

Thinking Beyond Borders: Global Networks of Resistance and the WTO's Doha Round of Trade Negotiations

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Since the World Trade Organization (WTO) ministerial meeting in Seattle in 1999 social movements and non governmental organizations (NGOs) have seen the need to create global networks to oppose and challenge international trade agreements and organizations like the WTO. This effort has included participation in various alternative assemblies, official meetings of international governmental organizations, and, since 2001, in the World Social Forum, particularly in the years prior to the major bi-annual ministerial meetings of the WTO during the Doha Round of international trade negotiations. Trade has been a theme for workshops, panels and events at the World Social Forum since the launching of the Doha Round of WTO trade negotiations in the fall of 2001. This paper examines the activities and efforts of this global network to educate, mobilize and coordinate opposition to neo-liberal trade agreements focusing, in particular, on the meetings of the WSF in 2003, 2005 in Porto Alegre, Brazil and 2007 in Nairobi, as well as at a number of regional social forums. The paper argues that in the wake of earlier formation of networks and contentious actions to challenge trade agreements, social forums have also come to play an important role in providing a space for educating and raising awareness about neo-liberal trade agreements. Their addition provides an autonomous and diverse space for activists to share specific strategy and tactics of opposition to neo-liberal trade agreements, as well as providing an opportunity to define alternative visions of the global economy.

The paper begins with a brief outline of the development in the 1990s of the transnational campaign of resistance to neo-liberal trade agreements which emerged in the wake of the struggle over the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI). It shows how that network has broadened and deepened over time and profiles some of the key actors within it. It also notes some of the key areas of division. It then briefly discusses the emergence of the WSF in 2001 and how it links to this network.

The second section looks at the more instrumental role the WSF has played for trade networks in 2003 and 2005 as a venue to educate and mobilize activists for the upcoming WTO ministerials in Cancun Mexico and Hong Kong, as well as against regional trade negotiations such as the Free Trade Area of the America (FTAA). The third section outlines the continuing challenge of powerful actors promoting neo-liberalism which are capable of shifting venues and scales in their efforts to push forward their trade agendas, especially the US and the European Union and their post Cancún push for bilateral and regional agreements (as seen in CAFTA, the FTAA, European Partnership Agreements). The fourth section shows how social forums were used by transnational trade networks to respond to this shift and the challenges posed through a case study of the 2007 WSF in Nairobi and the resistance to the so-called European Partnership Agreements (EPAs) where developing countries formed a central focus of trade activism. The fifth

section examines how regional and national forums, using the case of the US Social Forum in 2007, have also provided space for activists to continue their struggles against bilateral and regional trade agreements. The final section of the paper argues that the social forum process has facilitated and helped networks bridge divides of North-South, global and local, and those between radical and more reformist approaches to international trade issues and to tactics of opposition. The more regional, local elements reflected in Nairobi and Atlanta, the paper argues, are very much part of an ongoing process of opposition which the shift to bilateral and regional trade agreements on the part of proponents of neo-liberalism has necessitated. The key question of course is ultimately what difference has it all made? The conclusion offers some preliminary comments on this big question.

Transnational Resistance from Paris to Porto Alegre

Transnational resistance to neo-liberalism did not begin, to be sure, with the campaign against the MAI in the mid 1990s. Transnational campaigns themselves have long histories. Campaigns challenging neo-liberalism have their roots in the backlash against the aggressive efforts of various states and international organizations to push a pro-corporate agenda which would imbed a set of policies known as the Washington consensus into the rules of the international system as well as into national regulatory regimes in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Among the early transnational campaigns of opposition to neo-liberalism were those of environmental and development organizations against the World Bank and the IMF.

Many of these campaigns took the form of transnational networks. The past decade has seen much discussion and debate, especially in the field of sociology, around defining and measuring networks. This paper uses a simple definition provided by Keck and Sikkink in their seminal work *Activist Across Borders* which identified this phenomenon and defined networks as "relevant actors working internationally on an issue, who are bound together by shared values, a common discourse, and dense exchanges of information and services" (Keck and Sikkink 1998: 2) The network which developed around opposition to the World Bank and the IMF was followed in the later 1990s and linked to one which developed around a controversial investment agreement, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI).

The MAI campaign, which emerged in 1997, had its roots too in earlier national trade campaigns. However, what makes it important and innovative is the extent to which it involved cooperation among NGOs and movements in both the North and the South, the way in which new communications technology was used and how it raised awareness about the broader implications of trade and investment agreements for social justice. In addition it highlighted the need to counter such agreements through broader transnational campaigns involving an array of tactics, including more contentious ones. Thus the development of the anti-MAI network and the way in which it evolved into a broader campaign of resistance to trade liberalization merits some discussion.

Despite being an effort to launch negotiations on an investment agreement among its 28, largely developed member states, the MAI negotiations at the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) launched in Paris in 1995 had direct links to the conclusion of a seven-year process of trade negotiations under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) which had been launched after aggressive pressure on trading partners by powerful actors, such as the US, in 1986. This Final Act of the GATT was the culmination of seven years of fractious negotiations and resulted in major changes in the international system of trade rules as it broadened the trade agenda to include agriculture, trade in intellectual property (TRIPs), Trade-Related Investment Measures (TRIMs) and a

general agreements on trade in services (GATs). The long and difficult negotiations also created a new organization, the WTO, with stronger capacity to ensure the enforcement of trade rules and an agenda to continue “built-in” negotiations toward further liberalization in a number of areas.

In the case of investment rules major actors, such as the United States and the European Union, had see-sawed back and forth between regional and broader multilateral trade negotiation venues in their efforts to advance their agenda, much of which involved ensuring market access and protection of the interests of their major corporate investors. Tough rules, for example, on protecting the interests of foreign investment and limiting state regulation of investment had been negotiated into the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA). The US ultimately sought to imbed these same rules in trade agreements in the Americas and eventually at the WTO. However, strong opposition from a number of developing countries at the GATT had convinced the United States that a precedent setting agreement at the OECD with its smaller number of mostly developed countries was more likely. Given that many OECD member countries already afforded extensive market access and strong protection to foreign investors the US motives clearly went beyond the OECD countries. Unlike multilateral negotiations at the WTO which provided the potential risk that developing-country coalitions might emerge in opposition to investment rules an OECD agreement, once achieved, would define a strong standard which could then be imposed using strong pressure on individual developing countries in bilateral negotiations.

