



# Introduction: Southern Alternatives to EU Trade Policy



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## Introduction

Perspectives on the relationship and linkages between trade and development, and on how trade can support development, diverge significantly, and have been the subject of significant debate for decades. Academics, policy-makers, politicians, and social movements globally adopt a diverse range of positions on what approach impoverished countries should take in trying to achieve sustainable development and move their populations out of poverty.

The EU has for many years vigorously pursued wide ranging trade liberalisation in partner countries. It advocates that developing countries open up their markets to international trade, through, for example, reducing the taxes (known as tariffs) and other limits (such as quotas) on goods coming in, increasing rights for investors, pursuing privatisation of key industries and services, and reducing support to domestic producers. It is argued that this economic approach will be of benefit to developing countries, that competition and open markets will promote innovation, specialisation and increased trade and investment, which will lead to economic growth, which will in turn lead to poverty eradication.

However, many civil society groups, social movements and others, including the authors and commissioners of this policy report, do not subscribe to this orthodox understanding of economics. This blanket trade liberalisation agenda prioritises the interest of corporations and industries of the global North rather than the interests of people globally. It also undermines developing country governments' capacity to determine their own economic policies and has contributed to social, economic and environmental crises across the globe. Free trade policies have also contributed significantly to bringing about the ongoing global financial and jobs crisis which sees Europe needing to change its previous policies to address the multiple crises.

For years, free trade policies have particularly limited Southern governments' 'policy space': that is the extent to which developing countries are free to choose their own development policies and prioritise the development objectives which will protect the rights of their people and the environment. This policy space is imperative to enable developing countries to stabilise and develop their economies, promote food sovereignty, and to maximise the benefits of any foreign investment in their countries. Most importantly it is necessary to ensure that the benefits of economic development accrue to the poorest portions of the population, while taking into account the fact that limitless economic growth is not possible on a finite planet.

## 1. EU TRADE POLICY & DEVELOPMENT

In 2006, the European Commission (EC) unveiled its new Communication *Global Europe: Competing in the World*, which outlined a new trade policy for the European Union. This document set out an aggressive 'external competitiveness' strategy to be achieved through bilateral free trade agreements and at multilateral level through the World Trade Organisation (WTO). The aim of the strategy was to secure new and profitable markets for EU companies, while pushing for even more business-friendly 'domestic reforms'. The EU, recognising that progress on its liberalisation agenda was stalling at the WTO, set about negotiating a series of 'ambitious' bilateral free trade agreements with a range of developing nations which it identified as key markets. The EU had previously acknowledged that trade liberalisation can pose risks to development, observing that "by pitting unequally developed economies against one another, globalisation may, if unharnessed, widen the gap between rich and poor countries and further sideline the poorest economies" (EC, 2002: 6). Nevertheless, it pushed for speedy and far-reaching liberalisation in all its trade negotiations over the years following this strategy. The EU continued to build on this approach in the document *Trade, Growth and World Affairs: Trade Policy as a Core Component of the EU's 2020 Strategy* (EC, 2010) which replaced the aforementioned 'Global Europe' in 2010.

In its most recent communication on the topic of trade and development, *Trade, Growth and Development – Tailoring Trade and Investment policy for those countries most in need* (EC, 2012), the EC states that "effective trade policy can be a powerful engine for development, in line with the EU principle of Policy Coherence for Development" (pp. 2-3). However the reality is that the EU trade agenda continues to be concerned not with development needs, but with future EU trade and corporate interests. It sets Europe's trade policy down a path focused solely on maintaining Europe's competitiveness in the world market. It pushes to remove non tariff trade barriers for European exports and investment, secure better access to energy and raw materials, push the liberalisation of sectors including investment, public services, financial services, and increase protection of intellectual property rights. The EU's use of bilateral trade negotiations to implement this external competitiveness strategy fails to prioritise people and their employment and food security needs, as well as environmental sustainability, over profits. Instead it is structured to benefit corporations, whether from the North or South, at the expense of producers and workers. It does not adequately take into account the level of development of partner countries or the possible negative impacts of these policies on the local

population, their social, economic and political rights, or the protection of the environment. By pushing to further open market access, Europe's neoliberal trade policies undermine the ability of governments to protect their infant industries, to support their small scale and subsistence farmers, and more broadly to define their own development policy to address the needs and rights of their populations.

