Opportunities to strengthen trade policy for food and nutrition security: an analysis of two agricultural policy decisions

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Food insecurity and the double burden of malnutrition are major global health challenges. Despite the need for nutritious and sustainable food systems, global trade policy, particularly in relation to agriculture, is often highly political and constrains governments capacity to govern their own food supply for better food and nutrition security.

AIM

To understand the political and power dynamics of two agricultural trade policy decisions case studies at the global level, to improve trade-related food systems governance for food and nutrition security

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

• Analyse two agricultural trade policy decisions made at the WTO, with respect to the policy process, actor interests, and power (forms, spaces and levels)
• Consider the implications of these policies for food system governance for food and nutrition security

METHODS

a) Qualitative policy analysis: targeted literature and policy review on the two case studies, including major reports, publications, peer-reviewed papers, technical reports and WTO documents
b) Interviews: 8 key informant interviews, from academia, government, multilateral institutions and non-governmental organisations, who had been involved with, or were knowledgeable about the case studies

CASE STUDY 1: 2008 JULY MINISTERIAL

• The use of the Special Safeguard Mechanism (SSM) – a tool that will allow developing countries to raise tariffs temporarily to deal with import surges – was an unresolved issue from the Uruguay Round and an important issue in the 2008 WTO Ministerial. However, no decision was reached
• Rising influence of the G20 and G33 was a major reason for the resulting stalemate

CASE STUDY 2: 2013 BALI MINISTERIAL

• The WTO restricts the use of public stockholding – a food security measure for many developing countries – and a ‘peace clause’ was developed at the 2013 Ministerial to permit their use
• The global food price crisis influenced the urgency of the 2013 Ministerial
• India was a new and major influence on these decisions, pushing resolution on agricultural trade policy decisions for food security, which together with farmer interests was a significant concern for India and other developing countries

POWER

• Countries with a large economy / major agricultural exports demonstrated visible power in the negotiations
• Coalitions gave power in decision-making to typically voiceless countries
• The power and influence of large developed countries in decision making signifies a form of invisible power in a closed space, as developing countries did not have the ‘requirements’ to hold decision making power
• Domestic constituencies were influential in influencing negotiating positions and the ultimate outcome

CONCLUSIONS

• Coalitions between developing countries contributed to shifts in power at the WTO
• The case studies indicate that strengthening developing country voices can change trade governance shaping food systems globally