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ECOFAIR TRADE DIALOGUE

New Directions for Agricultural Trade Rules

Ecofair is a practitioner of organic farming and has a degree in agriculture. She is a recognized expert on sustainable agriculture policies in the West African region. Her main areas of work are ecological agriculture and fair trade. He is a practitioner of organic farming and has a degree in agriculture. Having closely followed the agriculture negotiations at the WTO for the last several years as well as issues concerning the developmental impacts of the common agricultural policy of the EU, he has a profound expertise on agricultural trade issues. He has a degree in economics.

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Information
If you are interested in receiving a newsletter of this project twice a year, please sign up at: www.ecofair-trade.org
THE ECOFAIR TRADE DIALOGUE

is a project carried out by the Heinrich Böll Foundation in cooperation with Misereor and moderated by the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy. In virtually no other sector of the world trade regime do different interests and convictions appear so irreconcilable as in agriculture. Conflict interests are prevalent between developed and developing countries, export-oriented and import-dependent countries, or countries with liberalized markets and countries with a high degree of protection. Conviction conflicts prevail between the promoters of an ever-increasing international division of labor and the advocates of a more decentralized economic order. Similarly, views and interests differ between the supporters of a large-scale, industrial and export-oriented production model and those who favor small-scale, organic and subsistence farming. However, the trade agenda pursued since the 1990s reflected and still reflects only parts of these controversies. For example, it does not allow space for trade rules adequate to protect the interests of farmers who produce for the local market, or of those who produce organic food.

Against the background of the existing power imbalances between developed and developing countries, agricultural trade policies have until now been shaped especially to the detriment of the majority of farmers in the South. Many developing countries had to give up market protection measures and have been at the mercy of cheap and often subsidized agricultural imports. In contrast, developed countries have managed to maintain their national markets and only secondarily for export. Sound production by small farmers, principally for regional and cultural production patterns that are environmentally and socially friendly and take into account consumer protection needs. In this form, it predominantly finds supporters in the North. Both concepts put priority on labor-intensive, environmentally and socially friendly and take into account consumer protection needs. In this form, it predominantly finds supporters in the North.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AS REFERENCE POINTS

The concepts of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture serve as the reference points for the EcoFair Trade Dialogue – two concepts currently marginal to agricultural trade agreements and negotiations, yet of major importance to the more than one billion people whose livelihood depends on agriculture as well as to the environmental condition of our planet. Food sovereignty is promoted mainly by small farmers’ organizations in the South and stands above all for the right of nations to determine their own and appropriate agricultural and food policies. Sustainable agriculture emphasizes primarily the need for agricultural production patterns that are environmentally and socially friendly and take into account consumer protection needs. In this form, it predominantly finds supporters in the North. Both concepts put priority on labor-intensive, environmentally sound production by small farmers, principally for regional and national markets and only secondarily for export.

OBJECTIVES AND APPROACH

The overall aim of this project is to enrich the debate on the reform of the current regime of global agricultural trade through the development and advancement of forward looking guidelines and instruments, taking the concepts of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture as reference points. A concrete and coherent reform proposal which responds to the 21st century’s social and ecological challenges to global agriculture is envisaged as the outcome of the EcoFair Trade Dialogue. The economic, social and cultural human rights, ecological sustainability and gender equity being the normative basis for its development. By molding this reform proposal via an international dialogue process, the project wants to contribute to a learning process and consensus building among the NGO- and scientific community as well as to the empowerment of the advocates of food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture. Through the discussion of the proposals with political decision makers and opinion leaders, the project intends to promote an improved linking of normative, civic demands with political decision-making, and to influence policy-making processes on agricultural trade in the medium and long term. The EcoFair Trade Dialogue will deal with means that fit into the current structure of the WTO’s Agreement on Agriculture (AoA), such as tariffs and subsidies, as well as with other potential approaches for trade regulation that go beyond that, e.g. supply management, qualified market access, and commodity agreements. Where appropriate, reform proposals might be proposed in a framework outside the WTO, such as the FAO, or UNCTAD.

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THE DIALOGUE PROCESS

The dialogue process to develop the reform proposal will involve selected experts, representatives of a broad range of civil society organizations, as well as policy makers. The first phase of the project to be carried out throughout 2005 will consist of a dialogue within a core group of experts from different regions of the world. This group of experts will develop reform proposals to be recorded in a set of policy papers. Views from policy makers will feed into this dialogue through an International Advisory Board. In a second phase in 2006, consultations on a regional level will be held in order to discuss and mirror the policy papers on the different realities around the world. It is intended to involve a broad range of stakeholders throughout the farming community, civil society organizations, the media, and the scientific community, as well as political decision-makers and negotiators at the WTO. After these consultations the policy papers will be revised and a final report will be elaborated. A wide dissemination of the report and a series of further dialogues on its basis are foreseen to follow.