



A-GENDA

GENDER AND TRADE IN CENTRAL AMERICA

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Central American Women debate the Association Agreement with Europe

Helen Dixon

Participants discuss strategies against the EU Association Agreement



Helen Dixon

More than a hundred women converged on the northern Nicaraguan town of Matagalpa at the beginning of April to evaluate the Association Agreement (AA) between the European Union and Central America, and to analyse and improve joint strategies.

This Central American women's conference was jointly organised by FMICA (Women's Forum for Central American Integration) and CAWN with several aims: to present a study sponsored by CAWN on the potential impact of the Agreement in women's lives; to share information from FMICA about the Women's Agenda¹ and the present negotiations; to exchange experiences of collective action on Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) and against European multinational companies; and to debate strategies between diverse participants from mixed organisations, women's groups and women from the Central

American feminist movement.

After the first round of presentations, the debate focused on the analysis of the post-CAFTA context and the aims of the negotiation process with the Europeans, especially given the negative history of FTAs in the region, and doubts about the way civil society has been used to mask European commercial interests structured into the AA. One of the participants stated: *"Perhaps we have been looking for answers in this process instead of formulating questions. If we're not careful the answers may end up servicing the system and the established framework."*

Over two days the women worked in seven small groups to ensure maximum participation. They revised the limits and advances of the existing agenda and current strategies, as well as making proposals around demands and joint strategies for the future.

The last presentations on the first day were of great interest

to participants: community resistance to the hydroelectric mega project Copalar-Tumarín-Mojolka in Nicaragua in which key figures from the Ortega government are involved as national investors along with European multinational companies; a video from Las Mujeres del NO, from Costa Rica about the way they pulled together alliances against CAFTA; and the experience of the Feminist Collective for Local Development in El Salvador in building economic solidarity networks among women as a contribution to creating an alternative model based on small-scale community initiatives.

Similarities and differences

Conference participants agreed not to reduce the debate to two polarised categories, but rather explore differing positions while making similarities and differences explicit.

A broad range of proposals were made in four areas:

strengthening the feminist and women's movement on a local, national and regional basis; development of alternative economic models among women; alliance-building with other social movements; and the development of a communications strategy. Women also made specific proposals to be included in the current Women's Agenda.

Participants coincided on the need to build greater capacity and strengthen links and joint action between women presently in FMICA with other women's and feminist organisations in the region—incorporating greater knowledge about the diversity of indigenous and Caribbean cultures – in order to face not only the challenge of the European AA but also the whole process of Central American integration.

The limitations observed related to an insufficient dissemination of information and a lack of efficient

communications mechanisms for the processes underway due to an inappropriate level of centralisation. The current agenda was criticised for lacking a strategic vision built by consensus beyond positions for negotiation, and participants proposed including more of women's historical demands. There was no consensus about the validity of participating or not in the negotiations process. An important segment of participants were in favour of non-negotiation, as they perceived engaging in the negotiations as playing into the political interests of Central American governments and powerful European interests.

In the words of one participant: *"The lack of symmetry in the negotiations puts us at a disadvantage, damages our rights and reduces*

our opportunities. This situation is worsened because our governments don't represent us. A real negotiation is between peers and must be based on respect for dignity, autonomy, sovereignty and all our peoples' rights to use their own resources".

Women evaluated advances in the current process as positive, helping to visibilize women, their demands and proposals in both regional and international forums. Speakers emphasised the way in which diverse actions have opened up space to observe and enter into dialogue with other stakeholders, which they regarded as an opportunity for greater influence, or at the very least for denunciations on an international level. The main problem is to ensure this engagement has concrete results

faced with the secrecy and even hostility shown by the negotiators towards women and civil society organisations.

The women's movement was assessed as having a rich diversity of leaders with many years of experience in actions to influence decision-making, in resistance alliance-building and in creating economic and cultural alternatives to the present hegemonic models. Part of the problem is the dispersed and fragmentary nature of the movement and also the economic situation of women and their organisations, that forces them to focus primarily on survival. There is a need for greater financial resources in order to improve the influence of the women's movement, but this also implies getting beyond some authoritarian tendencies in decision-making by aid

organizations, and levelling out the very different ways in which women's and feminist organisations deal with aid agencies, in order to ensure more respect and autonomy for the movement's strategic agenda.

