

SUSPENSION OF THE DOHA ROUND

■ A WASTED OPPORTUNITY

The WTO talks have been suspended. Celine Charveriat, Head of Oxfam International's Make Trade Fair Campaign, explains what this means for poor countries and how the fight to make trade fair goes on.

WHAT'S GONE WRONG?

In September 2001, in Doha, Qatar, the world embarked on an ambitious set of negotiations to reform the World Trade Organisation's (WTO) global trade rules. Rich countries themselves declared the "Doha Round" of negotiations to be a "development round", to provide fairer rules to lift millions of people out of poverty.

But nearly five years on, the negotiations have been suspended. Stubborn self-interest by the 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.

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 dependent on a trading system that's fair.

WHY ARE THE US AND EU TO BLAME?

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

HOW HAS MAKE TRADE FAIR EXERTED ITS INFLUENCE?

By involving people everywhere, in their millions. Already, twenty million people have signed the campaign's massive global petition, "The Big Noise", to demand that world trade rules be made to work for the poor. The success of the Big Noise is that it belongs to the people who have signed it, from all corners of the world.

Many celebrities have also joined the campaign, with Chris Martin from Coldplay leading the way. Colin Firth, Thom Yorke, Angelique Kidjo and many more have been photographed whilst produce that is commonly dumped on poor country markets was poured over their heads. And 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 and has never stopped challenging rich countries' rigged rules and double standards. It has only been able to do this by becoming the one of the best supported campaigns the world has ever seen.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE EFFECT OF ALL THIS SUPPORT?

By demonstrating widespread global concern, *Make Trade Fair* has highlighted the adverse impact of unfair trade rules on the livelihoods of millions of poor farmers in developing countries. This has helped to change the terms of the global trade debate and has ensured that the issues of food security and poverty reduction are not ignored in trade talks.

Make Trade Fair has also helped to increase the resolve of developing countries within the WTO negotiations. Through briefings and lobby meetings, Oxfam has assisted developing countries in their assessment of rich countries' proposals, helping them to resist unreasonable pressure to accept them. 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.

Another positive effect of *Make Trade Fair* has been to help bridge the gap between governments and civil society organisations in many developing countries. For instance, as result of our work, small-scale cotton farmers have come to realise the importance of advocacy and now routinely talk to their governments about issues that are affecting them.

HAS MAKE TRADE FAIR HELPED TO SECURE SOME POLICY SUCCESSES?

Yes it has. *Make Trade Fair* has been a persistent advocate for an immediate end to farm subsidies which encourage overproduction and the dumping of cheap produce on developing country markets. We have helped to expose the weakness of the EU/US defence of such trade-distorting subsidies, which contributed to the decision at the WTO to stop all export subsidies by 2013. Regrettably, due to the suspension of the talks, it remains unclear how and when this commitment will now be fulfilled.

The campaign was at the forefront of a powerful public demand to ensure that the WTO delivered on its promises to amend global patent rules. Before this pressure led to a new agreement in 2003, many of the world's poorest countries could not afford to import life-saving medicines because the patented drugs were too costly. Now developing countries have the freedom to produce or buy cheaper copies ('generics') without fear of reprisals from rich countries or multi-national companies.

Together with other NGOs, we have also supported developing countries in their fight against the imposition of WTO rules to reduce the power of governments to regulate business. Such rules, proposed and later withdrawn by the EU, would have restricted the ability of poor countries to harness investment for their development needs.

WHAT THE FUTURE FOR MAKE TRADE FAIR?

The WTO negotiations will continue in some form, sooner or later. When this happens, we will be there to make sure that the progress that has been made during the last five years is built upon. Decisions 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.

But there is a new threat to a world with fair trade rules. 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, 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 some of the poorest countries in the world, pushing them to accept terms favourable to the EU.

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 mean that life-saving medicines are still out of the reach of millions living with HIV/AIDS or suffering from other chronic diseases.

DO YOU STILL NEED MY SUPPORT?

Yes – there is so much more still to do! We will need your support to ensure that any proposed regional or country-to-country trade agreements which are not in the interests of poor people are stopped – and replaced by deals that instead demonstrate a genuine commitment by rich countries to help reduce poverty.

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.

