, in 2013, a coalition of countries led by India fought hard for permanent changes in the WTO rules that would allow developing countries freedom to secure the right to food for their people without WTO sanctions. The USA led the opposition and succeeded in postponing any permanent rule changes for a further four years, meanwhile conceding that developing countries might continue their existing subsidy programs in pursuit of food security but begin no new programs – the so-called 'Peace Clause'. There was no guarantee that a permanent resolution would be reached in 2017. Nor was it clear in the text whether the 'Peace Clause' would hold until there was a permanent resolution or would expire at the

end of four years. India again led the demand that this be clarified. The clarification came, reluctantly, the following year. It was agreed that the 'Peace Clause' would stay in place until permanent changes were made. And the deadline for adopting a permanent solution was brought forward to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2015. This means that a decision should be taken at the Ministerial meeting in Nairobi, Kenya, 15<sup>th</sup> – 18<sup>th</sup> December.

### **A KEY MOMENT: AN OPPORTUNITY FOR REAL CHANGE**

Removing WTO obstacles to food security would allow countries to be more self-sustainable. It would allow more poor nations to achieve the Millennium Development Goal of eradicating extreme poverty and hunger. It should be achievable.

What is it going to take? Anti-hunger groups worldwide will need to take up the cause and bring their powerful advocacy to bear on the issue. Farmers, Right to Food campaigners, and development advocates in Africa, Asia, and across the developing world will need to pressure their governments to support food security in the WTO. Unity among developing countries and Least Developed Countries (LDCs) will be essential. The USA Trade Representative and Department of Agriculture must be exposed for their divide-and-conquer tactics, as they are currently circulating inaccurate and misleading information about India's stockholding programs to scare the Least Developed Countries in the WTO. Solidarity with the poor and hungry must be mobilised in Europe and other developed countries. International agencies with a voice on food security must speak out. **It can be done. Let this opportunity not be missed.**

*Source: Deborah James, Director of International Programs, Center for Economic and Policy Research, Washington, DC. [www.cepr.net](http://www.cepr.net) Edited by Alison Healey.*

### **'A WORLD MEAL' IN THE NETHERLANDS**

The Africa-Europe Network (AEN) is the Dutch Antenna of the Africa Europe Faith and Justice Network with its secretariat in Brussels. According to its website, 'AEFJN

listens to the voice of Africa... brings this voice to the European Union (EU) and insists on the right and the responsibility of Africans to make their own policy for development.

AEFJN lobbies the EU and member states to promote sustainable development in Africa, monitors the impact in Africa of EU policies and agreements and promotes socio-economic strategies that take into account the views of African people for sustainable development’.

The Dutch Antenna is presently focuses mostly on the impact of land grabbing and its consequences, such as lack of food and water security, the environment and human rights.

A few months ago, we organised ‘a World Meal’ for a small group of parishioners in Tilburg. A World Meal contains no meat, because animals bred for meat consume a lot of good food. Roughly calculated, an animal will consume 10 kilos of wheat, soya, tapioca, maize and lots of water to produce 1 kilo of meat. In our country, most maize fields feed cows and pigs, not humans. A World Meal contains also no fish. Meat and fish can easily be replaced by other nutritious foods such as soya beans and grains.

In fact, there should be enough food for everybody. A Dutch organisation calculated

that, if food was equally divided among the people of the world, each person would have enough to eat good and nutritious food.

We started the meal by introducing ourselves and with a short prayer. After soup, we showed a short video about land grabbing in Uganda, on one of the islands in Lake Victoria. A big foreign company had ‘bought’ land from small farmers. The chief was paid; farmers were not compensated. The company planted the whole area with palm trees. The oil will be used as ‘bio-fuel’. This video was a great help to starting a good discussion and exchange among the guests. After the meal the question: ‘What can we do about it?’ was discussed and experiences shared of which food to buy and how to cook it, where the food we buy comes from, in which bank to have one’s bank account.

In this month of May we having our AEN annual meeting in the Grail Centre in Utrecht where we will again serve a World Meal with a video and discussion.

