

WHOSE DEVELOPMENT IS IT ANYWAY? A gender perspective on the EU's position in the WTO negotiations

WIDE statement, November 2005

WIDE is deeply concerned about the European Commission's insistence on pushing for the establishment of trade rules that threaten the livelihoods of poor women and men in the South and that perpetuate gender inequality, unfair gender relations as well as structural inequalities between women and men and within and between countries and regions. The EU is aggressively pursuing new markets, while offering little in return to developing countries. Of particular concern is the EU's continued insistence on pushing for progress on non-agricultural market access (NAMA) and services negotiations in the name of the Doha Development Round whose objective is stated to be that of putting 'development at the heart of the WTO' (Doha Declaration 2001). As a European network promoting gender equality and social justice, WIDE joins other social movements and NGOs in the EU in challenging the assumption that increased trade and opening of markets will yield equitable development.

From a gender perspective, we are deeply concerned about the ways in which neo-liberalism, founded on the promotion of a radical 'free-trade' regime, economic globalisation and market liberalisation has both exacerbated already profound inequalities and led to the creation of new inequalities. It has led to the feminisation of precarious employment, (poor working conditions, low wages, unsustainable perspectives) intensified exploitation of women's unpaid work in the caring economy and has undermined the livelihood strategies of poor women, including migrant women, in all areas of the world. WIDE appeals for a rethinking of the structural inequities on which these policies are based. We question the concept of progressive trade liberalisation as a "one-size-fits-all" recipe for development. We cannot afford the prioritisation of market access over development goals, nor the false division between social and economic policies. WIDE contests the current neo liberal economic regime which promotes EU's self-interest at the expense of women and men in the South.

WIDE does not support the "aid for trade" policies promoted by the EU alongside the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These policies promote the making of loans only in order to fund the adjustments required to facilitate trade liberalisation. As feminists and economic and social justice advocates, we believe that Official Development Assistance should not be linked with conditionalities. We also strongly oppose the approaches that aim to 'add women in' to the liberalisation process as 'beneficiaries' without questioning underlying structural inequities.

The time has come to change EU trade policies. They must be constrained and bound by existing international agreements that promote human rights and women's rights, ecological sustainability, human dignity and they must aim to end poverty and promote well-being. EU trade policies can no longer be dictated by the interests of EU corporations. Current WTO negotiations should not undermine EU commitments to implement the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action agreed at the Fourth World Conference on Women or the realisation of gender equality and women's human rights as enshrined in the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

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Globalising gender equality and social justice

WIDE calls therefore EU trade ministers, Member of the European Parliament and the European Commission to:

- **Ensure access to essential services for women and men.** The EU should stop pushing in the General Agreement on Trade in Services negotiations its proposal for “Complementary Approaches” which by setting quantitative as well as qualitative targets is a paradigm shift from the concept of flexibility to an approach of coercion within the GATS. Nor should the EU push for the Bolkestein Directive within the EU. Essential services such as water, education, health should be excluded from the GATS negotiations.
- **Recognise and guarantee government’s policy space and flexibilities by halting the NAMA negotiations and drop reciprocity demands in the EPA negotiations.** Governments should have the right to use policy tools, including trade measures that preserve government’s policy space to:
 - Develop fair and sustainable economies that contribute to women’s empowerment;
 - Protect and promote employment, social welfare, health for women and men and the environment;
 - Promote sustainable conservation and the sustainable management of all resources.
- **Ensure people’s food sovereignty.** The EU should respect the right of developing countries to develop and implement agricultural policies that guarantee food security and strengthen domestic agricultural markets, most particularly those where small-scale farmers trade their products. We therefore call on the EU to remove agriculture from the WTO.
- **Ensure that Official Development Assistance is not linked to any conditionality.**
- **Complete systematic public impact assessments of the development, social, environmental and gender impact of trade negotiations before proceeding to the next phases of negotiations.** Such assessment should involve civil society and more specifically women’s organisations from both Europe and countries of the South, which the EU is targeting. Rather than being considered simply as flanking measures, which has been EU practice with other impact assessments, these assessments should inform and also influence EU policy changes.

Celebrating its 20th anniversary WIDE is a European women’s network whose main activities are lobbying, advocacy and awareness raising; networking and capacity building on global trade agenda, macro-economic policy, gender and development policy and women’s human rights.

WIDE is a member of the Seattle to Brussels Network, the International Gender and Trade Network and the Our World Is Not For Sale Network.

Visit the WIDE website: www.wide-network.org

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