



Analytical Report on the Stakeholders' Meeting/ Validation Workshop of the Case Study on the Philippine Movement for Changing International Trade Rules and Barriers

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(As part of the dissemination and validation of research findings of the case study on the Philippine movement to change international trade rules and barriers, a workshop was held on January 30, 2006 at the Balay Kalinaw, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, Philippines, in order to explain and clarify the preliminary findings of the study based on the initial written research report and to provide members of the Stop the New Round Coalition-Philippines, who were the key informants of the study, a venue to collectively discuss the emergence, discourse, strategies, outcomes, and trajectories of the movement.)

INTRODUCTION

The workshop began with a presentation of data to support the key findings of the case study:

The Stop the New Round Coalition-Philippines (SNR) was a result not so much of increased discontent and disillusion on WTO-driven trade liberalization among various quarters of Philippine civil society; rather, it was due to: (1) the Philippine government's diminished confidence in the trade body as a rules-based system; (2) the

presence of "political entrepreneurs" whose understanding of the multilateral trading system and liberalization and organizational strategies had been conditioned by previous waves of mobilization and contentious episodes, both domestically and internationally; and (3) the pragmatic need to project a national presence and competence that exceeded the member-organizations' capabilities and lent legitimacy to civil-society actions in the international arena. SNR attempted to assume an

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independent identity and linked its goals and objectives to transnational initiatives on the WTO, rather than the movement struggling for political and social transformations; yet tactics employed still fall under the conventional blueprint of collective action, which are related to the latter.

To substantiate these claims, a brief history of trade activism in the Philippines was provided, which essentially focused on resistance related to the Philippine government's pursuit of trade liberalization programs and policies through the ratification of various international treaties and membership to trading blocs. These protest events became the antecedent for the organization of the Stop the New Round Coalition-Philippines (SNR). SNR emerged based on the necessity of building a campaign that would force the Philippine government to take a multi-pronged strategy to defend national interest in the Fifth WTO Ministerial Conference in Cancun, Mexico, and to complement the initiatives of two important global alliances opposed to a new round of trade negotiations—Our World Is Not for Sale (OWINFS) and Seattle to Brussels Network. What was envisioned was a time-bound campaign with defined and achievable objectives: rupture the double-edged consensus-building procedure of the WTO.

The workshop participants then gave their reactions on the salient and contentious points of the study.

ROLE OF GRIEVANCE OR DISCONTENT IN COLLECTIVE ACTION

While indeed SNR was an “enterprise” or a project authored and run by skilled and veteran organizers who had the expertise on the technical, procedural, and political aspects of the World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and the experience in carrying out campaigns—and therefore,

infused in recognizing, creating, and seizing opportunities—downplaying the role of grievances in the emergence, development, and outcomes of SNR may not be entirely accurate. The discontent or disillusionment to the professed benefits of multilateral trade through the WTO was a vital driving force for groups to come together and spearhead a national campaign against the launching of a new round of WTO negotiations. At all events, the assertion that the emergence of the anti-WTO coalition was due less to the “actual impact” of WTO policies to individuals and communities than to the action of political entrepreneurs would still have to be substantiated. It was the “collective grievance” which led to political participation. But this assertion by the members of SNR is one of the most controversial issues in the social movement literature because the causal relationship of grievances and collective action has been largely criticized by resource-mobilization theorists.

Nonetheless, it might be useful to examine the dynamic effects of grievances—in this case, the economic, political, and social impact of WTO-mandated policies—to the formation of the anti-WTO coalitions and the participation of a range of actors.

DOMESTIC POLITICAL OPPORTUNITY STRUCTURES

To attribute the Philippine government's confidence in the trade body as an opportunity for the mobilization of SNR may be a weak argument. The government is not a monolithic entity. This may be true in some quarters of the Philippine polity (such as the Department of Agriculture). But in the National Economic and Development Agency, the Philippine government's economic planning bureau, and the Department of Trade and Industry, which is at the forefront of international trade negotiations, the neoliberal paradigm remains a formidable guiding principle. There are dynamics as well within the policymaking branches of the government. The richness of this

dynamic could be aptly addressed if government officials involved in trade negotiations and policymaking were also interviewed.

Furthermore, ascribing SNR's emergence, development, and outcome to a shift in the Philippine government's stance toward the WTO-mandated trade liberalization—from passive to more cautious and calibrated—may be overstated. The prevailing view among the organizers and members of SNR in 2003 was that the administration of Gloria Macapagal Arroyo was a hopeless case considering her steadfast support for WTO treaty accession in 1995 and the unilateral liberalization process that followed. To expect the Philippines to break the WTO consensus was a marginal concern among SNR members. SNR had its eye fixed on derailing Cancun in Seattle fashion, regardless of the negotiating position of the Philippine government.

