

LST Workshop on Trade Justice – 13th & 14th November 2008

LST Residential Workshop on Trade Justice, the second provincial workshop conducted under the TDP project was held on 13th and 14th November at Mayura Beach Resort in Matara. It was a two day residential event which allowed the participants to arrive from their respective destinations in Hambantota and Galle districts. The workshop was conducted in Sinhala medium.

As in the first instance, this time too the objectives of the workshop was to identify civil society organisations working on trade justice issues in the Southern Province and look into the possibility of setting up a network of civil society organisations in order to collaborate with them in the future on the work on trade justice and relevant issues. In the course of achieving the above LST was also interested in promoting the exchange of experiences and ideas among the participants as well as exploring how the work of the individual participant organizations relate to trade justice.

Participant organisations / individuals

According to the selection criterion that LST set for the participant organisations and the individuals, we sought activists from the civil society organisations and grass roots level organisations in the Southern Province who are already engaged in programmes on globalization, trade justice and sustainable development as well as those possessing some familiarity with the issues and authority in shaping the work of their organisations were requested to attend the workshop. We also wanted to know from these potential participants the issues they would most likely to needed to be more informed in terms of their work. The purpose of this exercise was to prepare the agenda of the workshop as well as to select the resource people to cater to the potential participants' specific knowledge requirements. It must be also mentioned here that we had to decline some applications sent to the workshop due to budgetary constraints.

Twenty four participants from 13 organisations attended the workshop. (See Annex 1) They were from institutions working on community welfare and development, organic farming, providing legal advice and knowledge on self – employments, women's empowerment, garment workers, fisher folk, plantation porkers, human rights, ethnic harmony and peace building as well as other local social and economic issues.

The agenda and the sessions

The agenda entailed five main sessions (See Annex 2). Three of them were presentations while two were group activities. Presentations were followed by a discussion. Two presentations by Mr. Lalith Abeysinghe and Mr. Sandun Thudugala on *Globalisation & Trade* and *Global Food Price Crisis* respectively were held on the first day. They were preceded by a group activity where the participants discussed the work they are currently involved in. The third presentation by Mr. Sarath de Silva on Human rights Critique of WTO was held on the second day. The group activity on the relevance of Trade Justice in the participants' current area of work and on how to plan the work together on trade justice in participants' specific areas of work took place after the presentation.

The workshop started at 2.00 p.m. on the first day. Mr. Skanthakumar of LST made the introduction to the work shop on *Why Trade Justice?* After doing a brief introduction of the LST, he highlighted the present prominent status given to civil and political rights as opposed to economic, social and cultural rights. Then he went on to emphasize the human rights perspective in understanding trade and how trade justice must take into account how it (trade – free trade) would impact on the poor, and the marginalized. He also said that trade must not be seen merely in terms of purchasing power, but by

bringing in a human rights perspective, understanding and critiquing trade is made possible. In his speech the relevance of human rights in all areas of our lives was pointed out.

Commenting on the necessity of exposure to information on trade and globalization, Mr. Skanthakumar said that in Sri Lanka's the civil society activists especially with grass roots level contacts should have a good knowledge of this in order to carry forward their campaigns effectively.

The participants were divided into four groups for the first interactive activity. This activity was a success in terms of sharing experiences and networking among the participants from three districts in the southern province (See Annex 3). All the participants were keen to speak about their work and experiences which created a productive atmosphere for the sessions to come.

The first presentation on Globalization and Trade was made by Mr. Lalith Abeysinghe. He explained globalization and Trade through five main points; Definition of globalization, its history, the present context of it, definition of trade, necessary ingredients to achieve fair trade and present local context.

Mr. Abeysinghe defined globalization as an enforcement of an oppressive and unfair system over a majority of world population by a minority of population for their own benefit. He traced the history of globalization to colonization to present neo colonization and direct exploitation by the World Bank, IMF, WTO and the developed nations. He delineated how the effects of globalization manifest in political, cultural and economic aspects.

The speaker then traced the history of trade from the barter system in the ancient times to the present only-for-profit large scale trade that threatens human ethics, human relations and fairness. He described the trade in the third world which deals with primary commodities/raw material, low prices for products decided by the buyer and payment of low wages. Afterwards, he discussed Being on alert and being aware of the situation as the measures to secure fair trade and finally concluding his presentation with what should be done by the civil society activists in these circumstances.

During the discussion that followed there were several comments and questions on the need of effective advocacy and attitudinal changes, taking measures to prevent environmental degradation through globalization and the importance of public mobilization against globalization.

The topic for the second session was global food price crisis conducted by Mr. Sandun Thudugala. He commenced his presentation by mentioning the 15 proposals which his organisation MONLAR has put forward to the government to solve the crisis food price increase.