In contrast the European Union, Japan and Canada clearly preferred to negotiate such rules at the WTO hoping to launch a new round of trade negotiations that would build on, or extend, the more limited existing rules (TRIMs). New stronger rules would be enforceable through the strengthened WTO dispute resolution mechanism which they saw as an advantage. Yet the efforts of the EU and its allies to push for these negotiations at the newly-created WTO’s first ministerial meeting in Singapore in 1995 were stymied by continued developing-country opposition. Despite that defeat they continued over the next eight years to argue in various bodies and working groups at the WTO for negotiations on investment and a number of other issues. (Smythe, 2006)

One result of the strong push for global economic liberalization in the 1980s through bilateral and multilateral trade agreements had been the mobilization of domestic opposition in countries like Canada in the 1980s where a national campaign to stop a free trade agreement with the United States developed. Despite the signing of a bilateral free trade agreement with Canada in 1987 which the coalition failed to stop the US continued to push for further liberalization on issues such as investment and market access to culturally sensitive industries in Canada. The move to negotiate an agreement with Mexico forced both Canadian and American opponents to link up with their Mexican counterparts and begin to define a critique of globalization and neo-liberalism. Such were the roots of the International Forum on Globalization (IFG) in 1993 which brought together a number of organizations and individuals from the North and the South who were later to play key roles in various campaigns (Reitan, 166).

The relentless US push for negotiations at the OECD on investment, within the Americas on trade and investment liberalization, and in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) made Canadian opponents of further integration with the United States realize they had no choice but to continue their campaign and broaden their links to include opponents of such agreements in Latin America and Asia. Similarly organizations

based in the global south, such as Third World Network (TWN), a Malaysian -based think tank founded in 1984, which now has offices across the global south as well as in Geneva, (Couette, 7) had closely monitored the efforts to push investment rules at the WTO and were watching developments at the OECD on investment with great concern. They played a key role in alerting North American opponents of neo-liberalism to the implications of the negotiations at the OECD. The result was a transnational campaign which merged national campaigns of opposition with transnational ones and involved a broad array of organizations from national public policy advocacy organizations to arts, cultural, environmental and development organizations, along with churches. The loose network which formed used the Internet to quickly share intelligence and information, including a leaked draft copy of the MAI being negotiated at the OECD, accompanied, more importantly, a detailed analysis of its implications.

When France withdrew from the MAI negotiations in 1998 after strong domestic opposition the OECD negotiations collapsed. It did not mean, however, the end of this transnational campaign, since, as most opponents of the OECD negotiations had already realized, pressure would simply resume to negotiate these rules somewhere else, either at the WTO (the EU preference), or in other regional and bilateral negotiating forums (the US preference). The ministerial meeting of the WTO at the end of November 1999 in Seattle thus included an attempt to launch new negotiations on an expanded agenda, the so-called “Millennium Round” which would include investment rules. The opposition to negotiations in Seattle, however, like other opposition to neo-liberalism which was emerging globally, saw the increasing use of more contentious forms of direct action and the emergence in this case of alternative media (Reitan). While opposition had been growing globally its dramatic eruption before the cameras in the streets of Seattle also ensured that mainstream media and, thus a broader global public, would become increasingly aware of, and more attentive to, these issues.

The formation of the campaign against the Millennium Round did not mean that all activists agreed on what the goal was or how to reform trade rules. There were divisions between those seeking to reform, or abolish, the WTO and between those who sought stronger labour and environmental protections imbedded in trade rules and those who feared they would be used to protect markets in the North from lower cost products in the south. Others disagreed about tactics of opposition and the role that direct action, confrontation that might lead to violence, and attacks on property should, or should not, play in resistance to neo-liberalism. Despite divisions on a number of issues the Seattle campaign managed to bridge them for example, with a common website for both those seeking to reform and those seeking to abolish the WTO (people for fair trade and STOP WTO, Reitan 172) and many meetings and strategy sessions where common positions could be articulated. For example, rather than addressing the merits of reform or abolition of the WTO groups unveiled a civil society declaration on Nov 29 “No New Round, Turn Around” referring to opposition to the new millennium round of negotiations discussed above. The statement focused on the push “for further liberalization through the introduction of new issues for adoption in the WTO”. It made its opposition to further liberalization clear and called for a moratorium on “further negotiations that would expand the scope and power of the WTO” (No New Round, 1999). Signed by over 1000 civil society organizations in 73 countries the declaration became one of the many ways in which groups in the network articulated broad positions.

A variety of responses to the emergence of these campaigns of opposition occurred at the global and national level on the part of decision-makers. These included consultations on the part of national trade negotiators with an expanded range of domestic stakeholders and some increased transparency, although limited in important ways (Smith and Smythe 2003). Consultations were structured and framed by the trade officials and reflected assumptions favouring neo-liberal globalization. Often very exclusive, with participants picked by officials, and viewed by them as opportunities to sell the merits of trade agreements consultations rarely had a major direct impact on policy.

Organizations like the WTO also began to modestly increase the transparency of their activities, through their website, and increased public relations type of activities (Smith and Smythe, 2003) These included an annual symposium designed to bring together negotiators and NGOs and more regular briefings of interested parties on the progress or state of trade negotiations. The post Seattle response, reinforced by the events of 9/11, was also characterized by stronger efforts on the part of governments and WTO officials to insulate global and regional trade negotiating venues from the kinds of direct actions and protests which opponents had been using very effectively to disrupt negotiations. Not surprisingly this approach included stronger and rather indiscriminate physical coercion.