Changes in FMICA's role?

Presently FMICA has been formed as a formal space for coordination, with representation in national chapters in six countries in the region. Conference participants proposed that FMICA strengthen its consultation processes and focus them more on the women's and feminist movement, and not only towards institutional spaces. Consultations carried out around the agenda in the different countries were questioned. Many FMICA

EDITORIAL Racing in the wrong direction

In CAWN's advocacy work on the Association Agreement currently being negotiated between the European Union and Central America, the UK government Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform and the European Commission's Directorate General (DG) for Trade have expressed concerns reflecting the scope of the political dialogue within the agreement. They argue that it is not appropriate for the European Union to require observance of internationally recognized social, labour and environmental standards from their trading partners as these standards may be "not appropriate for their stage of development".¹ It has become clear that women's gender rights are not even on the agenda.

Instead, the agreement has at its heart a far-reaching free trade agreement (FTA) in goods and services that removes the legitimate government policy space necessary to ensure that

the benefits of trade flows and economic activity are distributed equitably to women and men, and is based on the sustainable management of natural resources. Guided by the "Global Europe Strategy – Competing in the World" (October 2006), the "ambitious" scope of the Association Agreement embraces issues and areas that developing countries were successful in excluding from the multilateral space of the World Trade Organisation, including privatization of services, government procurement, and trade facilitation through the removal of non-tariff barriers such as "restrictive regulations and standards".

In the words of a Honduran participant at the regional meeting that brought women's organisations together in Nicaragua in April to debate the Association Agreement:

"The only thing that neoliberalism, in all its guises, has achieved is to deepen poverty. We live in a time where

people are losing hope faced with ecological devastation and the crisis in the social movements. Many people say that resistance doesn't work, but this is an achievement of the neoliberal, patriarchal system. So we decide to negotiate, but what power do we have in these negotiations? We need to dismantle the logic that the EU is better than the US".

Behind the rhetoric of dialogue with civil society, social movements in Central America and Europe are finding that Europe's inflexible agenda for a far-reaching FTA, the accelerated time frame for concluding the negotiations, weak consultative mechanisms and secrecy surrounding the content of discussions, preclude any genuine participation in the process of negotiating the Association Agreement that might influence its outcomes. In Europe, negotiations are led by the narrow interests of DG Trade, with insufficient involvement by other

directorates and insufficient scrutiny by Members of the European Parliament. As trade policy and democratic process part company, European civil society faces the urgent challenge of reviving democratic accountability in the Union.

Despite the severe impact that further trade liberalization under the Agreement is likely to have on Central American women, and the important work that their organisations are doing on the issues of trade and economic rights, participants at the regional meeting also expressed frustration at the lack of interest, and even resistance, to the inclusion of women's historical demands in debate – both in formal institutional spaces and in European and Central American civil society networks. Meaningful participation by women in all arenas is the only way to ensure that they are recognized as full economic, political and cultural citizens.

The Association Agreement is a stepping stone in furthering the dominant – and gender-blind – economic model. It fails to recognize the importance of people's work taking care of



Costa Rica's Radio Feminista transmits the conference live

members recognised that there was no consultation process, or that what had happened was insufficient or had a low level of attendance.

Rather than strengthening national chapters, it was proposed that FMICA strengthen training and linkages among a greater diversity of leaders: improving their ability to link everyone and create a more fluid communications

network "so that everyone looks to them (for information)". Women underlined the need to build a regional platform based on women's rights. "We can't go running after other people's agendas, instead we should take more time with our own priorities".

At the end of the event there was lively and defiant debate with some of the figures linked to the negotiations

each other and the environment, much of which is undertaken by women in the home and community. It also reduces the economy to the market without considering how social and power relationships – including gendered power relationships – determine the freedom that individuals have in accessing, participating in and benefiting from this space. Even if the proposed Association Agreement were to increase trade flows and economic growth in Central America, these results are not positive in and of themselves. If the fruits of economic growth are distributed in such a way as to widen the gaps between rich and poor – gaps which are compounded by inequalities in wealth and power between men and women – then such growth is detrimental to social and gender justice and to sustainable development.