EU policies based on "competitiveness" and increasingly open and deregulated markets have already undermined the capacity of developing countries to prioritise sustainable development, poverty eradication, food security and social justice. The type of reciprocal trade liberalisation pushed for by the EU has destroyed local agriculture, dismantled local and regional markets, shut down domestic industries, resulted in privatisation of public services and accelerated environmental degradation, as it attempts to override national policies and insist that all future directives on social, labour or environmental issues for instance, should not threaten the global competitiveness of European corporations. These policies often mean the destruction of local businesses and associated employment, with a large proportion of the profits which emerge from the liberalised export economy expropriated by foreign companies. Evidence shows that the liberalisation of trade has had a devastating impact on jobs and workers' rights, with less developed countries bearing the greatest burden. For instance, in Ghana the labour market in the industrial sector shrank by 17% in the first eight years of trade liberalisation; for women workers the figure was 22% (War on Want, 2009: 8).

In the agricultural sector also, opening market access has been disastrous for small farmers and food security in developing countries. Small scale and subsistence farmers in the Global South have found themselves unable to compete with highly subsidised agricultural imports from Europe and other regions. The concentration of control of land in the hands of big owners has brought about loss of jobs, income and livelihoods, and displacement of rural populations.

While the EU imposes more and more economic policy constraints and restrictions on governments, it secures more and more rights for European corporations. The new European Commission focus on investment, as reflected for example in the investment chapters of FTAs (Free Trade Agreements), pushes developing countries to provide concessions to rich countries which go far beyond what is mandated at the WTO. Proposed investor-state-dispute agreements allow multinationals to challenge governments' social, environmental and economic regulations, ignoring the domestic judicial system and undermining public intervention, if

companies believe they might harm the profitability of their investment (UNCTAD 2012).

Such provisions on investment also undermine pro-development policy and the regional integration process, whereby neighbouring states enter into agreements in order to enhance social, political and economic cooperation in their region and strengthen their collective stance on core policy areas. Countries of the Global South are nowhere near as regionally integrated economically as the EU. However they are increasingly moving towards regional integration, seeing the benefits of trading with local partners of a similar development level. ALBA (Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América - Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas) is one of the most well known alternative regional approaches to the focus on liberalisation of the Global North. A number of regions in Africa and Asia are also in the process of consolidating their trade and regional integration with neighbouring nations.

However EU trade policies, from EPAs (Economic Partnership Agreements) to its FTAs, which demand that EU companies, services and products receive the same treatment as domestic ones, are preventing governments from supporting national and regional firms to industrialise, and from ensuring that where foreign companies invest, adequate benefit, capacity building and profit go to the host nation and community. The accompanying tendency towards liberalisation of public services, in order to secure competitive advantage for European service providers such as water corporations, results in a diminution of access to such services for poor people, and price increases in the cost of services to consumers, as foreign private companies prioritise profit over public access. In February 2000 for example, protesters in Bolivia took to the streets after the Cochabamba water system was privatised and rates were increased by as much as 100%. These free trade policies also seek to prevent developing countries from protecting their natural environment through regulation, and facilitate the export of environmentally damaging activities (such as mining) to poorer nations with weaker labour and environmental regulation.

Consequently, the situation of the poor in developing countries has worsened over the past number of decades, due to the insistence on trade liberalisation, competition, deregulation, structural adjustment and other economic orthodoxies, enforced on developing nations by the Global North. These policies prioritise profit over sustainability and poverty eradication. Despite these observations, increasingly reflected in UN reports<sup>1</sup>, and the clear incoherence with EU's development policies and objectives (CONCORD 2009; 2011), the EU's Trade strategy continues to pursue

a 'business as usual' approach. Recently the EU has renewed its efforts to relaunch EPA negotiations and is working to conclude FTAs with regions such as ASEAN and MERCOSUR. It has also begun negotiations with countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco and Jordan, where recent "Arab Spring" revolutions demanded regime change and reform, including a change to the neoliberal policies that are causing widespread poverty and unemployment, which the EU wants to consolidate before democratic institutions and processes are fully in place. (Cermak et al., 2012: 1).