Many of the key groups active in Seattle became part of the regular network that attended the annual WTO-sponsored NGO meeting. The first of these meetings was held in 2001 in Geneva. NGOs were clearly expected to sit politely through briefings and speeches of trade officials and various academics and limit themselves to posing polite questions from the floor. But Martin Khor of the Third World Network rose (author's notes) to denounce the symposium and the limited and largely shallow efforts to engage civil society with another sign-on declaration entitled "Our World is Not for Sale: Sink or Shrink!" This declaration of solidarity of opposition to an expanded trade agenda became formalized via the creation of the website, Our World Is Not for Sale. (OWINFS.org). That point also saw the development of increased civil society capacity to monitor trade negotiations, analyze very technical aspects of these negotiations and put them in a language that activists could understand. Several key organizations in the network, such as Third World Network and the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy (IATP), had full time staff in Geneva monitoring WTO developments. Organizations like the International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development (ICTSD), founded by several NGOs, began producing regular weekly and monthly bulletins such as *Bridges* which are widely available via the internet to thousands of activists globally. These networks recognized that complex implications of trade agreements needed to be communicated in a meaningful way. As important however, was the need for the local impacts and implications to be understood both by transnational campaigners and activists at the local level.

"Our World is not for Sale" (OWINFS) describes the network as:

a loose grouping of organizations, activists and social movements worldwide fighting the current model of corporate globalization embodied in the global trading system. OWINFS is committed to a sustainable, socially just, democratic and accountable multilateral trading system.

There is no formal network "staff"—rather member groups volunteer to carry

out agreed upon tasks. A strength of the network is that individual movements and organizations can work together where it is strategic and helps advance their initiatives, and are free to dedicate as much or as little time to the network as makes sense for them in order to meet their objectives.”
(www.ourworldisnotforsale.org downloaded January 10).

Contact and coordination is done via conference calls, e-mail, and face-to-face meetings at strategy sessions just prior to WTO annual NGO symposium, ministerial meetings and venues such as the WSF. Decisions are made by consensus.

Despite the formation of the network there have continued to be divisions among trade activists and organizations within the network especially around the issue of reforming trade rules as they relate to agriculture. This division flared up not long after the network was formed and involved one of the largest, well funded NGOs, Oxfam and its Make Trade Fair Campaign launched in 2002. The campaign was spearheaded by the release of the ‘Rigged rules and double Standards’ report which reflected a view that the promotion of trade is a key means to poverty reduction and that reform of trade rules especially in the area of agriculture, in terms of better market access and subsidy reductions, were key. The publicity around its slogan of ‘Make Trade Fair’ the recruitment of pop stars sporting the logo and T-shirts were viewed by critics skeptically and some in the trade network were clearly concerned at

the strong reformist connotations whereby trade can be made more fair and equitable within the current institutional framework ...which makes it susceptible to complicity with the institutions at the helm of advanced liberal initiatives, including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the World Bank. (Ilcan and Lacey, 208.)

As such it was short on more radical alternatives to challenge neo-liberalism such as re-localization, reflected in the call of peasant organizations like Via Campesina for food sovereignty, or for more south-south trade. Major activists in the OWINFS network, such as Walden Bello of FSG and Vandana Shiva, wrote critical articles about the report and its ‘schizophrenic analysis’, as it attempted to reconcile two incompatible paradigms: ‘one which gives precedence to people’s democracy, another which gives precedence to trade, commerce, markets’. (Shiva as quoted in Ilcan and Lacey) Meanwhile the mainstream press gleefully reported that “Oxfam Backs Globalization”(Blustein). Despite these differences the network has persevered and organizations have continued to work together on common campaigns around areas of consensus.

More recently the broader concept of food sovereignty has been integrated into the demands of the OWINFS coalition as the latest version of the joint declaration of indicates:

- We believe that the development of food sovereignty, food security and peasant- and family farmer-based sustainable agriculture requires governments to acknowledge the flaws in the “free market” principles that underpin perceived comparative advantage, export-led agricultural development and “structural adjustment” policies; and replace those policies with ones that **prioritize and protect local, subsistence and sustainable production, including use of import controls and regulation that ensure more equitable sustainable production**

methods.

The coalition statement goes on to suggest a convention on food sovereignty and sustainable agriculture, and challenges the WTO focus on trade liberalization at all costs, arguing that governments have a right to define the food and agriculture policies of their countries.

One of the spaces where the sustaining and broadening of OWINFS network has been made possible is through the World Social Forum.

The WSF and the Organization of Resistance to Trade Agreements

In parallel with the development of a transnational network on trade a group of Brazilian organizations had developed a proposal to counter the neo-liberal agenda embodied in the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum with a world social forum. The idea was discussed with Bernard Cassen of ATTAC, one of the French organizations which had developed out of the MAI struggle. His enthusiastic support led to a meeting of eight Brazilian organizations planning the first WSF and a subsequent meeting of a delegation of the Brazilians with a number of organizations which were involved in an alternative parallel summit to the UNs Copenhagen +5 meeting in Geneva in June 2000. Out of that meeting an International Committee was created. It was this committee which approved the Charter of Principles of the WSF in 2001 as

an open meeting place for reflective thinking, democratic debate of ideas, formulation of proposals, free exchange of experiences and interlinking for effective action, by groups and movements of civil society that are opposed to neoliberalism and domination of the world by capital and any form of imperialism....

The World Social Forum is a plural, diversified, non-confessional, non-governmental and non-party context that, in a decentralized fashion, interrelates organizations and movements. (WSF Charter of Principles)

Designed to be inclusive, diverse, and more horizontal in structure the WSF would include both social movements and NGOs. Since its inception the WSF has had a strong presence of organizations involved in the transnational network challenging the WTO on its International Council and strong financial support from some of the largest such as Oxfam International/Novib. There is much overlap between the IFG, the OWINFS network and the composition of the International Council.