Trade can – and should – benefit women. There are many examples of how this can be achieved, including the economic alternatives being developed by the Feminist Collective for Local Development in El Salvador. However, if the Association Agreement as it is

currently formulated comes into force, all indications are that it will perpetuate and deepen poverty and inequality, including gender inequality, in Central America. It will further weaken women's capacity for the political participation necessary to promote and defend their human, gender and labour rights – a fact which must be considered in the context of the grave violations of women's rights in the region and the deep inequalities that exist. One example is that in mid-May as this newsletter goes to press, there have been 55 reported cases of femicide in Honduras so far this year.² Another, that since therapeutic abortion (when the mother's life is at risk by carrying the pregnancy to term) was made illegal in Nicaragua by incoming President Daniel Ortega last year, 127 women³ have died unnecessarily. In the trade race to the bottom, it is women who will lose most.

1. CAWN communication with BERR, May 2008

2. La Tribuna (Honduran national newspaper), Monday 19th May 2008

3. Figures from Coordinadora Civil, Nicaragua, June 2008. The government does not publish official statistics.

process and the Central American Integration System, including members of the Central American Parliament, the Nicaraguan Vice Chancellor for Foreign Affairs, Manuel Coronel Kautz, and members of the Central American Court of Justice (CCJ).

Demands for the next rounds of talks

The III Round of talks in Central America was seen as a very key moment to incorporate women's organisations in regional strategies. The women's organisations present agreed to mobilize around an "exclusively women's action" in El Salvador with the aim to visibilizing the impact of these negotiations on women's lives. They talked about a "demonstration of like-minded women, marching, jumping, dancing; taking into

account that there will always be some on the inside and others on the outside."

The conference's seven working groups drew up a series of demands to reinforce the current strategies of women's organisations faced with the AA talks. These included improving the security of women with micro or small businesses, paying more attention to the situation of migrant women and demanding equal recognition for women's professional qualifications in Central America and Europe. Among the structural and strategic points raised was the inclusion of territorial rights and the right of women to own land, as well as the importance of protecting biodiversity and regional seed varieties.

1. Developed by several organizations under the auspices of AGEM, a UNDP project.

An Agreement with Europe that respects Women Workers' rights

"María Elena Cuadra" Working and Unemployed Women's Movement

On March 2nd in Managua, Nicaragua, the "María Elena Cuadra" Working and Unemployed Women's Movement (MEC for short) held the Annual Meeting of Women Maquila Workers for the tenth consecutive year as part of the commemoration of International Women's Day. The meetings are an important space for women and men to consult, discuss and make collective proposals. They have permitted ongoing, timely and much-needed debate to develop an analysis of the social, economic and labour situation of women in general, and women maquila workers in particular.

Each year there is a review of advances and setbacks in the struggle for women's labour, human, economic and gender

rights. This year, the discussion of national issues focused on analysis and debate about the Association Agreement (AA) between the European Union and Central America and its implications in Nicaragua. Various decision-makers were invited to participate, including government representatives, trade unions, national and international business leaders, and representatives of international aid agencies in Nicaragua that are developing projects to benefit Nicaraguan women in coordination with MEC.

Using a participatory methodology to ensure that the women's political analysis is gathered by the meeting, the participants divided into working groups to discuss and analyse



"For Central American Integration with Respect for Women's Rights"

topics such as: "Implications of AA negotiations for Central America"; "The impact of the AA on the Nicaraguan Economy"; "Analysis of the impact of the AA on Nicaraguan women's lives"; "Analysis of the economic situation of women in the new Central American context" and "Analysis of advances and setbacks for women maquila workers".