## 2. RESISTANCE IS FERTILE! ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVES FROM THE GLOBAL SOUTH

This alarming approach of the EU and the dismal record of free trade liberalisation, has galvanised ordinary people, academics, politicians, and civil society, from both the North and the South, to call for a halt to further trade liberalisation and a rethink and redesign of global trade rules so that they promote economically, socially and environmentally sustainable outcomes for all. In Europe, a broad alliance including development organisations, trade unions, human rights, fair trade, farmers, migrant groups and others have come together under the umbrella of the Alternative Trade Mandate Alliance (ATM). They are calling for an alternative trade mandate for EU trade and investment policy that would support sustainable development and poverty eradication globally. The alliance foregrounds alternatives proposed by organisations and individuals in developing countries and asserts; "There are alternatives to the current trade and investment regime and they are gaining support around the world." (ATM, 2011: 3).

This report aims to contribute to the ongoing dialogues, locally and globally, on alternative trade and economic approaches. We hope to provide a space for proposals to be articulated by organisations and individuals from the Global South which could sustainably enhance local economies, societies and the environment. We also highlight perspectives which propose abandoning the growth model for economic development, taking into account the need to sustainably manage the world's limited natural resources and ensure human wellbeing across the globe. We hope to promote an alternative discourse by amplifying these proposals in Europe, engaging EU citizens, policymakers, civil society and social movements to discuss these alternatives and to influence the formulation of EU trade policies which achieve pro-environment and pro-poor outcomes.

Rather than aiming to be exhaustive or conclusive, this report tries to bring together various voices of individuals, movements and organisations in the Global South and present their perspectives and visions of alternative trade policies and processes. It builds on our report commissioned in 2010 (Curtis, 2010) which focussed on European trade policies and agreements driven by the Raw Materials Initiative (2008) and its findings relating to policy space. It also widens the focus to encompass broader natural resource issues including land, agriculture, and water. This reflects the increasing focus on natural resources in trade and investment policies of late, given the abundance of natural resources in developing nations, and their central role in securing pro-poor and sustainable development.

<sup>1</sup> For example, UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, fifth report to German government about agriculture (2011): "'The Committee notes with deep concern the impact of the State party's agriculture and trade policies, which promote the export of subsidised agricultural products to developing countries, on the enjoyment of the right to an adequate standard of living and particularly on the right to food in the receiving countries' (Paragraph 9 cited in Paasch, 2011: 10). See also UNCTAD Trade and Development Report (2010), UNCTAD Secretary General Report (2012), and the work of Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food

The contributors and topics for discussion were selected on the basis of being linked to ongoing EU policy processes (so as to be useful in Europe) and representing issues being discussed by a significant portion of civil society and social movements in the Global South. Each contribution highlights and reflects the experience, perspectives and policy alternatives, of communities in the Global South who are living through poverty, debt, economic policy conditionality and lack of economic sovereignty. These people and movements have challenged the economic orthodoxy locally and globally for decades, with concepts such as Mother Earth, illegitimate and odious debt, and alternative trading patterns, rules and approaches. The report highlights many existing proposals from the Global South to enhance the development benefits from trade, deconstructing the notion that ‘There is no alternative’ to market liberalisation, while not necessarily advocating for any particular ‘right answer’.

It should be stressed that the opinions laid out in the various contributions do not necessarily reflect the views of the project partners. Rather they are presented as valuable, diverse and different perspectives, reflecting the range, depth and scale of alternative visions of a global and local trading system which benefits all and does no harm. The contributions provided and alternatives proposed are diverse with varying levels of detail, longevity of focus or degree of applicability, reflecting the diversity and complexity of these debates across the globe.

Such perspectives are often not acknowledged in European policy dialogues, or given serious consideration and reflection. However we believe that it is essential that the EU takes into account alternative proposals from the Global South and the development objectives of its partner countries in its trade policies, if Europe is to ensure coherence between its own trade and development agendas. This is all the more urgent in the context of a global economic downturn and climate crisis which is disproportionately impacting upon developing country economies and livelihoods.

The following section contains short summaries of each of the eight contributions from Southern authors on alternatives to the EU’s current trade policy.

## 2.1 Agriculture and Land

Two contributions to this report address issues relating to agriculture and land and how free trade policies and the liberalisation agenda have challenged food security. In his contribution, Joseph Mbinji of the *Zambia Land Alliance* focuses on obstacles faced by poor families in Zambia accessing and obtaining legal tenure to land,

especially in the face of land grabs and increased foreign demand for agricultural land. He argues that the main driving force behind land injustice in Zambia is liberalisation and introduction of land markets, adopted at the behest of the IMF and World Bank, coupled with pressure from the WTO and EU, through both multilateral and bilateral trade policy negotiations. He explores several alternatives that would improve land justice for the poor, including proposals to address land grabs and protect poor families, for securing legal title to land and livelihoods, and to reduce the negative effects of increasing food prices.