The development of the WSF coincides with the launching of the Doha Round of trade negotiations later in 2001 and if we examine the composition of the programs of the WSF over the years the presence of these organizations is also evident. In an analysis of the program of self organized events at the WSF in Mumbai in 2004 Anheier and Katz noted the salience of trade as an issue in the three networks they identify (220). The level of involvement of trade activists in the social forum process suggests that it has provided or facilitated the development of their network and campaigns. The WSF and regional and local forums have facilitated the following:

1. networking- developing, extending and maintaining transnational networks, bridging geographic distances, North-south divides and reform and resistance perspectives.
2. Defining and developing common strategies
3. Developing common frames which link trade and investment agreements to broader questions of social justice, development and democracy.
4. Educating and mobilizing from the global to the local or regional level and from the local to the global on the impacts of neo-liberal trade agreements through testimonials on the local impact of trade agreements
5. Sharing information, experiences and best practices of resistance
6. Defining alternative visions of trade agreements or global economic interchanges

As a consequence the WSF has facilitated the work of transnational networks of resistance and helped them to address the challenges of the shifting scales and strategies of proponents of neo-liberalism. The following provides a case study of how the WSF has specifically facilitated mobilization against the WTO.

A tale of Two Forums: Porto Alegre 2003 and 2005

We begin with an examination of two world social forums held in Porto Alegre in 2003 and 2005 which preceded key WTO ministerial meetings in September 2003 and Hong Kong in November 2005. The 2003 WTO ministerial meeting was particularly crucial to the advocates of a further broadening of the trade liberalization agenda. Strong US and EU pressure on developing countries had succeeded in Doha in forging an agreement to launch a new round of trade negotiations in 2001. But some developing country resistance led by India resulted in a failure at that meeting to agree on adding investment and a number of other issues to the negotiating agenda. A critical decision was to be made in Cancún about adding these so-called “Singapore” issues¹ to the agenda. Mexico, a strong ally of the US and Canada in their efforts to embody NAFTA-inspired rules in the FTAA, was also seen as a site of potential popular opposition given the negative impact of neo-liberalism reflected in the devastation of the peasant agriculture sector. Activists worldwide had also drawn inspiration from the uprising in Chiapas on the day NAFTA came into effect and the ongoing struggle of the Zapatistas.

The WSF in 2003 had a number of workshops and events dealing with trade issues not surprising given that in 2003 a number of major events connected to the negotiation of trade agreements were being held. The first was the WTO ministerial to be held in Cancún and hosted by the government of Mexico between September 10-13 2003, followed shortly thereafter by a summit of the Americas in Miami Florida in November. Several panels at the WSF dealt with the FTAA (ALCA in Spanish) focused on the upcoming trade ministers meeting and the Summit of the Americas in the fall of 2003. Some also focused on testimonials dealing with the devastating impact of NAFTA (2 panels), especially on Mexican farmers.

The OWINFS network sponsored six panels, several of which dealt with trade issues and “the road to Cancún”. A major panel of the same title brought together the key actors and spokespersons from the OWINFS network including Lori Wallach of Public Citizen, Martin Khor of TWN, as well as representatives of US labor from the AFL/CIO and Via Campesina. Oxfam also provided a representative, Muthoni Murui, from Senegal. Notable also was the presence of Ivan Palanco of the Mobilization Committee Towards Cancún from

Mexico. This and other panels and workshops conveyed consistent messages and were designed to achieve a number of goals for the OWINFS campaign. The first was to inform activists about the significance of the WTO meeting in Cancún. Trade issues are often highly technical and difficult to convey simply. These panels provided an opportunity to explain the key issues facing the WTO and how at the Cancún meeting representatives of member countries would take a final decision on expanding the negotiating round to include the “Singapore Issues” discussed above –the most controversial of which was investment. The panels also outlined the nature of the WTO decision making process, its lack of transparency, and what activists argued were its undemocratic practices. However, in order to bridge the divisions around whether reform or abolition of the WTO was the answer the discussion centered more on the need to stop the further expansion of the WTO’s agenda. The panels also addressed regional and multilateral trade agreements and showed the linkages among them. Testimonials on the negative impact of NAFTA, particularly in Mexico, were linked to the FTAA and the WTO in order to bring home to activists at the WSF the real and concrete impacts that an FTAA modeled, for example, on NAFTA, would have on them. The connection to the local was reflected as well in the repeated emphasis on the key role of Brazil at both the FTAA negotiations and the WTO and the need to maintain pressure on the Lula government. Finally the call for a large mobilization of activists on the ground in Cancún was made. The People’s Assembly made such a call on the final day.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) and a proliferation of regional and bilateral trade agreements, such as the Africa Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and the proposed Central America free trade agreements, are used by multinational corporations to promote their interests, to dominate and control our economies and to impose a development model which impoverishes our societies.

In the coming year, our campaigns, against the WTO, the FTAA and trade liberalisation will grow in size and scope. We will campaign to stop and reverse liberalisation of agriculture, water, energy, public services and investment.

We are in solidarity with the Mexican agriculturists who say —el campo no aguanta mas (the fields are fed up) and in the spirit of their struggles we will mobilise locally, nationally and internationally to derail the WTO and the FTAA. We support the worldwide movement to fight for food sovereignty and against neo-liberal models of agriculture, food production and distribution.

In particular, we will organise mass protests around the world during the fifth ministerial meeting of the WTO in Cancún, Mexico, in September 2003 and during the ministerial meeting of the FTAA in Miami, USA, in October. (5.2 CALL OF THE WORLD SOCIAL MOVEMENTS PORTO ALEGRE, BRAZIL, JANUARY 27, 2003)

This is not to suggest that the WSF was the only venue where coordination had occurred. In fact members of the network had met in Mexico City November 15and 16 and in Oslo Norway in December 2002 to intensify collaboration and define a strategy. The meeting at the WSF provided quite clearly, however, an opportunity to reach out to a range

of groups, especially in Latin America and raise awareness of the importance of the Cancún meeting and how it linked to regional struggles against other trade agreements.

At the Cancún meeting itself the trade activists coordinated their actions inside and outside the venue of negotiations daily. (Danaher and Mark). While activists from the network having credentials were permitted inside the venue (though excluded from the meeting rooms) where they could lobby negotiators and talk to media, activists outside the fenced off venue could continue with protests and demonstrations. A range of groups were in the streets with large contingents of Mexican and Korean farmers who had seen their livelihoods destroyed by trade agreements. Most dramatic and tragic was the suicide of a Korean peasant farm leader.