The over 1,500 women who participated in the discussions arrived at the following key conclusions:

- The government must urgently disseminate the contents and advances in the AA negotiations and must consult the population about whether it accepts or rejects these contents.
- The country is not in financial conditions to open its doors to new markets. We must first raise production and productivity in order to improve competitiveness in current international market conditions.
- The focus should be on developing micro, small and medium scale production units. This is the future for a small economy such as ours. State institutions should promote and finance the creation of small and medium family enterprises.
- Efforts should be made to produce and process raw materials in our own country and ensure more opportunities for employment. The products harvested in our country should be industrialised here for export.
- In all negotiations, the government should put special emphasis on negotiating tax barriers so that the state doesn't lose income and can invest in services and social programmes.
- The government should not exonerate foreign companies from paying taxes.
- When free trade agreements are signed the government must ensure respect for national sovereignty, that our environment is not destroyed and our currency is not devalued.
- Agreements must include parity between Nicaraguan salaries and those of Central American countries.
- The Ministry of Labour should be belligerent in protecting the labour rights of women and men workers.
- The state must create an effective and real equality of opportunities and ensure that there is no discrimination because of gender or age.
- The state must create diversified sources of employment and develop technical training programmes that support women in choosing employment in new industries.
- Companies established with foreign capital must

guarantee: job stability and respect and compliance with all rights established for female and male workers in the political constitution of the nation.

- Foreign investors in Nicaragua must guarantee gender equity and non-discrimination for reasons of age.
- One aspect that was repeatedly emphasised was the issue of Nicaraguan migration, especially women's migration, as this demonstrates an urgent need to define salary and employment policies that will

keep people from migrating to work in other countries.

Finally, participants in the 10th Annual Meeting of Women Maquila Workers concluded that in our country no agreement should be signed that will increase national debt, technological dependency or the unsustainable use of land and water.

In this meeting, the approval on February 14th of Law No. 648 was announced (Law for Equal Rights and Opportunities). It is based on constitutional precepts such as the equality of rights and protection, and considers the recommendations of the World Conference of Human Rights in 1993, and the platform of the World Conference of Women in Beijing 1995. For the first time in Nicaragua a law has been passed that reflects these basic women's rights.

The law, which has 46 articles, still has weak points, but is an important advance in recognising women's fundamental rights in the social, educational, labour, economic and cultural spheres. With the approval of the law, it is now up to women not only to disseminate its contents, but also to fight for its application in the widest sense.

Women's Economic Alternatives in El Salvador

Ana Landa Ugarte, Feminist Collective for Local Development

In El Salvador, women's living conditions and their possibilities for exercising citizenship have been seriously eroded by the country's economic policies, which since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 have faithfully followed the dictates of the Washington consensus and neo-liberal globalisation, resulting in the agreement of a series free trade

agreements (FTAs).¹ These policies and FTAs have defined the differentiated insertion of women and men in economic activities: women are principally responsible for domestic and family work, and when they have income it is from lower paid and more precarious employment.² There are no public policies to support women's initiatives that take

into account how gender discrimination limits women's access to opportunities for generating just and sustainable incomes.

The **Women's Commercial Network** was formed in April 2005 by the Salvadorian Women's Union for Democracy and Justice with Gender Equity in response to women's needs for income to relieve their and their families' poverty, and to improve their levels of economic and personal autonomy as a condition for greater organisation and participation. The network brings together more than 2,700 women from 35 organisations, 22 of which are active in a range of economic activities including craftwork, traditional sweets, natural medicine, textiles etc. They are collective businesses that produce and market their own products and their members are women with few resources and low levels of formal education.

The women producers and the Network itself have achieved a great deal over the past three years, enabled by processes of discussion and collective work that have gradually built trust between women in different enterprises and enabled them to forge a collective identity.

Interconnected work

One of the most successful work areas has been the production and sale of traditional sweets, produced by four associated women's businesses in different municipalities. In 2005 only one business existed, and when the others started they initially saw each other as competitors. The vision changed thanks to a linking process called **interconnected work** in which associated businesses are strengthened technically, administratively and in their management abilities, as well as through joint promotion and marketing.