He went on to say that among the reasons given for the global food crisis was the 40% increase in food prices, especially in the price of staple foods. It is said the Sri Lankan food prices even surpass the global food prices.

Commenting on the situation in Sri Lanka, he said that half of the population is reported to be malnourished. Half the number of the population does not receive the necessary number of calories. Anemia/ malnutrition of women are common. One out of four women in Sri Lanka is said to be suffering from malnutrition.

In his presentation Mr. Thudugala put across urban migration, changes in the trend of food consumption, current priority to produce bio-fuels, high import cost of wheat flour and milk powder, increase in oil and fertilizer prices and farmers' dependency on high yielding seed varieties which sometimes will only produce crop once as reasons given by experts for the global food crisis and gave a detailed description of all these factors. His talk included a critique on the Sri Lankan

government's measures towards solving food crisis. He emphasized the proactive activism of civil society organizations in solving the eminent food crisis in Sri Lanka.

At the end of the presentation the participants who are working with the community and the grass roots level organisations in the Southern Province commented the work and the campaigns such as promoting organic farming, home gardening, farmers' rights to seeds, awareness raising on food crisis and the latest trend of transnational companies buying large stretches of land for cultivation which they have been so far involved in.

On the following day – 14th November, the workshop commenced at 8.30 am. The first task done was the recap of the previous day's activities. All the participants were invited to comment on the activities that took place on the previous day in the workshop. This exercise was effective for LST in understanding how the activities on the previous day had affected the participants. It was also important for the participants to air their opinion of the work done.

The third presentation by Mr. Sarath De Silva on Human Rights Critique of WTO was the next in the agenda. In his talk Mr. De Silva gave a detailed description of the evolution of WTO and its function. He also spoke about the principle of non discrimination and the principle of comparative advantage on the basis of which WTO functions and how they are manipulated by the Developed countries in implementation. The second section of the presentation touched on the basic human rights as stipulated in the Sri Lankan constitution.

This presentation brought about many comments and queries from the participants on the effects of international trade on the developing countries including Sri Lanka, the link between the WTO and globalization, as well as issues of implementation of basic human rights in Sri Lanka.

The final activity of the workshop was the second interactive discussion. The participants discussed in groups how the knowledge on trade justice they received from the workshop could be used in their existing programmes and the ways and means to work together in economic, social and cultural campaigns. All participants worked enthusiastically in this activity. They had many plans of working together (See annex 4). During their group presentations they elaborated the need for more workshops like this to share their experiences as well as to update their knowledge in the topics.

At the end of the workshop the participants were given an opportunity to evaluate the workshop. Most of them said that the knowledge they gained was very useful for them to work in their respective fields. They also encouraged LST to hold similar workshops in order to renew their knowledge.

From the point of view of the organisers, we felt that the workshop was a success in terms of networking and bringing together like minded activists to campaign for economic, social and cultural rights in the future. On the other hand, in spite of the difficulties gone through to organise this workshop in Matara, we were encouraged to a great extent by the enthusiasm and the need for exposure for knowledge in the activists in the provinces.

Annex 1

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Annex 2
LST - Workshop on Trade Justice -13th and 14th November 2008
Agenda

Day One

<i>12.00pm – 01.00pm</i>	<i>Lunch</i>
<i>02.00pm – 02.15pm</i>	<i>Registration</i>
<i>02.15pm – 02.45pm</i>	<i>Introduction: Why Trade Justice? (LST)</i>
<i>02.45pm – 3.30pm</i>	<i>Sharing Our Work</i>
<i>3.30pm -- 04.15pm</i>	<i>Globalisation and Trade</i> <i>Lalith Abeysinghe (16+ Movement)</i>
<i>04.15pm – 05.00pm</i>	<i>Discussion</i>
<i>05.00pm – 05. 30pm</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>
<i>05.30pm – 06.15pm</i>	<i>Global Food Price Crisis</i> <i>Sandun Thudugala (Monlar)</i>
<i>06.15pm – 07.00pm</i>	<i>Discussion</i>
<i>07.30pm</i>	<i>Dinner</i>

Day Two

<i>08.30am – 09.00am</i>	<i>Re-Cap</i>
<i>09.00am – 09.45am</i>	<i>Human Rights Critique of WTO</i> <i>Sarath Silva (Sri Jayawardena Pura University)</i>
<i>09.45Am – 10.15am</i>	<i>Discussion</i>
<i>10.15am – 10.45am</i>	<i>Tea Break</i>
<i>10.45am – 11.45am</i>	<i>Group Work: Relevance of Trade Justice</i>
<i>11.45am – 12.15pm</i>	<i>Report Back</i>
<i>12.15pm – 12.30pm</i>	<i>Close</i>