The WTO meeting in Cancún ended suddenly and unexpectedly amid confusion and the rather dramatic development of new coalitions of developing country members around agriculture and the Singapore issues. The lead up to Cancún had seen the formation of the Group of 20 led by some of the largest developing countries including India and Brazil pushing for more aggressive reductions in agricultural subsidies than the US and EU were offering (Taylor). In addition a coalition of African and least developed countries and the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries who formed part of a trade agreement with the EU, had banded together. Dubbed the G90 they strongly opposed the EU (along with Japan and Korea) push for negotiations on the Singapore issues. When these issues showed up in September 12 draft version of the ministerial declaration they prepared to walk out. Despite an EU retreat the continued insistence of the Japanese and Korean delegates that negotiations be launched on these issues caused the Mexican minister chairing the meeting to declare an impasse and adjourned it. Both the EU and the United States negotiators seemed shocked and then very angry. Both the US Trade Representative Zoellick and the EU Trade Commissioner Lamy made it clear that those who had obstructed their agendas would be dealt with.

The intentions of both the EU and the US became fairly clear over the coming months and included concerted efforts to split developing-country coalitions at the WTO. The US also began to push even more aggressively for bilateral or regional trade agreements to achieve their goals, a practice they had adopted in the past. Over the following winter and spring efforts were made to re-start negotiations by abandoning the traditional model whereby the EU, US, Japan and Canada (the Quad) had forged the basis of trade deals behind closed doors at the WTO. The new approach involving the EU, US, Brazil and India, along with Australia, the so-called Five Interested Parties (IP) and a lot of intensive bargaining in Geneva resulted in late July 2004 in a new framework to re-launch negotiations with the Singapore issues, by and large, now off the table.

For trade activists this presented both challenges and opportunities. The development of a more assertive group of developing countries suggested stronger resistance to some aspects of the neo-liberal agenda but also meant that there would be much complex maneuvering among negotiators in Geneva behind closed doors. The consensus of July 31 also meant however, that there would be another high profile ministerial meeting in Hong Kong in December 2005. It is in fact at those meetings where NGOs have access to negotiators and media. The WSF meeting in Porto Alegre thus provided the opportunity for networks of trade activists to share knowledge and understanding of what had transpired at the WTO, to organize in opposition to the ministerial meeting and most importantly, given the location of the Ministerial, to strengthen linkages with southeast Asian activists,

particularly militants from Korea and Hong Kong. For Southeast Asian activists the WSF provided an opportunity to be directly involved in workshops and actively encourage many western hemisphere groups and organizations to come to Hong Kong.

Porto Alegre and the Road to Hong Kong

With the return of the WSF to Porto Alegre after a successful meeting the year before in Mumbai India came a new methodology of developing the program. In July 2005 the IC launched a consultation process in which more than 1800 organizations participated online and offline to provide a means by which participating organizations could interact and convey their opinion on what debates, issues, and themes they wanted included in WSF. Based on the consultation process 11 themes emerged which served as a basis for organizing the more than 2500 Forum activities. Each of the themes was given a letter label and a physical space in the newly created site along the river. The third theme was “peace, demilitarization and the struggle against war, free trade and debt.” Thus all the activities around issues of trade and debt were within one area of the venue facilitating interactions among activists and organizations involved in various aspects of these campaigns. On the other hand it did mean that the distance from venues for themes such as diversity and communications were great. The resulting program included a large number of trade workshops and panels too numerous to detail here. What is described below draws on the author’s participant observations of eight of these three-hour events, all of them sponsored or organized by the OWISNFS network, its key members and/or regional and local partners.

These events were designed to achieve several goals. The first was to inform activists about the events since Cancún and in particular the implications of the July framework and the re-start of negotiations. This activity of analysis and interpretation of complex trade negotiations and agreements has been an important aspect of the work of a number of organizations that form part of the international networks. A number of these organizations have analysts in Geneva (TWN, IATP, IGTN) or nearby in Europe (TNI) and provide regular, detailed and comprehensible analyses that are forwarded through listservs and reproduced on websites to be widely disseminated. The advantage of the WSF as a venue to share this information is that it can link to the experiences and campaigns of local activists from various regions and, in turn, the analysts can receive input about what is happening in these regions. Not surprisingly two workshops on the first day of forum activities, January 27, “Outcome and implications of the July Framework Agreement” (OWINFS), and “Plans for the WTO Ministerial in Hong Kong” (IGTN) dealt with interpreting the meaning of the recent developments in Geneva.

The second key goal was to mobilize activists in opposition to the ministerial meeting and further liberalization either within their own country or at the venue of the ministerial meeting itself. The mobilization of resistance in Hong Kong itself was reflected in a number of activities including the IGTN event listed above and the culminating OWINFS session on January 30 called “Mapping the Road to Hong Kong” which involved a fairly detailed discussion of strategy for Hong Kong and included representatives of the Hong Kong People’s Alliance on the WTO. The representatives of this network of 22 groups in Hong Kong provided information on the situation in Hong Kong, details on the site venue for the ministerial and issued a call for other trade activists to form an International Coordinating Network which would meet in February 2005 in Hong Kong to plan the coordination of events both in and outside of Hong Kong. The session was carefully planned to move from the broader international issues and an update on WTO developments in Geneva to the more

specific actions and events in Hong Kong. As Walden Bello of Focus on the Global South, made clear the goal was to “prevent a consensus from emerging at the (WTO) meeting” and ensuring that our national governments “don’t make concessions” (author’s notes). As December approaches, he pointed out, attention will shift to Hong Kong and there “we must coordinate with our friends in Hong Kong creating conditions for mass mobilization in the street.”