Each enterprise developed a speciality within the Network in two specific types of sweets, in order to broaden the sales base

for everyone. Through collective work they established joint production standards, quality control, packaging and presentation. The businesses use the same packaging – labels that name both the Network and the individual business that has produced the particular sweet. This enables women to identify with the collective space of the Network, and at the same time maintain their own identity as a business when they do direct sales and marketing. Another advantage is that the packaging and labels are purchased collectively, thereby lowering production costs. This way of working interconnectedly also allows the women to manage if one of the businesses suffers a production problem, and enables them to respond more immediately to market demand.

In November 2007 we introduced a new product that has been registered as collective property. NAHUALITOS are small delicatessen sweets produced in bulk by the sweet businesses, but packaged by women's associations that aren't involved in production. This product has enabled us to add value to the sweets and to access non-traditional markets that give women a higher income.

Feminist solidarity economy

The Women's Commercial Network also promotes the **feminist solidarity economy** from women and for women, which proposes new ways for us to relate to each other economically, based on solidarity, sharing experiences, mutual learning and creating mechanisms for horizontal decision-making. A series of activities in training, product design and marketing are carried out in alliance with other groups and institutions and seeking support from public resources managed by local and national government.

A good example of our collective solidarity work is the collective distribution of resources for supporting

businesses in buying equipment and machinery. When a business needs support to make a purchase, the women present a clear proposal justifying their request to the Network's Commission for Economic Development, on which all member businesses are represented. Following further questions and discussion, the Commission will decide whether to approve proposal and release all or part of the funds requested.

Because the available funds are always insufficient, when this mechanism was established three years ago the groups were reluctant to make decisions about the allocation of scarce collective funds. Now, thanks to the trust and solidarity generated over time, the funds are successfully managed based

Another economy is possible

The Network's work promoting the revaluation of production is politically important as an alternative to the current system of capitalist globalization that leaves the majority of benefits in the hands of "middlemen", promoting permanent speculation. The revaluation of production requires periodically revising the profit margins for the producers in relation to the collective profits for the Network generated by product sales. The aim is to redistribute these profits from marketing back to the producers, trying to ensure more just payment to producers as well as promoting the economic sustainability of the Network.

This collective work has enabled us to duplicate sales annually (US\$5.000 in 2005, \$11.300 in 2006 and \$22.500



Selling traditional sweets

on the principles of solidarity, responsibility and redistribution. All of the businesses that receive financial support return 15% back to the Network in kind, as a contribution to a revolving fund with which we can support other businesses in the future.

Women's participation in the enterprises includes discussion and training on gender and training in rights and leadership, so that generating income becomes a medium for women to achieve **economic autonomy and empowerment**. Through this work the Network is creating opportunities for lobbying at local and national levels to support women's collective businesses.

in 2007), bringing together more than 150 producers and saleswomen who have gained an income from this collective work, securing support from municipal governments and national government institutions, as well as achieving national and international recognition as an innovative experience in economic solidarity and fair trade amongst women.

The main achievement is the slow and far-from-simple advance in the formation of a collective consciousness about the need to stand together, to resist together, and to propose collectively that another way to relate to each other and to structure the economy is possible.

The Free Trade threat to Indigenous Communities in Guatemala

Interview with **Norma Maldonado** of the International Gender and Trade Network



Norma Maldonado

For Norma Maldonado, the Association Agreement currently being negotiated between Central America and the European Union (EU) means continuity not change, “the European companies are already there, they have been living off us for a long time”. Agricultural production in the region has been organised to satisfy European markets ever since the Spanish conquest, and the influence of both European capital and the small number of powerful families who profit from exports to Europe are long established. Union Fenosa (Spain, energy sector) and Telefónica (Spain, communications sector) are just two examples of the European companies already operating in the region. Norma continues:

“So this is nothing new. What is happening now is that the capital and the powers behind it are interested in other sectors of the economy. They are interested in what is left of our natural resources: in the water that has been looked after, maintained

and protected by the indigenous communities; in the fertile land that hasn't yet been degraded by agro industry, like the monoculture sugar, African palm or eucalyptus plantations that devastate the environment and leave the soil sterile. They are interested in the minerals that are under the ground and in the biodiversity, but especially in the water.”