Group Work 1: The current programmes/campaigns conducted by participants

1st Group – areas of work

- Welfare of rural women/self-employment schemes/to help develop their business
- To market their produce/products
- To develop domestic industries
- Legal advice, particularly to garment workers and problems arising out of termination.
- Help in getting credit/legal counseling services
- Hambantota – training of teachers

2nd Group – areas of work

- Programmes designed to give priority to rural women
- Training given to rural women on the habit of saving
- Self-employment generated for rural women.
- Legal education
- Cultural activities designed to appreciate each others cultures/integration among different ethnic communities
- Programmes on gender sensitization
- Skills training of garment workers, because limited skills acquired in garment factories.

3rd Group – areas of work

- Help low income rural women to engage in self-employment schemes. Agromart helps them in areas of trade, livestock
- Assistance is given to fisher folk/fisherwomen/fisher children
- Private individuals/businessman market commodities to the village at a reasonable price.
- Assistance to widows, legal advice
- Develop roads
- Assist in the education of poor children through schools
- Encourage the savings habit in women.
- Periodic briefing (every 6 months) given to VIPs/government representatives about the problems/needs of the villagers
- Peace building programs in Deniyaya
- Dairy farming development.

4th Group – areas of work

- Community development programs
- Community welfare programs
- Training programs
- Home cultivation
- Educate government officers about the needs/problems of fisher community
- Provide fishermen opportunities to buy cheap/reasonably priced fishing equipment.

Annex 4:
Group Work 2: Relevance of Trade Justice in the current Work and Way forward in ESCR campaigns

Group 1

- 1) awareness programmes for community through drama techniques
- 2) Making the community leadership knowledgeable through organizations headed by religious leadership.
- 3) Promotion of organic farming and home gardening.
- 4) Making the community aware about the food security in a practical level
- 5) Initiate a discourse on environmentally friendly trend in the modern technology.
- 6) Distribution of leaflets and brochures received from various institutions on relevant areas among communities.
- 7) Awareness programmes for school children.
- 8) Creating space for youth to put across their views of the relevant issues in the specific areas.
- 9) Encouraging individuals to take initiative in being proactive about the issues related to trade justice.
- 10) Provide the awareness raising on rights, entitlements and privileges of communities like farmers, fisher folk, garment industry workers and self employed workers and plan campaigns for the future.
- 11) Facilitate discourse between the communities and the government authorities regarding the relevant issues.

Group 2

- 1) Organising a series of awareness raising workshops for the community, including the relevance of trade justice to the current work
- 2) Creating a network of participant organizations.
- 3) Launching programmes with the assistance of the other organizations which are involved in the same area of work.
- 4) The maximum utilization of resources identified in a specific area of work.
- 5) Initiating protests and pickets
- 6) Introducing the concept 'value the local products'
- 7) Organise discussions and fora with regards to basic human rights
- 8) Broadening the knowledge and the understanding of trade justice and consumer protection among the communities.
- 9) Stand for social justice.

Group 3

- 1) Organising community awareness programmes with the assistance of Samatha Mandala, Grama Sevakas and Samurdhi animaters, religious leaders, members of pradeshiya sabhas, posters and hand bills.
- 2) Making the consumers groups who produce informative fair prices, quality of products and fair markets.
- 3) Encouraging the producers to make goods with quality through providing correct entrepreneurial skills.
- 4) Promoting local productions and producers.

- 5) Encouraging consumers to purchase local produce.
- 6) Providing information to the communities to sell their products with in the village through village level production associations.

Group 4

- 1) Making children familiarize with nutritional local food varieties
- 2) Invoking environmentally friendly thoughts in children
- 3) Organise awareness raising programmes and nutritional programmes for the community.
- 4) Through above actions create a society of good families
- 5) Providing training and knowledge at school and village levels on maximum utilization of the land owned by individuals
- 6) Community awareness programmes on local seed varieties and organic fertilizer.
- 7) Community awareness programmes on the importance of food security.
- 8) Use the factor 6) and 7) to benefit the community's financial position.
- 9) Creating a social discourse about the food items available in the market and the self produced food items.
- 10) Establishment of ethnic harmony through item 9)
- 11) Protecting the rights of the fisher folk through a sustainable fisheries industry and thus provide benefits to the community.
- 12) Promoting eco – friendly attitudes among the community, Government and non-governmental authorities.
- 13) Making the activists aware about human rights and organize community level awareness programmes .
- 14) Making the community knowledgeable about sports, personality, and health and create a healthy society.