*Source: Carla van Thiel (Grail, Netherlands)*

## **AUSTRALIAN ACTIONS AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN HUMANS**

For the last eighteen months I have represented the Grail in the NSW sector of the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans (ACRATH), taking over this role from Mary Robertson. Though not a religious institute, the Grail is warmly welcomed to participate in the activities of ACRATH.

As a national group, ACRATH is involved in a wide range of issues associated with various forms of trafficking. Its success has been largely dependent on funding provided by religious congregations and its very successful lobbying of the Federal Government. The funding has enabled the employment of people in a variety of associated activities.

### **Forced Marriage Project**

The New South Wales Government has enacted new legislation regarding forced marriage of children – ‘girls not brides’. Some ACRATH members attended the Sydney

Forced Marriage Network plenary meeting in February of this year and will continue its association with this group. A start has been made on clarifying definitions.

### **Women’s voices heard in sex trafficking research**

At the ACRATH National Conference in February of this year, Sister of Mercy, Angela Reed, and her bilingual research assistant, Marietta Latonio, presented a full-day exposition of her PhD research. It was very informative to share her findings through the interactive approach she took.

While researching and writing, Angela discovered that sex trafficking is a very complex global problem and there is no one homogenous sex trafficking experience. She was awarded her PhD by the School of Global, Urban and Social Studies at RMIT University in Melbourne. In her thesis, *Exploiting*

*Vulnerability: A Study of the lives of Filipino women who have been trafficked into sex work*, Angela has given a human face to sex trafficking and explored the complex lives of forty trafficked women. Importantly, she can now put names and faces and stories on this problem - stories that she is keen to share.

### **Stop the Traffic**

Much of the chocolate that finds its way into our shops and homes is made with cocoa from Cote d'Ivoire plantations that use trafficked children. They are kidnapped, or their families are tricked; they are then forced to work in the plantations from an early age, for long hours, in dangerous working conditions, without any possibility of attending school. ACRATH has joined with Stop the Traffic to promote the purchase of chocolate Easter products made from cocoa that has not been harvested by trafficked labour. The six weeks prior to Easter this year saw an intensive campaign where people purchased post-cards from Stop the Traffic and were asked to present them to two major supermarkets urging them to increase their supply of certified chocolate products in 2016. A postcard of thanks was presented to Aldi in appreciation of the large range of certified Easter products provided in their stores.

### **Schools and parishes**

ACRATH has prepared information sessions for both school and parish presentations

Several high schools in all Australian States have participated in this program, presented by ACRATH members trained to lead these sessions. Some parishes have also requested sessions for various groups.

### **Australian Catholic University (ACU) pro bono project**

Earlier this year ACRATH was approached by the Dean of Law in the St Thomas More Law School, ACU, with a view to providing some pro bono assistance for ACRATH. After a number of planning meetings, First Year Law students of the North Sydney campus began a two week, intensive, pro bono project in December.

The students were given information about human trafficking and the work of ACRATH. They set out to research *Principles for a compensation scheme for people trafficked into Australia: What are the learnings from overseas?* During the project, the 17 students attended one of the bi-monthly meetings of NSW ACRATH where they gave a progress report on their findings. ACRATH is grateful to the staff and students for this opportunity to develop a partnership with the St Thomas More Law School. The Coordinator of this project has indicated that the final presentation, requiring the collation over 140 pages of data, is still some time off. It was gratifying to learn that the Attorney General's Department is interested in obtaining a copy of the final document for their internal use.

*Source: Anne Day (Grail Australia)*

"In reality, the concentration of wealth may be even greater since all data is based on official statistics, which do not include the money hidden in tax havens. A 2012 study estimated the number of tax havens at 80 and the total value of wealth beyond the taxman as somewhere between \$21 and \$32 trillion....This is huge when you consider that in 2012, global GDP was about US\$72 trillion and world wealth totalled US\$223 trillion." ( cf. *Global Wealth Report 2012*, Credit Suisse, Zurich,)

*Source: Paul Cliché, Canadian Catholic Organisation for Development and Peace, March 2015.*

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