

UNCTAD Public Symposium 2013

Breakout session „*Can a more locally focussed agricultural trade regime reduce hunger and environmental impact?*“, facilitated by Nexus Foundation

Outcome

A more locally focussed trade regime following the formula „regional/local is first choice“ could bring about advantages on the food security and environmental side, if it is guided properly and as practical examples furnish evidence. In fact, especially the environmental damage today is so big – having crossed a few planetary boundaries already – , that a shift in agricultural practices to more sustainable approaches is dear to come. Current trade regime fosters specialization, which to a certain extend is against the actually diverse nature of agriculture and rural economies. But local preference rulings could be misused for protectionist measures. Inefficiencies would as well have to be avoided.

Already today some flexibilities for local sourcing are given in the current WTO framework. But somehow the current trade regime does not really let them occur and come into practice. Besides, as the recent example of public food stocks, where procurements above minimum price levels are counted as subsidies, shows there are delicate limitations of the flexibilities.

The today prevailing economic system, building more or less on anonymous competitive market mechanisms withstands to a larger extend divulgement of local preferences. Heavily distorted agricultural markets (subsidies, and no internalized externalities) do their own to exacerbate the situation (in the Public Symposium a call for a new economic order was repeatedly being heard). One essential solution lies in stronger involvement of citizens engagement in hands-on measures on food production, trade and land tenure. Cooperative land tenure for example, micro-crediting, transparent local/regional food chains, broadcasted knowledge dissemination and trainings for the knowledge-intensive agro-ecological approaches help to foster vibrant rural economies in the serve for food security and environmental stewardship. Governments should give room for this stronger citizens engagement.