The WSF provides opportunities as well to address one of the challenges of those seeking to resist trade agreements face. That is the plethora of bilateral and regional agreements and the need to pressure national governments which are the key decision makers within the WTO process. That leads to a need to coordinate local campaigns, cooperate where possible regionally, and, in some cases, share experiences. The WSF provides many opportunities for activist to do this as reflected in the Plenary of Social Movements Against Free Trade where a range of groups from Mexico to Korea were able to outline their campaigns of resistance to neo-liberal trade agreements. In addition a subsequent session outlined the Global Week of Action on trade to be held April 10-16, 2005. The plan to have a week of events worldwide, but locally organized had originated with a group of 100 trade activists who had met in Delhi in 2003. The idea was then brought to the WSF in Mumbai and publicized widely at the WSF in 2005. At the sessions in Porto Alegre activists from various countries shared their plans and proposals for the week of action. The date, in this case, was deliberately chosen not to coincide with or be driven by an agenda of trade meetings but to provide a time and space chosen by activists themselves.

The emergence of the G20 coalition at the WTO and the efforts of the EU and the US to split them and give a privileged role in the inner circle of negotiators to Brazil and India means that these countries are now key players in the negotiations. The WSF in Porto Alegre provided an opportunity to raise concerns and mobilize local trade activists around both the broader campaign targeting the WTO ministerial but also in terms of their own government. There was a need then to raise local awareness about the role of countries like Brazil in the negotiations and the need to maintain pressure on the Lula government. FSG and a number of regional North and South American organizations such as the Hemispheric Social Alliance organized a session on January 29 with this purpose in mind. “The G20 What Achievements and Whose Interests?” included two WTO negotiators- one from Brazil and the other from Bangladesh- who debated with critics from groups such as Action Aid. The Brazilian negotiator in particular tried to justify his country’s positions and re-assure critics that developing countries were better off in forging multilateral trade agreements and that, while being part of the IP, Brazil did still consult with, and represent, the interests of the G20. The audience questions and comments made clear to him the local concerns about the Lula government’s attitude to neo-liberalism, its relations with agri-business and the lack of Congressional or civil society input into negotiations.

The World Social Forum has also been about defining and articulating alternatives to neo-liberalism. The International Forum on Globalization has profiled its proposals in its 2002 publication of *Alternatives to Economic Globalization: A Better World is Possible*,² at the WSF and sought feedback for subsequent editions and updates. Similarly the Hemispheric Social Alliance, as part of its efforts to challenge neo-liberal trade agreements such as NAFTA and the proposed FTAA articulated in 2002 *Alternatives for the Americas*. It provides a broad set of principles and outlines an alternative vision which would allow national government more policy space to best meet their development and social needs. The

2005 WSF also had a number of events designed to address the question of alternatives. OWINFS held a workshop on January 30 designed to address “Alternatives to Neo-Liberal Globalization” The FOE representative who led the workshop identified the need to do less “fire-fighting” at WTO ministerials and more defining of what trade activists want and outlined a set of ideas coming out of a conference in Bangkok in 2004. Speakers from the Polaris Institute and Public Services International outlined visions of what should or should not be in trade agreements and via breakout groups involved the workshop participants in identifying what they thought the limits and scope of trade agreements should be.

The 2005 WSF included far more events and sessions that addressed regional and global trade issues than those outlined above. Many of these focused on more specific aspects of trade agreements, such as the services negotiations under the GATs at the WTO, or broader concepts such as food sovereignty which have implications for trade agreements. However, the discussion of the sessions described above are indicative of the way in which the WSF has provided a space to strengthen, broaden and coordinate trade campaigns at all levels be they local, regional or global. These efforts have had to continue as the attempts to complete the Doha Round of WTO negotiations continued to move, albeit very slowly, forward. Moreover the efforts of the United States and the European Union to advance their trade interests through regional and bilateral agreements has continued so activists have had no choice but to continue their campaigns.

The WTO ministerial in Hong Kong was met as have been so many other ministerials with concerted opposition on the part of trade activists. As in Cancún the Hong Kong venue for the meetings December 13-16 was surrounded by fences and barricades. NGOs with credentials continued their activities inside the Convention centre often coordinating with the activists out in the streets. In the case of Hong Kong, as Global Exchange reported:

workers, farmers, environmentalists, students, health activists, and other human rights advocates came from countries as far-flung as South Korea, the US, Kenya, Brazil, the Philippines, France, South Africa, and Indonesia to manifest their overwhelming opposition to this institution. (James)

Korean activists, as they had in Cancún, came out in force and over 1500 of them engaged in colorful and dramatic protests, at several points almost breaching the barricades. Over 1000 protestors were arrested but most were ultimately released. Inside the convention center division, coercion and manipulation of delegates, according to critics, marked the proceedings. Even the new WTO Secretary-General and former EU Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy admitted it had only moved the WTO from 55 to 60 per cent completion of the Doha Agenda. An achievement, the *Economist* derided as an “expensive experiment in sleep deprivation” (Smythe, 2007). Most of the major achievements touted as pro-development have been dismissed as less than meets the eye. Since that time the negotiations at the WTO have faced breakdown, re-starts and stumbles while the momentum slows with the looming US election. Nonetheless efforts on other fronts to embody neo-liberal trade rules in bilateral and regional agreements have continued. Social forums have continued to provide space to articulate and organize resistance to them. The following section examines two more recent social forums and the way in which they have reflected these efforts in seeking to resist the pressure of the European Union on African

countries to sign Economic Partnership Agreements or face the sudden loss of preferential access to EU markets and the United States bilateral trade agreements.