Norma is the representative of the International Gender and Trade Network in Guatemala, as well as participating in the Women's Committee of the Hemispheric Social Alliance and the Guatemalan Network for Food Security and Food Sovereignty. She has worked for many years at grass roots level with groups of organized indigenous women on the issues of trade and food sovereignty and a significant part of her work is producing accessible and appropriate education materials that explain the market oriented economy and neoliberal globalization. The approach is to start from local

knowledge and support local initiatives, then locate them in the context of macroeconomic issues:

“I have always thought that the earliest agricultural knowledge comes from women. After eating the fruit or vegetables that had been gathered, they would scatter the seeds in the patio of their house and watch and look after the plants as they grew; the patio was the first site of experimentation and documentation of seeds. The indigenous diet is diverse and balanced and it is indigenous knowledge that has preserved the biodiversity we have today. We need to learn from history, to educate ourselves about our roots and the ways that agriculture and trade have been organized locally in the past in order to imagine alternatives to this brutal and dehumanizing system.”

One of the main local alternatives that has been growing over the past few years is a network of women, many of them widows from the Rio Negro Massacre, who are preserving local biodiversity, knowledge and agricultural practices through the exchange of experiences (*campesina to campesina*) and sale of native and Creole seeds. In April this year, the network organized a 3-day native seed fair to coincide with the near-by trade fair promoting genetically modified maize. It was the fourth fair of its kind and included two days of debate: an important space for discrediting the campaigns run by multinational companies to promote dependence on their hybrid “terminator” seed,¹ campaigns that have the explicit

support of a government that prioritizes the economic interests of powerful corporations over the importance of food sovereignty and biodiversity.

Another key conflict between indigenous communities and powerful corporate interests is water: “all of Guatemala's rivers are born in the indigenous territories”. Norma explains that deforestation and monoculture to enable export-orientated production has led water sources in many parts of the country to dry up. However, far from constituting an advantage for indigenous communities, poverty, social exclusion and a corrupt political system transform the resources they have preserved into the motive for abuses of their basic rights:

“There are many, many plans for hydroelectric plants, some of which are already in process. Plans to privatize water in order to generate electricity, which will mean a slow death for the indigenous communities. There are communities that are being left without water because it is all being diverted to the big hydroelectric plants. The idea is to displace the populations of these vast regions because of the minerals, the petrol and the biodiversity that can be found there. In many ways they are trying to evict the communities from their territories, there is an aggressive appropriation of the land.”

Norma describes the difficulties that civil society faced in responding to the negotiations for DR-CAFTA:¹ the agreement seemed abstract and was negotiated behind closed doors, it was only as the negotiations rapidly progressed that the gravity of its content became clear. It was civil society that organised serious debate and research about the issues, meanwhile the government disseminated populist information about the benefits of the agreement. When CAFTA was approved after just 9 months, and despite mass protests in which 2 people were killed and several injured, an

unprecedented number of amendments were made to Guatemala's constitution to accommodate the required hyperprotection of US multinational corporate interests and investment.

I asked Norma what she thought of the inclusion of a democratic clause in the Association Agreement between Central America and the EU, the way the EU has incorporated "political dialogue" and "cooperation" alongside an ambitious free trade agreement.

"There is a lot of talk about political dialogue, but what we are seeing is completely the opposite. There is no citizen participation or transparency; there is no clarity about the real content of the negotiations. The population is informed what areas are being negotiated but can't participate in or influence the negotiations. Cooperation refers to the EU's strategy for the period 2007 to 2013 to promote regional integration, one of the conditions for trade between the regions, but it is cooperation for trade, for business people, for the infrastructure that will help business."

As well as the lack of mechanisms for real participation, mirrored by the

experience of civil society in Europe, Central American organisations' ability to respond to the Association Agreement negotiations is compromised by a conflict of interests. The fact that CC-SICA³ is funded by the EU, and the nature of its consultations to date, have created a lack of faith in its neutrality. On a broader level:

"A lot of organisations think that they can't criticise the EU because they receive European funding, from organisations that might be against this model of globalization but are not clear about it. Development cooperation has been an instrument, a way of creating confusion and of the EU using cosmetics to mask its real interests. It has turned into a manipulation of the population in order to further some very particular interests. Our communities have cooperated with Europe for more than 500 years; what Europe has is a historical debt to our communities."