It is highly probable, therefore, that the opportunity to mobilize and launch an anti-WTO campaign in the Philippines did not emanate from the domestic political environment but on the transnational plane, such as the state-of-play in the post-Doha negotiations and power politics in the WTO, which various national movements captured and used to their own advantage.

FRAMING THE “STOP-THE-NEW-ROUND” CAMPAIGN

What was exceptional about SNR was that it was able to “package” and spread a radical call, carve its own niche, and pose as a credible campaign-coalition on the WTO, despite its link to the larger movement fighting for broad structural transformation. This point should be strengthened and further expounded. How did SNR frame the WTO as a bread-and-butter issue in the Philippines amid a sea of domestic concerns, such that it was able to penetrate Philippine mainstream media and draw movement participants, supporters, and allies?

Rather than lengthily discuss SNR members' discourses on the WTO, the

study should recast the analysis by focusing mainly on the issue frames. In the first place, the spectrum of positions on the WTO—from dismantle to reform—is more of a continuum rather than distinct categories. There are gradations in the positioning, but the fundamental analysis is basically the same and consistent: the WTO is an imperialist tool. Yet, SNR eschewed any reference to “imperialism.” Hence, it is necessary to cull from the organizational documents, narratives of movement participants, and media coverage of SNR how it projected itself and its issues.

INTERNATIONAL LINKAGE

Although SNR is a Philippine-based national movement, it is possible that it was triggered by global activism seeking a more defined national base. Certainly, there existed a rich history of mobilization and contentious episodes on trade and a robust and dynamic civil society where transnational activism may stem from. But SNR may have been initiated based on the desire and necessity to ground international campaigns nationally, especially since mobilization at the capital was largely lethargic and sporadic, notwithstanding the ruckus that Philippine civil society creates during WTO affairs and other international gatherings. This seems to indicate a norm that privileges global efforts over local struggles. However, as SNR grew and developed, local actions were privileged over international ones.

Thus a more systematic analysis of SNR's transnational face may go beyond a description of approaches taken to link the national campaign to the global movement to stop the new round by seeking parallelism with OWINFS network in its positions or tactics or the impact of conflicts and debates among international nongovernment organizations such as Oxfam International, Focus on the Global South, and Third World Network at the global level to SNR's positioning. Is it precise to characterize SNR's strategies of (1) information exchange of updates and

reports with trade activists and campaigners around the world through the Internet, (2) application for membership in the OWINFS coalition, and (3) funding of a few of its members to participate in the WTO ministerial in Cancun as transborder activities?

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

A number of conclusions and recommendations emerged from the validation workshop/stakeholders' meeting. First, the political and economic context of SNR should not be limited to the domestic level; changes in the structures of political opportunity may be negligible, if not absent. The moment was ripe for a campaign to be launched mainly because the momentum created by Seattle was continuing in both North and South. The development and democratic deficits of the WTO and the conflict between developed and developing countries on implementation issues and between the European Union and the United States on agricultural subsidies were intensifying. In short, most of the ingredients favoring a collapse were evident and national movements, such as SNR, seized these opportunities.

Second, credit was due SNR as to its success in radicalizing the trade discourse and getting public acceptance and media coverage for its radical positions on trade and trade-related issues in such a short time. Hence, it might be more appropriate to look into the outcomes of SNR in terms of its influence on public discourse, and to assess its information-education strategies compared to effects on policy change vis-à-vis government engagement.

Finally, an assessment on the working relations of the SNR members beyond conflicts on slogans and positions would contribute to the understanding of coalition building in the Philippines on contemporary and transnational issues such as international trade. The broadness of SNR must be qualified, since the members are mostly kindred spirits at the

level of ideology despite the shades of differences among themselves. But again, it is still worthwhile to look at the extent to which the dynamics in the Philippine progressive movement affect or did not affect the formation, management, and outcome of SNR.

PARTICIPANTS

A. Representatives from Member-Organizations of the Stop the New Round Coalition

1. Jenina Joy Chavez Malaluan
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2. Joseph Purugganan
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PHOTO DOCUMENTATION



Sharon M. Quinsaat (left), member of the UNRISD-Philippine Research Team, takes note of the issues raised by Jenina Joy Chavez Malaluan, coordinator of the Focus on the Global South-Philippine Program, during the national stakeholders' meeting on changing international trade rules and barriers.



Alice Raymundo, deputy executive director, Resource Center for People's Development, comments on Sharon M. Quinsaat's presentation.



Isagani Serrano, senior vice president of the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement, gestures as he raises a point during the meeting.



The participants during the open forum of the meeting.