In their contribution, Henry Saragih and Mary Lou Malig from *La Via Campesina*, argue that the liberalisation agenda has resulted in several Asian countries changing from being exporters into net importers of staple foods, such as rice, with local markets being flooded by artificially low priced crops imported from subsidised countries in the North. With little control over pricing, which is susceptible to financial speculation and market fluctuations, rising prices have undermined food security in the region. Saragih and Malig outline the principles an alternative Asia could be based on, which would reclaim the people’s sovereignty and build a common vision that encompasses the shared hopes, dreams and goals of communities and countries. They outline alternatives that would achieve food sovereignty by putting the aspirations and needs of those who produce, distribute and consume food at the heart of food systems and policies, rather than the demands of markets and corporations.

Both contributions call for the EU to halt negotiations and trade policies which do not put the interests of people and need for food sovereignty at their centre. In particular, Saragih and Malig criticise the EU for backing the Global Partnership for Agriculture and Food Security (GAFSP) which they see as advancing the take-over of land by agribusiness in the name of increased land investment and higher agricultural productivity. They also demand a halt to the current system by which food production is monopolised by transnational and big agribusinesses.

## 2.2 Water and Access to Public Services

The impact of EU trade policies, which prioritise the interests of European corporations, on access to public services for the poor is highlighted in the contribution by Mary Ann Manahan, Dr. Buenaventura Dargantes, and Cheryl Batistel, who detail the privatisation of water service provision and the dominant position of European water companies in Asia, with particular focus on the Philippines. They argue that the trend towards privatisation and commodification of water has reduced

access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation for poor people, resulting in the search for alternative water service provision. These alternatives include provision of water services by municipalities or local councils, local communities, cooperatives, public to community as well as public to public partnerships (PuPs) which are proving successful in securing water justice, access to safe drinking water and improved sanitation for poor families. In their contribution they argue that regional and bilateral free trade and comprehensive investment agreements, (such as the EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement which includes a provision for investor-state dispute resolution) are being employed by the EU as a means of securing more market access and corporate control through foreign direct investment. They believe that the liberalised environment being sought by the EU through trade negotiations, such as in the FTA already signed with Singapore, would favour European investors and privatisation of essential services, further consolidating their interests in Asian economies. Consequently they call on the EU to rethink existing EU bilateral and regional investment and free trade agreements that intend to open Asian markets and to ensure that Asian countries have the flexibility to choose policies which meet the needs of their people and the environment.

### 2.3 Extractive Industries and Raw Materials

Three contributions explore the impact of EU trade policy on countries' efforts to protect their natural resources and environment and/or ensure maximum benefit is derived where some degree of extraction does take place. Chandra Bhushan and Sugandh Juneja of the *Centre for Science and Environment*, New Delhi argue that the proposed EU-India FTA will undermine many of the progressive pro-poor and pro-environment provisions in a newly crafted domestic mining law – the Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) (MMDR) Bill, 2011. This bill establishes provisions including sharing mining profits with local communities, participation of local communities in decision-making processes, tightening of environmental regulations, among others, which conflict with European provisions on national treatment, dispute settlement and disclosure of information.

Dr Claude Kabemba, director of the *Southern Africa Resource Watch* (SARW), in his contribution tackles the scourge of secrecy and lack of access to information in the extractive industry in Africa. He argues that secrecy in the extractive industry is one of the biggest problems confronting African governments, civil society, and local communities, in their effort to secure mining justice and effective natural resource governance. Kabemba outlines several recent initiatives at both international and national level that

aim to bring greater transparency and accountability to the extractive industry in Africa. He cautions that EU trade and investment policy, especially in the form of the Raw Materials Initiative (RMI) and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), could undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives.