Civil society organisations in Europe need to establish clear positions about the current economic model and make them the foundation for strong alliances with their counterparts in Central America.

Norma has no doubts about the severity of the likely impact of the Association Agreement. She came to Europe not to ask for charity or for solidarity, but to demand corresponsibility in transforming an economic system that threatens to destroy the earth's natural resources and, en-route, the way of life of communities like those in Guatemala who have found themselves at the front-line in defending the ecosystems they have lived within for centuries:

"The Association Agreement is legitimacy and laws, its legalised sacking. During the conquest they used mirrors,⁴ today they use free trade agreements. It's a very myopic perspective towards life on the planet that thinks only about profits today as if there is no future. It will lead to the destruction of territories have the indigenous communities have looked after and maintained for centuries. We are being aggressed by big business and it is an aggression that determines our lives, culture and future; if they insist on the type of "development" preached by the Association Agreement we are not going to survive for more than one generation.... We need to find a way to stop, to

condemn. The people can't take any more and the land can't take anymore."

Norma Maldonado was speaking to Julie Porter from the Central American Women's Network

For further information:

Maíz: Mucho más que tortillas. Guatemala, 2007. Norma Maldonado & Beatriz Barrientos
<http://www.generoycomercio.org/capacitacion.html>

"Las Mujeres hablan" – video about native seed bank run by women from Baja Verapaz
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V9pYSYFsV7Y>

"Áreas Protegidas Izabal" – video about the impact of resource appropriation on Natural Protected Areas and Q'eqchi indigenous communities
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkrUPwqT7Do>

1. Sterile seeds giving just one harvest so that it becomes necessary to buy them each year
2. Dominican Republic – Central America Free Trade Agreement
3. The Consultative Committee of the System for Central American Integration – the official civil society consultative body for the negotiations
4. During the conquest, the Spanish traded mirrors for gold.

Making Trade Work for Women in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific

Véronique Dion One World Action

Since September 2002, Europe has been negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) with 79 countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) with the aim of replacing the 25-year Lomé Convention regime, which was declared incompatible with WTO rules.

The Cotonou Agreement was then concluded on 23 June 2000 and opened the doors to negotiations of new trade agreements.

Promoted by the EU as means of "fostering the smooth and gradual integration (...) into the world economy (...) thereby promoting sustainable

development and contributing to poverty eradication" (Cotonou Agreement, article 34), EPAs hold potential to bring about substantial changes within ACP countries. However, as currently negotiated, they are most likely to compromise and further hinder development efforts. EPAs demand the removal of tariffs of

at least 80%² - that is, 'substantially all trade' - from all EU imports (including goods, services, intellectual property, etc.) within the next 15 years. This timescale makes it very difficult to compensate for loss of government tariff revenues and to deal with the supply-side constraints that prevent producers from competing successfully with EU imports. Restrictions are also placed on informal cross-border trading between regions, thereby dismantling existing regional blocks and fostering competition from within. Initially, EPAs were to be negotiated "with due regard for [ACP] political choices and development priorities" (Cotonou Agreement, article 34), but the whole concept of

'partnership' quickly became rhetoric, as European commercial interests took precedence in the negotiations over the ACP's developmental and regional integration interests.

More strikingly, gender issues have not featured in the EPAs negotiations and their impact on women's rights, lives and livelihood, the progress towards greater gender equality has not been yet fully assessed. With the aim of uncovering the likely impacts of EPAs on women's rights and gender equality, One World Action carried out the research "*Making Trade Work for Women: The likely impact of the Economic Partnership Agreements on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*" (Khan, 2006) in 2005/2006. Examining the sugar industry in Mozambique, beef industry in Namibia and horticulture industry in Zambia, enabled us to demonstrate how women could gain or lose from the new trade agreements with regard to employment and wages, tariffs and revenue and policy dialogue and influence, as well as to make recommendations on the process. Our conclusions are regrouped in the four following points:³

Removing tariffs will not have a straightforward impact on women's employment and income. With regard to specific products, if women are consumers, then they could benefit from cheaper goods but if they are producers, then they would face competition and possibly loss of employment and income. From a poverty reduction point of view, it is important to ensure that those women on low incomes are not negatively affected by EU imported goods and that core labour standards are implemented across production

for export and domestic consumption.

