Pathways to Just, Equitable and Sustainable Trade and Investment Regimes

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In this report we discuss what a Fair, Just and Equitable approach to the global, liberalized and hyper-competitive system of global trade and investments should be. The global market for goods and capital affect the life of producers and workers, stimulates the run towards cheaper products and puts farmers and workers against each other. The current vision of trade and investments is based on the silencing of gendered and reproductive labour and is responsible for the increase in inequality and relative poverty. Furthermore, it stimulates the extraction of commodities and contributes to the degradation of the planet, it has a significant impact on greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) due to transportation representing above 7% of the world total GHG, and it is closely linked with the appropriation of nature through patenting and the shift towards

capital-intensive forms of production. These are the injustices that the Fair Trade movement wants to overcome are not simple externalities of the global system of trade and investments. These are not ‘market failures’ or exceptions, but structural situations upheld by international laws and policy. As a matter of fact, these social and planetary impacts are produced and intensified by the rules of a game that is oblivious of historical patterns of unevenness and domination and that believes in the capacity of the ‘invisible hand’ and techno-fix solutions to address all problems.

In light of this, our report claims that the Fair Trade Movement shall not play ‘outside the market’ nor accept that the existing narrative and mechanisms will provide a solution that addresses the root causes of the problem. If the Fair Trade Movement was to play outside the market, it would create islands of fairness in a sea of degradation and violence, which sooner or later would also swallow those few bubbles (unless they can be reproduced thanks to the support of an elite interested in fair and sustainable products). This is because the global market is characterized by an inherent expansionist tendency and needs to stretch its frontiers, compete for resources and ensure a larger shares of consumers. If the approach was that of tweaking with current mechanisms and narratives, it would accept the historical violence and inequality of colonialism and uneven development that are at the basis of the global system of trade, it would dismiss the role that global trade has in piercing the planetary boundaries, and it would accept that contemporary social problems shall be addressed by making the pie larger rather than adequately redistributing what is already available. Given that the aim is that of implementing justice, equity and sustainability, we thus suggest ten principles/recommendations to be utilized by the Fair Trade movement when thinking about its approach to trade, its campaigns and where does it stand vis-à-vis concrete issues.

The adoption of an intersectional and systemic approach to justice, equity and sustainability has concrete implications on the approach that the Fair Trade movement should adopt with regards to a set of trade and investments issues that are prominent in the contemporary international and regional debate. In the last part of this report we engage with five of these topics and present the main elements of a renew policy approach that follows the indications contained in our analysis.

You can also download the Full Report on SSRN.

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