Responding to the EU's Raw Materials Initiative, Carlos Aguilar takes an alternative position to the other contributors by reflecting on the historical role of extractivism in Latin America, criticising extractivism as a development approach and proposing a transition to post-extractive societies. He outlines initiatives which aim to design and implement social alternatives which depend less on extractive industries, and the diverse strategies being adopted by individual states as they respond to the pressure to provide the raw materials targeted by the EU's Raw Materials Initiative. He argues that there has been a failure to recognise that a development paradigm based on exports and foreign investment will not address historical and structural problems of inequality but will make local communities pay for the environmental and social costs of extractive activities. Post-extractivism is therefore proposed as an alternative vision for Latin American societies, supporting rather than undermining the needs of the people and planet.

### 2.4 Regional Integration and Economic Agreements

Finally, the report addresses the impact of EU trade policy on regional integration and economic agreements with contributions by two authors. Enrique Daza, Secretary of the *Hemispheric Social Alliance*, outlines the range of alternative proposals to the dominant neoliberal economic approach currently being explored in Latin America, such as the ALBA<sup>3</sup> and the People's Trade Agreement. He argues that the financial crisis has raised many questions about the "social model" of European integration, which is in sharp contrast to the Latin American integration and social development agenda. He cautions that concentrated focus on the export of raw materials and dependency on speculative capital driven by the EU will only serve to increase the vulnerability of the region in the face of the global crisis. Finally, he argues that the EU's trade and investment policies have weakened the regional integration processes in Latin America, giving the example of Europe's agreement with Central America which prioritises free trade over sub-regional integration. He proposes that the EU pay more attention to the alternative proposals coming from Latin America such as the ALBA-TCP (People's Trade

<sup>3</sup> Bolivarian Alternative for the Americas. ALBA was a proposal of Hugo Chavez back in 2001, which became effective in December 2004. It is a political alliance of 9 countries around principles of solidarity and integration.

Treaty) which calls for a form of integration where international agreements are based on reciprocity, mutual benefit, national sovereignty, the protection of internal markets and respect for the basic rights of the people and the planet.

The final contribution by Timothy Kondo, representing ANSA (*Alternatives to Neo-liberalism in Southern Africa*), sets out ANSA's perspective on trade policy and regional integration for southern Africa which would support a people-driven bottom-up approach to economic development. The positive role of civil society in stalling EPAs negotiations, identified as "a re-colonisation strategic plan rather than development instrument", is outlined in his analysis of the EPA negotiation process. He stresses that the current structure of EU-ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific) trade relations, and the economic threats to development for ACP countries which are included in the EPAs under negotiation, make it imperative for civil society to formulate and campaign for alternatives. In his contribution he calls for collective action between EU and ACP civil society in order to achieve development that prioritises people and the planet, reinforcing the need for a bottom up approach to trade and development issues.

## 4. CONCLUSION

Given the depth, breadth and diversity of the perspectives in the alternative proposals from our Southern contributors, it is perhaps surprising that there are certain key commonalities between all contributions. The contributors clearly identify common principles and themes which should be at the heart of international trade policies particularly if the EU is to ensure coherence between trade and development policies. This includes ensuring that:

- trade policy places people before profits where corporations are agents of positive change, not drivers of trade rules for profits;
- the need for participatory democracy is upheld and citizen engagement in decision-making supported;
- structurally unequal power relations are challenged and equitable and just power relations are established within countries and across regions;
- international conventions, agreements and treaties on human rights, labour and environmental standards are upheld and enhanced rather than undermined by global trade policy and practices;
- information is transparent and shared freely; and
- the trade practices undertaken protect the universal and inalienable human rights of all people and respect the Earth's natural limit and the need to avoid catastrophic climate change.

European trade and investment policy must respect and serve the overarching aims of universal and indivisible human rights, decent work, democracy, ecological justice, gender equality, justice between countries, regions, social classes, castes and ethnicities, and the fight against poverty. The wealth and depth of perspectives from people in the Global North and South who suffer the impacts of neoliberal policies must be acknowledged by European policy-makers. It is increasingly urgent that a conversation on alternative visions for the world is nurtured, highlighting positive alternative approaches, at grassroots or international level, where economic policy is balanced by social and environmental need.

To respond to the global and myriad crises facing our world, economically, socially and environmentally, the EU must desist from adopting a business as usual approach. To do so would ignore the role that the current economic paradigm and orthodoxy has played in contributing to these crises, and miss an important opportunity for European trade and development policy to achieve its overall aim of poverty eradication and sustainable development. For the sake of people in Europe and globally, and of the planet, it is imperative that European policy-makers pay heed to civil society voices globally and engage with this important discussion and debate.

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