



Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network

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AEFJN Trade policy

1. AEFJN position on the EU External policies

In our globalized world, the economy and the rules regulating trade have a great impact in bettering or worsening the life of people and societies. Trade should be a means of sharing the resources of the earth and the fruits of human labour. Trade on unequal terms is damaging, yields poverty, creates and maintains inequities, abuses and exploits the weakest and can lead to poverty, violence, conflict and environmental destruction, especially in Africa.

Current global trading systems are dominated by a few economic powers – rich country governments, transnational corporations, stock markets and multilateral institutions. They set the rules in their favour, force economic liberalization on the poor and prevent them from accessing to the global market on equal terms. At present, the African continent is the main victim of this unjust international trade.

AEFJN was founded to deal with economic issues related to Africa, to foster more equitable relations in trade, between the European Union and the African countries. It aims at changing the current unjust rules of trade, towards “fair” trade agreements at the European Union and at the World Trade Organization, in order to empower the marginalized countries and communities of the African continent and to develop their economies and trading systems so that they are at the service of the whole population.

1.1 TRADE and Africa

Though the raw materials from Africa are in high demand by most developed countries, the continent is left “aside” of the benefits of international trade and globalization. The international trade conditions are one of the factors that have made poverty increase during the last 20 years.

Today in our world there are enough resources to eradicate poverty, but what is missing is a political will to do so. Just trade agreements that would take into account the concerns and the sustainable development of the poor countries would be an important instrument to eradicate hunger and poverty.

The International institutions: European Union (EU), World Bank (WB) and IMF (International Monetary Fund) argue that increased trade liberalisation will bring important benefits for both North and South, however farmers, workers, NGOs and civil society organizations in Africa, tend to be more sceptical and critical on liberalisation. The experience of the actual trade system and economic policies in Africa is quite negative, as it has taken away the livelihood of the people and communities and is keeping them destitute and dependent on aid.

The current Doha negotiations at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) between the EU and the Africa Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) regions all of them working towards further liberalisation reflect this deep division. The rich countries show inflexibility and do not adequately address the difficulties and concerns of African countries: the focus on development; the imbalance in the trade liberalisation; lack of appreciation of the major adjustment challenges that African economies would face in implementing EPAs. The WTO and the EU's policies, threaten the livelihoods of small and medium sized farmers, jeopardizing food security, and increasing their dependence on imports. These policies will also adversely affect the environment, as agricultural commodities are transported ever longer distances, and are processed and packaged to survive the journey.

Alternative commercial models do exist, but the EU and the developed countries are not in favour of a "market policy" that will allow for a real development of the Developing Countries. What is needed is more political involvement to facilitate the process to move forward, and to have trade agreements that favour food sovereignty and sustainable development. The EU must refocus its development policies, so that African countries can replace their dependence on Western markets by greater national and regional self-reliance.

1.2 Trade between the European Union and the African countries: the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs)

The Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) negotiated between the EU and the ACP countries offer some opportunities and a lot of risks for Africa. The opening of the African market to European products and companies will benefit mainly the EU companies and a few foreign companies in Africa. But for the majority of the population in Africa, they represent a threat to their well-being.

For Africa, the EPAs and its liberalization policy will mean privatisation of essential services (transport, water, electricity, and communications) and reduction of the help that governments can give to cooperatives, vulnerable farmers, producers and traders. It means exposing their vulnerable economies to transnational corporations with whom they will not be able to compete.

We call for Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) that respect the spirit of the Cotonou Agreement, in which the EU policies will contribute to the eradication of poverty and to a sustainable development, will allow for domestic policy space so that the ACP governments are able to decide on the policy tools they need to support economic and social development.

AEFJN is concerned by EPAs that pursue trade liberalisation without taking into account the effects on a sustainable development. The periods to bring forward this liberalisation are too short for the nascent industries and there is not enough protection for sensitive products.

As shown at the Lisbon Summit in December 2007, the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) have not been well received in Africa, either by governments, farmers, business and civil society, nor among intellectuals. They believe that these agreements threaten their food sovereignty, sustainable development and fear they will increase the gap between poor and rich. AEFJN believes that the EU should take into consideration the concerns of the ACP countries.

AEFJN advocates trade policies towards African countries that allow for:

- An economic and trade system that creates justice between and among countries and communities, and offers opportunities to all.
- Fairer conditions of trade between the European Union and the African countries.

