

WTO trade rules benefit rich countries

Compromising the spirit of the Doha Development Round of the World Trade Organization (WTO), big trade players during Hong Kong Ministerial tilted the trade rules to benefit rich countries and multilateral corporations.

This was the crux of the presentations at the first day of a two-day training workshop on “International Trade and Human Development” organized by a media think tank Journalists for Democracy and Human Rights (JDHR) in collaboration with the Trade Initiative with Human Development Perspective (TIHP)/UNDP and the Ministry of Commerce here Tuesday.

Speaking on this occasion, Mustafa Talpur of Actionaid said the Doha Development Round was started to correct the inequalities in global trade rules to share the gains from global trade and to reduce poverty but after wasting five years, two WTO ministerial conferences have not brought any significant result. He said the current proposals on table for negotiations to conclude the Doha Round are entirely anti-poor and unacceptable. Rich countries are not offering any substantial cuts in agriculture subsidies, market access barrier for agriculture goods from developing countries is still intact and undemocratic and non-transparent methods of exclusive meetings are being arranged to make a backdoor deal, he added.

Talking about agriculture and food security, Mustafa said the food poverty and hunger is increasing in Pakistan. The goals sets in 1996 food summit and then 2000 millennium summit are far beyond to achieve. The over all per capita availability of cereals has decreased in Pakistan and caloric intake also has a decreasing trend from the period of World Food summit.

According to current estimates by various sources there are 23% people of Pakistan are malnourished while during 1991-92 there were 24% people were malnourished. In fifteen years Pakistan government has been unable to protect the citizens’ right to food. In the percentage terms the statistics show one percent reduction but in number there are now 35 million people are malnourished while in 1991-92 this number was 27 million. There are several reasons of food insecurity and inaccessibility in Pakistan. The uneven land distribution, elitist characteristics of state, rising poverty, unemployment and international trade regime are the main causes which are affecting food production, accessibility and distribution.

Giving an overview of the Trade Initiatives from Human Development Perspective (TIHP), Syed Qasim Ali Shah said TIHP is a joint venture of Ministry of Commerce and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). He said the increased poverty, and rising unemployment, has reduced schooling, diminished public services, and increased social stress and fragmentation. One of the UNDP reports comments, “economies are now recovering but human recovery will take longer”. The sustainable human development is the ultimate end of the development process, with economic growth simply representing an important means to that end. As quoted by Emerson, “the real wealth of a nation is its people”. And the purpose of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy long, healthy and creative lives. This simple but powerful truth is often forgotten in the pursuit of material and financial wealth.” Sustainable human development (SHD) is not only the core objective of the process of economic growth and development. But it is also a powerful instrument for promoting

economic growth, especially when investments in human development are made in the context of a liberal and open economic environment, he added.

Qasim said there should be an interrelationship between three complementary policy spheres: integration into the global economy and the liberalization of markets; the promotion of fast economic growth; and sustainable human development, however human development remain ignored in all the times in countries like ours. The impact of each of these interlocking policy spheres on promoting development needs to be considered, and policy proposals should be devised accordingly. He said the negative consequences of globalization and liberalization should be evaluated, and strategies to mitigate those impacts should be an important constituent located in social and economic policy. However, the complexity of the overall policy environment confronting policymakers pose a serious question to all of us, and several weaknesses of so-called 'holistic' or 'comprehensive' development approaches needs to be identified. Realizing these issues, UNDP started a holistic programme in collaboration with the Ministry of Commerce titled 'Trade Initiatives from Human Development Perspective (TIHP)' with the aim to assist the Government of Pakistan and other stakeholders to make assessment of impacts of trade policies and WTO trade agreements on poor people.

Shafqat Munir said journalists can play an important role to protect the right to know of the people while tracking and exposing bad deals in the WTO negotiations process. He said media can influence the policy making process by properly taking up the issue in the interests of the people.

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