From Brussels to Nairobi : The Social Forums take on EPAs

Since the 1970s the European Union had had special trade arrangements with a group of countries in the south, many former colonies. By the 1990s these preferential trading arrangements had been found to be in violation of multilateral trade rules. In an effort to move toward compliance the European Commission (EC) had negotiated a series of agreements which were accorded a special waiver (exemption) from the WTO for the period of the agreement. The latest, the Cotonou Agreement, was due to expire at the end of 2007. With the failure in Cancún, the dropping of the Singapore issues, and the slowing momentum of multilateral negotiations, which the Hong Kong ministerial and the suspension of negotiations in Geneva in 2006 represented, the EC, many critics charge, has turned to using the deadline of expiration of the Cotonou Agreement to negotiate new Economic Partnerships Agreements (EPAs) with the 77 ACP countries. Given the adoption of a new aggressive policy to advance the EU's external economic competitiveness in October 2006 it looks to many as if the EC is using the EPAs to do an end run around the opposition of the G90 at the WTO to the EU's trade agenda. Within the EPA's, even to the dismay of some EU member countries, the:

EC also seeks investment liberalisation, guaranteed protection for European corporate property and increased 'intellectual property' rights, the opening up of ACP services sectors and government procurement (public tenders) to the operations of European companies, the imposition of inappropriate 'competition' rules and much else. (Keet, 5)

Negotiations had begun as early as 2002. Given that the majority of countries with over 90 per cent of the population of the ACP are African it is not surprising that Africa has been the centre of resistance to the EPA's. At the same time many of the countries involved are small with very vulnerable economies that would be devastated if access to EU markets were to change abruptly. The first network of resistance did emerge in Africa. The African Trade Network (itself linked to TWN) initiated a Stop EPA pan African campaign in December 2002. At the same time it was clear that EPA's could not be challenged without the cooperation of activists in the North. The Seattle to Brussels Network of civil society activists had developed in Europe in the wake of the Seattle WTO ministerial and was a logical partner in the struggle. In April 2004 European civil society groups, along with ACP groups, took a decision to actively participate in the campaign.

The growing challenge of resisting complex bilateral, regional and multilateral trade agreements was also recognized by many in the activist community. Even keeping track of developments on many trade fronts was challenging. In September 2004 the Asia-Pacific Research Network (which includes members of OWINFS) and the Spanish based research network Genetic Resources Action International (GRAIN) noted "the ongoing trend already evident, but accelerating with the collapse at Cancún ministerial, to push the neo-liberal agenda through bilateral trade agreements" and launched a new "website against bilateral free trade and investment agreements (www.bilaterals.org)

The European Social Forum (ESF) provided an opportunity to link the North and South campaigns against the EPA. At the ESF held in London 2004 the STOP EPA

European campaigners to held a strategy meeting and then publicly launched the European STOP EPA campaign. The ESF included a number of panels dealing with the EPAs which brought representatives of European groups together with African activists from organizations such as SEATINI and the African Trade Network. Panels provided a rough guide to EPAs, informed European activists about the campaigns in Africa and then examined how the EPA campaigns linked to other campaigns and allowed for the sharing of ideas and strategy.

A number of social forums in Africa and the polycentric WSF in Mali in 2006 also provided opportunities to strengthen the networks further and share experiences. With the looming EU deadline of the end of 2007 and growing pressure on the ACP countries it is not surprising that the World Social Forum in Nairobi in January 2007 provided a focal point for mobilizing resistance to the EPAs. There were literally hundreds of large and small sessions that addressed the issue of EPAs offered by groups such as the Africa Trade Network (ATN), EcoNews, Eastern African Farmers Federation, Friends of the Earth, Agency for Co-operation and Research in Development (Acord), Alianza Social Continental (Hemispheric Social Alliance) and the Greek Net for an Alternative Agricultural Policy, along with the OWINFS network and the Global Call to Action against poverty (GCAP). Many of these events provided an opportunity for experts on the negotiations such as Yosh Tandon from the South Centre in Geneva, Dot Keet from TNI, or Walden Bello from FSG to provide the big picture of how these agreements fit into the broader context of trade negotiations. But more importantly other panels provided a chance for Africans themselves to testify to the impact of neo-liberal policies and the potentially devastating impacts of these new agreements on their countries. Many were also able to share information about local anti-EPA campaigns. A number of sessions brought Europeans together with African activists to look at joint strategies. As TWN reported for some Europeans it was an eye-opener.

An Austrian Member of the European Parliament (MEP) at the Africa Trade Network's activity on the theme 'Stop-EPAs: Resist Europe's new colonial agenda' expressed shock at the depth and breadth of the EPAs and the arm-twisting tactics employed by the European Commission..(Obeng)

Such EU tactics have included divide and conquer strategies of dividing ACP countries into more vulnerable negotiating groups and using aid as a lever against some of the smallest and most impoverished countries. Most interesting as well was the presence at the WSF of the Hemispheric Social Alliance, seen by many as a model for European and African activists of how Northern and Southern activists could unite in opposition to trade agreements. The sessions also included exploration of alternative south-south regionalism and finally efforts to mobilize.

These culminated in a march to the headquarters of the European Union on January 24 where thousands of demonstrators confronted the EU representative and handed over a petition with 30,000 signatures calling for an EU-ACP partnership that will:

- Protect ACP producers in domestic and regional markets
- Be based on the principle of non-reciprocity, as instituted in the Generalised System of Preferences and special and differential treatment in the WTO;
- Reverse the pressure for trade and investment liberalisation; and Allow for the necessary policy space and support for ACP countries to pursue their own development strategies.

- Protect and enable the fulfilment of all human rights

Given that the EPAs do not take any of these concerns into consideration, and do not meet the development needs of ACP countries, we reiterate our call to stop the EPAs.

From the Global to the Local the USSF and the bilateral US trade agenda

Just as the WSF in Kenya regional forums in Europe have provided a means for activists from the North and the South to maintain and strengthen connections so the first United States Social Forum held in Atlanta June 28-July 1 provided an opportunity for American activists opposed to the many regional and bilateral agreements to link up with activists in the countries involved through many workshops and panels held during the USSF. Coming two years after a very tough battle in the United States Congress over the Central American Free Trade Agreement³ which narrowly passed the House of Representatives by 2 votes on July 28, 2005 the USSF provided a space for activists from both Central and South America and from Korea to bring home the need for US opponents of neo-liberalism to mobilize against further bilateral agreements that would, in the views of critics, further imbed neo-liberal policies. The CAFTA agreements in particular had been heavily criticized by a coalition of groups in the US and well-known intellectuals such as Joseph Stiglitz. The USSF provided a space to continue the struggle against pending agreements including ones with Peru, Colombia and Korea. Moreover Costa Rican activists were gearing up for a battle against their bilateral agreement in a referendum to be held in October 2007.