- Allow for the necessary policy space and support for ACP countries to pursue their own development strategies.
- Protection for African producers in domestic and regional markets.
- The fostering of agricultural production for small-scale farmers as well as of industrialisation and employment creation.
- Respect for the Food Sovereignty of each African country, allowing for local production in a sustainable way.
- Rules governing investments, services and trade in goods, that respect the sovereignty of the state, and allows development policies and the protection of its nascent industry, for the benefit of its population.
- The freedom and right to choose the trade and development policies for poverty eradication.
- The freedom not to be forced into liberalisation and privatisation.
- Protection and fulfilment of all human and social rights.
- Develop regional integration and foster inter-regional trade.
- The principle of non-reciprocity, as instituted in the Generalized System of Preferences and special and differential treatment in the WTO;
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AEFJN is deeply concerned that the EPA proposed free trade agreements will exacerbate the current agricultural crisis that African farmers already face, increase poverty and violate human rights. We are in favour of EPAs that foster “Trade that is fair” instead of the “Free Trade”, as expressed by the EU.

AEFJN believes that the proposed EPAs between the EU and the ACP countries do not ensure the protection of the rights of citizens or the sovereignty of the state, nor does it respect the provision set forth in the Cotonou Agreement that no country should be worse off as a result of such a partnership.

2. Trade, Human Rights (HR) and Social Rights (SR)

Human Rights provide extra “leverage” to economic policy arguments. Governments should be confronted with the HR consequences of their trade policy decisions, at both national and international level – and the violation of their legal obligations that those consequences represent.

In promoting « free trade » at all costs, the International Institutions (WTO, IMF, WB, EU) seek to do away with possible regulatory interferences with the free flow of goods and services, thus limiting governments’ ability to regulate in favour of sustainable development, environmental protection or concern for vulnerable groups. Though most states have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, these rights are currently being violated by international trade agreements, which limit governments’ ability to act in the public interest, thus violating the basic rights of peoples and societies. Already food security, wildlife and pollution controls laws have already been challenged and weakened as illegal “barriers to trade”. The respect of human and social rights requires states to take decisions in line with these fundamental rights, in favour of their population and not to prevent the enjoyment of human rights in other countries. The fundamental rights have also a moral force as **ethical principles** for all persons. Trade policy should be more transparent, accountable and responsive to the needs of the people it is said to serve, as well as being more sustainable and more legitimate.

Trade policies should respect the Social and Economic rights that are **legally binding**. The August 1998 Resolution adopted by the UN’s Sub-Commission on Promotion and Protection of Human Rights called for human rights to be recognized as the primary objective of trade, investment and financial policy. Because Human Rights are included in the UN Charter that prevails over all international agreements, and because they protect the fundamental aspects of human dignity, they should have

priority over economic agreements and policies. These rights principles concerning rights challenge the economic injustice of unfair trade rules in the international trade agreements.

AEFJN is concerned with the victims of the current neo-liberal system, the poor in Africa. The action of AEFJN is oriented to fairer trade, which will contribute to the dignity of every human being, to poverty reduction, to just distribution of wealth, and to sustainable development.

The common good demands that the rights of the person and of the communities be preserved and promoted over any other economic gain. This should be the supreme law governing trade and economic relations. The common good calls us to look at the impact of policies, strategies and decisions on the whole community.

2.1 AEFJN advocates for the central place of the human person in society

Trade and economy are not an aim in themselves, but must be at the service of the human being. Trade rules should be an instrument for the promotion of human well-being, sustainable communities and economic justice. The neo-liberal system subordinates the human being to the “market”, and spoils nature. The current trade policies contribute to increased poverty and inequality in Africa.

The fact that the human person is social, lives in community and in interrelationship with others, involves moral obligation towards the other human beings. This implies the commitment to work for a just and equitable society where nobody is oppressed or marginalized, and where each person has both the right to have the minimum necessary and the duty to provide for this minimum for each member of the human community.

The ethics of AEFJN pushes us to consider human beings as the central concern of any economic policy and not to place the benefits at the centre as does the neo-liberal system.

2.2 Poverty reduction

A just international trade system in the current global world should have rules that explicitly support the eradication of poverty.

