

Alternatives for the Americas: A Summary

Alternatives for the Americas is a document of guidelines (summarized here) for making the process of hemispheric economic integration more inclusive, democratic, environmentally and culturally sustainable, and equitable. The document proposes development based on democratic citizen participation, local control over resources, and the reduction of economic and social inequalities.

Recognizing that the market is imperfect and does not address many needs - such as social justice, public services, and public security - the document calls for a stronger role of the state and increased regulation of the economy not only at the national but at the supra-national level as well. Equally important is the value citizens play in developing, implementing, and monitoring the process of economic integration.

An Alternative to What?

Alternatives for the Americas was created in response to the proposed Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA), often described as an extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to 33 countries of the Americas (excluding Cuba). Consolidating corporate-centered globalization, the FTAA (slated to go into effect in 2003) will likely give multinational corporations new legal rights, restrict the ability of governments to regulate in the public interest, and establish new rules for investment, trade in services, and public procurement.

The following is a **summary of the guiding principles** for just and sustainable development found in Alternatives for the Americas

Trade and investment should not be ends in themselves, but rather the instruments to promote a just economy.

Democratic Participation

In general, (whether it relates to creating a national development program, policies on free trade, development projects, mining, biodiversity, etc.) local communities affected by policies should be involved in drafting, approving, and monitoring

these policies. This should be a widely participatory process which uses broad consultation. The rights of local communities to veto or reject a project must be respected.

Role of the State

The sovereignty of states should be preserved by any agreement so that states have the power to maintain the well-being of their citizens. Same basic guiding principles regarding the role of governments are:

- To ensure that the interests of national populations supercede those of corporations. For example, promoting public interest over private ownership, especially in terms of education and health.
- To restrict or prohibit investment that is harmful to the environment, workers, or national development plan.
- To ensure national and international capital promote a country's fair and sustainable development.
- To ensure a strong export sector is not pursued at the expense of the domestic market (domestic markets must be strengthened in part by improving standards of living).
- To create conditions which promote competition among domestic companies in the international as well as domestic markets.
- To "evaluate and define rules and regulations of free trade agreements within frameworks of national development plans." For example, rules regulating foreign imports should coincide with these plans. This would restrict corn imports to Mexico.
- To protect strategic sectors such as natural resources and basic food production by small family farms.

Reducing Inequalities

In order to reduce inequalities among trading partners Alternatives for the Americas suggests:

- Promote an improved standardization of rights, laws, and standards upwards. For example, standards and regulations on the use of insecticides, rules on emissions and transfers of pollutants, and labor standards should be raised to highest levels.

- Institute a tax on revenues from international financial transactions (called a Tobin Tax) to pay for increased investment in education, health, and adjustment programs for workers who have been laid off due to economic restructuring..
- Create a level playing field among countries by forgiving foreign debt.
- Provide development aid to countries of the south. (Given by developed countries.)
- Recognize that women and certain racial and ethnic groups have shouldered a disproportionate share of economic and social inequities which need to be remedied by any trade agreement.
- Recognize indigenous rights to land and resources.

Some of the Categories Addressed in Alternative for the Americas

Human Rights, in their broadest definition, should be promoted by economic integration. These rights include civil, political, economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights, gender equity, and rights relating to indigenous peoples and communities.

Labor should be included in trade agreements. A just trading system is one that guarantees basic worker rights, ensures proper social assistance to those negatively affected by trade, and promotes the improvements of working and living standards. The eight fundamental workers' rights conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO) should be included in any hemispheric agreement. Governments and employers would be obliged to respect them as a condition of access to the benefits of the agreement.

Investment should be productive rather than speculative, transfer appropriate technology and create high-quality employment. Governments should have the right to screen out investments that make no net contribution to development or are detrimental to internationally recognized human, labor and environmental rights.

Agriculture should receive special treatment in trade agreements. To ensure food security, countries should have the right to protect or exclude staple foods from trade agreements. Property rights of small producers should be respected, in particular the traditional rights of indigenous people to live off their ancestral lands. Governments should

recognize that small-scale farming requires special policies concerning land conservation, appropriate technology (including biotechnology), agricultural research, credit, and subsidies. Recognizing there are great differences in the amounts of subsidies that governments give to agriculture, there should be attempts at improved standardization of financial assistance for agriculture.

Gender should be addressed as an overarching theme throughout investment and trade negotiations. Women and representatives of women's organizations from all levels of society should be included and engaged in trade debate. Trade agreements should ensure that women have equal access to resources such as credit, and technological training as well as assets such as land. Laws and policies should be developed to provide technical and development assistance that promotes education, technological training, capacity-building, and skills development for women.

Environmental protections should be prioritized over corporate interests. Governments should have the power to channel investment towards environmentally sustainable activities, reject privatization of natural resources, and eliminate policies that subsidize or encourage fossil fuel energy.

Immigration should be an issue covered in all trade negotiations. Governments should grant amnesty to all undocumented workers within their borders, demilitarize border zones, and support international subsidies for regions and/or countries that are major exporters of labor.

The Hemispheric Social Alliance

Alternatives for the Americas is a document created by the HSA, a hemispheric wide coalition of labor unions, environmentalist, family farmers, scholars and other citizens coalitions representing more than 100 organizations throughout the Americas. It was created to facilitate information exchange and joint strategies and action towards building an alternative, democratic model of development. The HSA was created in April 1999 with the secretariat being the Mexican Action Network on Free Trade (RMALC). The Alliance for Responsible Trade (ART) is the U.S. coalition of groups representing the U.S. in the HSA.

Summarized by Witness for Peace, Mexico International Team