Furthermore, the potential **revenue loss** arising from an EPA could negatively affect the delivery of public services, such as health, education and welfare. Cuts in spending would negatively affect the quality and quantity of services at a time when countries are struggling to combat HIV/AIDS, food insecurity and poverty. This would also be inconsistent with the current global consensus that increased and stepped-up public expenditure is necessary to meet the Millennium Development Goals in poor countries. The imposition of domestic taxes on goods and services could substitute for revenue loss, but it is imperative that measures are taken concurrently to ensure that women are not disproportionately affected by taxation policy.

The **policy and legislative environment** in most countries is conducive to gender equality but this could be undermined by the introduction of an EPA that would have economy-wide impact requiring changes to country poverty reduction strategies. There has been little attempt to harmonise negotiating positions with national gender plans even though the Cotonou Partnership Agreement emphasises gender equality as a cross cutting issue for development and poverty reduction.

There is ample evidence of **weak women's representation** at all levels of the negotiations including at government level on negotiating teams and inter-sectoral trade fora. Because these structures are dominated by men, women's voices are largely absent from the formal

negotiation process.

Additionally, very little attempt has been made to ensure that women's organisations and groups, as non-state actors, have been consulted about the potential impact of an EPA.

Making Trade work for Women clearly exemplified the absence of a gender analysis in trade policy formulation, negotiations and implementation. Very little attempt has been made to consult women's organisations and groups or to make it possible for them to engage more actively in the discussions on the implementation of trade liberalisation. Furthermore, women within government structures, women's organisations and groups need to build their capacity to engage in trade debates and negotiations. These conclusions compelled us to pursue our work to put gender on the EPA agenda.

In a joint partnership with the Commonwealth Secretariat, we are undertaking a DFID-funded analysis of the implementation of trade liberalisation in Tanzania, Mozambique and Jamaica. Drawing a clear picture of the position of women in the labour force will enable us to make recommendations in order to secure women's rights and gender equality. Combined with advocacy work within the ACP regions and Europe, capacity-building workshops are also central to this project. It is crucial to strengthen women's and men's abilities to engage effectively in national and regional debates on EPAs, in order to negotiate equitable agreements reflecting the needs and interests of women, as well as to render trade a real means for development, as it was

intended in the first place.

To view the full report and information on the current research, please visit: www.oneworldaction.org

For more information on Gender and Trade, please visit the Commonwealth Secretariat web-based resource platform: http://www.thecommonwealth.org/gthomepage/164044/gender_and_trade/

You can also find more information on the work of our partners:

In Mozambique - Forum Mulher : <http://www.forumulher.org.mz/>

In Namibia, The Namibia Development Trust: <http://www.ndt.org.na/>

In Zambia, Civil Society Trade Network of Zambia: cstnz@coppernet.zm

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- Khan, Zohra. (2006) *Making Trade Work for Women: The likely impact of the Economic Partnership Agreements on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*, One World Action. www.acp-eu-trade.org (2007) 'Overview of EPAs initialled' *Trade Negotiations Insights*, 8 (6): 22, available online at: http://www.acp-eu-trade.org/library/files/TNI_EN_6-8.pdf

1. The WTO argued that the Lomé Convention was discriminatory against other developing countries of Asia and Latin America.
2. To date, 35 countries have initialled interim agreements under European pressure and agreed to eliminate 80 – 98% of tariffs within the next 25 years (Trade Negotiation Insights: 22)
3. These four points are extracted from One World Action's report *Making Trade Work for Women: The likely impact of the Economic Partnership Agreements on Women's Rights and Gender Equality* (Zohra Khan, 2006)

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