2.3 Just distribution of wealth

Just trade needs to be “fair” so that everyone receives a fair share of the earth’s resources, has the opportunity to develop and flourish as a human being and has the possibility to exercise his/her responsibility for him/herself and others. The task of trade is to develop regulations that allow all people to participate in the sharing of resources.

2.4 Peaceful society

There is no peace with extreme disparities of wealth. Only communities, economies and societies which care for the weaker are sustainable and can live in peace. The actual neo-liberal system excludes nearly the whole African continent from the benefits of trade. This can create unrest and conflicts. As human beings we are called to work towards a fair and just economy and trade system that will include African countries in the benefits of the globalisation from which most are currently excluded.

2.5 Sustainability of the Earth

The resources of the earth are to be used well, carefully and efficiently with respect for their inter-relatedness and caring for them for future generations. Trade is closely linked with environmental issues. Through production and transport of goods and services, trade contributes to a great deal to environmental destruction. But trade centred on people and on sustainability can contribute to heal the wounded earth.

3. Other aspects of the Exterior policy

3.1 The Millennium Development Goals

AEFJN proposes to increase the financial contributions to meet the Millennium Development Goals, ending hunger and poverty in the African continent.

3.2 Control of the Arms Trade

The African continent suffers from armed conflicts and violence that, in addition to the human tragedy that support their people, undermines their ability to achieve sustainable development. The causes of these armed conflicts have their roots in the plundering of natural resources (coltan, diamonds, oil, etc) and the economic interests of Western countries, including the EU. One of the main suppliers of arms to Africa are the Eu member states.

AEFJN supports a binding policy on the control of the arms trade, in all states. This should also include the "Tracking" and "marking" of weapons produced or transiting through the EU. We call for a firm commitment to transparency and effective control on the sale of arms in all the EU states, so that none of them sell arms to countries in conflict or whose neighbours living situations of violence.

3.3 Food Sovereignty

We uphold the principle of food sovereignty that the social movements around the world are building as an alternative to the neoliberal model of industrial agriculture and food production controlled by the corporations.

3.4 Immigration policies

AEFJN promotes immigration policies that guarantee immigrants' rights, respects the right of access to asylum, and mainly addresses the reasons why the people are leaving their countries.

4. Pour une politique européenne de l'énergie qui respecte les droits et la survie des petits agriculteurs en Afrique

AEFJN appelle les Institutions Européennes à respecter et protéger la Souveraineté Alimentaire des petits agriculteurs africains, y compris dans la politique énergétique et notamment en ce qui concerne l'importation d'agro carburants. Ces instances ont un rôle capital auprès des africains qui se confrontent, chaque jour davantage, aux menaces multiples des multinationales qui contrôlent le marché mondial agro-industriel de l'alimentation et ... de l'énergie.

La Commission européenne met en place une nouvelle Politique énergétique pour préserver sa sécurité d'approvisionnement énergétique, respecter le Protocole de Kyoto et pour assurer de nouveaux débouchés à l'industrie agro-industrielle. Ce faisant, elle promeut la production intensive d'agrocarburants à grande échelle sur le continent africain avec de multiples conséquences négatives pour la société, l'économie agricole et l'environnement en Afrique.

Pour AEFJN, l'Union Européenne ne doit autoriser l'importation des agrocarburants d'Afrique que dans le cas où leur production ne menace pas les ressources alimentaires et agricoles des petits agriculteurs africains d'aujourd'hui et de demain.

Nous observons qu'à travers le continent africain la production d'énergie à partir de sources renouvelables, y compris certains agrocarburants, peut être profitable à certaines conditions : réalisée à petite échelle et intégrée dans un circuit local ou national, respectueuse des ressources alimentaires et agricoles des petits agriculteurs d'aujourd'hui et de demain. Par contre, la production pour exportation de grandes quantités de biomasse obtenue par agriculture intensive sur une surface agricole donnée pose d'énormes problèmes. Réalisée à grande échelle et de façon industrielle, la production d'agrocarburants est catastrophique pour des millions d'Africains, majoritairement des petits agriculteurs. Ces monocultures sur de grandes étendues consomment beaucoup d'eau. Elles impliquent l'usage fréquent d'engrais azotés et de pesticides, voire l'introduction de plants génétiquement modifiés. Nombre de compagnies s'arrangent pour devenir propriétaires ou locataires de terrains originellement exploités par les fermiers locaux et pour pouvoir déboiser des forêts essentielles à la survie de ces derniers. De plus, elles offrent peu d'emploi local. Elles n'assument généralement pas la responsabilité des effets secondaires négatifs à court et à long terme de leurs pratiques, telles le tarissement des sources d'eau, la pollution et l'érosion des sols, la réduction de la biodiversité. Par de telles pratiques, ces compagnies se rendent responsables de conséquences négatives sur le potentiel agricole local et la lutte contre la faim. Elles confrontent les petits agriculteurs à la réduction de disponibilité et de qualité de l'eau, de disponibilité et de qualité de terre agricole, de biodiversité et de ressources alimentaires et agricoles dans l'environnement, ainsi qu'à l'expropriation et au déplacement de population.