A number of panels and workshops dealing with bilateral trade issues, food sovereignty and continental migration were linked to the impact of regional and bilateral agreements. While a detailed discussion of all of the groups and organizations is not possible here the author's observations from several workshops provide some insights into how networks worked to link activists from both sides of these agreements at the forum to share information, strategize, coordinate campaigns. Most importantly for many of the southern activists, was the need to stiffen and strengthen resistance to these agreements on the part of US labour, often seen by their southern counterparts as too close to power. Panels such as the North and South United Against the FTAA and CAFTA allowed southern representatives from the Hemispheric Social Alliance to share their experiences and practices of mobilization gained from campaign of opposition to the FTAA in countries such as Costa Rica, Mexico and Brazil. Another panel Countering the Bilateral Free Trade Strategy: The Right to Sovereignty Under a Free Trade Regime involved bringing representatives of a Korean Womens Peasant Alliance together with peasants from Colombia, a small farmer from Missouri and the Imokalee Farms Workers in Florida to recount the impacts of neo-liberal policies and how they link together across the continents and relate their various strategies of a mobilization and action. Groups such as Korean Americans Against War and Neo-liberalism (KAWAN) and the Alliance for Responsible Trade (the broad US coalition which is partner in the HAS) were thus able to bring home to their American audience of activists a message about the impact of these agreements in their own countries and work to build alliances based on a broader social justice frame rather than one centered solely on job losses for US workers.

Providing space to educate audiences about the impact of agreements, sharing strategies and best practices and mobilizing citizens and groups to lobby, protest or even just send postcards to members of Congress does not in and of itself however indicate what the impact of these efforts has been. One of the great challenges to evaluate and assess the kinds of impacts the networks of resistance to trade agreements have had.

Conclusion

There are many dimensions along which we could assess the impact of transnational networks of resistance. One would be the success or failure of efforts to stop or to re-shape trade agreements. The defeat of the MAI and the premature ending of WTO ministerials in Seattle (1999) and Cancun (2003) can be countered with the successful launch of the Doha Round in Qatar in 2001 and the limited “success” of Hong Kong in 2005. The breakdown of WTO negotiations in 2005 was followed by a re-launch, another stall and now glacial movement. Yet even as the WTO process has slowed so the bilateral and regional proliferation of North-South agreements has accelerated. Even if we argue that there have been a number of major successes for resistance can we link them directly to the campaigns of the networks or are they based on some broader inter-state differences and the formation of new coalitions and an enlarged WTO membership?

Beyond counting successes and failures in terms of negotiations and agreements it is fair to claim, I would argue, that the campaigns of resistance have influenced the discourse around globalization and trade agreements. The triumphal discourse of the 1990s has given way to more attention to the distribution of the gains and losses which result from such agreements. More attention in general in mainstream media to trade negotiations thanks in part to the sensational events, more contentious politics and the rise of alternative media has created public more aware and somewhat more skeptical about questions of gains (BBC 2007). Increased attention to ethical and social justice perspectives on globalization and trade agreements has made it more difficult to dismiss opponents or critics as narrow protectionist or special interests.

Another measure of success has been the survival and broadening of the networks themselves. Networks of resistance were able to build and spread in the 1990s in response to globalization partly through their use of technology and a more contentious repertoire of actions against trade agreements. However, the events of Sept 11, increased coercion and the challenges of maintaining solidarity and bridging ever present north-south divides, especially in the face of more and more regional and bilateral approaches to trade agreements has required new responses. Hybrids of broad transnational coalitions, linked digitally, but with roots at the local and regional level where activists can meet, build relationships of trust and facilitate the local-global links have emerged. Social forums since 2001 have played a role in that process.

Social forums are clearly not the only venues where these activities have occurred. However they offer some features and potential that other venues lack. One is their horizontality. Although there is a tendency for certain larger organizations to dominate there are also possibilities to hear from local groups, movements and organizations. Forums can bridge distances as they bring together activists from across the globe, many of whom represent broader organizations to whom they report back on the information and shared experiences. The remarkable presence of Korean militant trade and peasant organizations at forums in Brazil, Kenya and Atlanta is notable as was the presence of South American and Hong Kong trade activists in Nairobi. Despite complaints that are often heard that social

forums, especially at the global level, have become NGO-dominated they are much more inclusive spaces in comparison, for example, to UN or other IGO conferences and forums that seek civil society input. They have a much stronger presence of local social movements and activists who are in touch with the lived reality of neo-liberalism. In that sense they also provide a more open, less hostile environment to articulate more radical critiques of, and pose alternatives to, neo-liberal trade agreements. This is not a trivial matter given the level of coercion seen at major international meetings of organizations like the WTO.

For trade activists the increasing scope and complexity of trade agreements and their multiplication at various levels and scales pose major challenges in linking the local experience to global campaigns and coordinating across countries and regions. Trade activists face another challenge. As analysts like Robin Broad have noted the one aspect of the Washington consensus and its paradigm which has been more resistant to attack in recent years has been that of free trade. This is in part due to the association of trade with ideas of openness and a more cosmopolitan world. Public opinion polls in many countries indicate a general positive orientation of publics to the notion of open markets and free exchange. Yet those same surveys also reflect a different lived reality for many who indicate, when asked who benefits from trade agreements, that it is multinationals and they themselves have not. Breaking the powerful hold of “accepted wisdom” by confronting it with real experience and everyday knowledge is one of the challenges transnational networks face, along with those of bridging distances and positions on trade issues to unify and mobilize citizens. Social forums clearly have had a role to play in these efforts.

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¹ The four issues were new rules on investment, competition policy, transparency in government procurement and trade facilitation. These proposed areas for negotiation were rejected by developing countries at the first ministerial of the WTO held in Singapore.

² This was based on an earlier publication released at the Seattle ministerial in 1999 called, *Beyond the WTO: Alternatives to Economic Globalization*.

³ Originally the agreement included Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua. Subsequently the Dominican Republic became part as well and the agreement is now officially the US-DR-CAFTA.