La concurrence entre agriculture pour énergie et pour alimentation accentue le problème de la faim dans le monde en réduisant la quantité de nourriture disponible et en provoquant l'augmentation de prix des denrées agricoles. La production de « bio fuels » absorbe une part non négligeable des denrées agricoles disponibles sur le marché, ainsi que les surplus de production jusqu'ici utilisés pour fournir l'aide alimentaire aux pays en crise. La pénurie d'eau et de surface cultivable, ainsi que le coût d'une production intensive augmentent les coûts de production. Les prix sur le marché augmentent aussi du fait de la diminution de quantités récoltées (à cause du réchauffement climatique, lui-même provoqué par les productions industrielles diverses) et du fait de la croissance démographique.

L'expansion du marché des agrocarburants encouragée par la politique européenne de l'énergie va à l'encontre de la politique de développement de l'Union Européenne.

AEFJN agit auprès des Institutions Européennes pour qu'elles intègrent dans leurs instruments politiques la protection des droits humains et sociaux des petits agriculteurs africains, tels que le droit à l'alimentation et le droit à des conditions de travail justes pour tous. Il est essentiel que l'Union Européenne préserve l'accès à l'eau et aux terres agricoles de la population africaine, ainsi que le potentiel vital de leur environnement ; ce sont 3 fondements pour atteindre les Objectifs de Développement du Millénaire auxquels l'UE s'est engagée.

Cela passe par :

- exiger la présence de représentants des Organisations Paysannes en Afrique dans les comités de conseil des négociateurs car elles sont la voix de milliers de petits agriculteurs.
- exiger des Etats membres de l'UE un contrôle strict de l'origine des agrocarburants importés et de vérifier que leur production ne menace pas les ressources alimentaires et agricoles (eau, terre fertile, biodiversité) des petits agriculteurs en Afrique.
- exiger des gouvernements européens la réduction de consommation globale d'énergie et l'inscrire dans leur politique énergétique afin de réduire la demande d'agrocarburants destinés au transport et à la production d'électricité, et de réduire la quantité de GES émis par le secteur agricole parce qu'ils contribuent largement au réchauffement climatique dont souffrent déjà les populations africaines.
- évaluer tous les 2 ans les conséquences de l'essor des cultures pour agrocarburant dans les pays producteurs; en particulier, analyser l'évolution de l'accès à l'eau et aux terres agricoles des petits agriculteurs africains, contrôler la qualité de l'eau disponible, surveiller la pollution du sol et répertorier leurs ressources biologiques disponibles, analyser la disponibilité des denrées agricoles sur le marché local associées aux cultures pour énergie et le déplacement de productions agricoles, et enfin, analyser l'origine des fluctuations des prix des denrées agricoles. Ces évaluations couplées de la possibilité de corriger les orientations politiques incombent aux Etats membres, et requièrent l'avis de l'Assemblée parlementaire paritaire ACP-UE.
- exiger des compagnies européennes importatrices d'agrocarburants la garantie des enjeux sociaux tels que la protection du droit à l'alimentation, du droit à des conditions de travail justes pour tous et plus particulièrement de l'interdiction du travail des enfants au détriment de leur scolarité et de leur santé, ainsi que l'obligation pour les importateurs de mentionner l'origine de leur produit et d'en permettre la traçabilité.
- intégrer dans les directives européennes concernant la production et l'importation de sources d'énergie les critères sociaux, l'évaluation biennale des conséquences liées à l'application des mesures contenues dans les directives, le dialogue régulier entre Institutions européennes et représentants de la société civile des pays de production.