Chapter IV

Media and WTO

Introduction

The emergence of truly global media system is a recent development, reflecting to no small degree of globalisation of the market economy. Although media is only one part of the overall expansion and spread of an increasingly integrated global corporate system, they complement and support the needs of non-media enterprises. On one hand the global media play a central economic role, providing part of the global infrastructure for non media firms, and facilitating their business just as the growth of domestic commercial media supports corporate growth within countries. The global media provide the main vehicle for advertising corporate wares for sale, thereby facilitating corporate expansion into new nations, regions and markets. On the other hand, the global media's news and entertainment provide an informational and ideological environment that helps sustain the political, economic and moral basis for marketing goods and for having a profit-driven social order. In short the global media are a necessary component of global capitalism and one of its defining features. In contemporary societies people communicate in many ways by direct personal encounters at home and in public spaces: by phone, fax and mail by attending public gatherings and lectures: and by listening to reading and watching the media. As the media are not the exclusive means of communication, when they are technically deficient or grossly propagandistic other forms may fill the gap, however, imperfectly(Herman & McChesney, 1997). The media are especially important in large and technologically advanced countries where most of the citizenry never meet 99 percentages of their fellow citizens and the media serve as kind of proxy. A major collective source of information and images, the media perform many functions and server numerous personal needs. At the personal
level they provide a link to the larger society and at least indirect connections to other human beings, and in varying degree of connectedness and solidarity. The media can however, strengthen peoples isolation and make them fearful of the world outside. They provide emotional outlets, evoking anger and feelings of sympathy, stress, and release. The media provide amusement, entertainment and distraction. And they provide information (or myths and disinformation) about the past and present that helps to create a common culture system of values, traditions and ways of looking at the world. The media also sometimes service minorities and subcultures within large communities, providing them with local news and entertainment and allowing them to see themselves and the world through their lens.

At the political level the media play a central role in the working of democracies. Historically, a critical feature of movements toward democracy has been the creation of public sphere meaning all the places and forums where issue of importance to a political community are discussed and debated and where information is presented that is essential to citizen participation in community life. The concept is important because a democratic society depends on an informed populace making political choices. In large and complex societies public participation in political process is already limited largely to occasional expression of opinion and protests and the periodic selection of representatives. For the weak participation to be minimally effective the public has to know what is going on and the option that they should weigh debate and act upon.

In view of the Jürgen Habermas and others, the public sphere works most effectively for democracy when it is institutionally independent of the state and society’s dominant economic forces (Habermas, 1989). Although such autonomy is difficult to develop and maintain, the point of democratic communication policy making is to strive toward this goal, although within the institutional schemata there are many different shapes a public sphere may assume. To some, the public sphere is exemplified by non-profit non-commercial public service broadcasters like the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) that tend to relatively independent and there fore capable
of some degree of objectivity. A public sphere arguably can work as well or better when there is a wide range of media, each partially or wholly independent of the state and commercial control, that engage in public affairs and journalism in a partisan fashion.

Media plays a role of educator a space in which citizens learn, discern, debate and judge to formulate action, news media can be imagined as an extension of the classroom. And as a powerful force in democratic society for or against change, the new media as subject warrants critical focus in classroom education. As already mentioned Jürgen Habermas posits that early modern capitalism created the condition for the “bourgeois public sphere” an area for public debate. The time period during which GATT was in operation the public sphere was taken over by an expanded state and increasingly powerful corporate interest. Instead of allowing a sphere for debate that could shape the direction of the state, the increasingly commodified media became a force for manipulating the public and manufacturing consent (Curran, 1991). If one accepts Habermas view that concentrated corporate ownership of new media undermines the public sphere, then Canada would be a prime example. Canada’s mainstream news media is increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few very large corporations. Indeed as one media scholar notes “Canada has a high degree in media concentration that is unequalled in any country of comparable social, political and economic standing (Raboy, 2005).

When such clear corporate interests are involved then it would not be surprising that they would also have a similar trade interest which could stretch global. Since the early 1980s there has been a dramatic restructuring of national media industries, along with the emergence of a genuinely global commercial media market. The newly developed global media system is dominated by three or four dozen large transnational corporation (TNCs) with fewer than ten mostly US based media conglomeration towering over the global market. With business interest as the prime component of globalization and international trade the use of media by the corporate interest cannot be denied and few handfuls of TNCs decide the daily agenda (Herman & McChesney, 1997). Critical studies have gone to extent of labelling WTO
working in favour of giant conglomerates and against public interest as most policies are geared towards creating more profits for the multinationals (Wallach & Sforaza, 1999). Some media studies in India on WTO coverage too have suggested based on the news content analysis that the present media is severely biased and wedded to the ideology of neo-liberalism (Arora, 2004). Global studies on media have suggested that the news coverage of WTO negotiations have been institutionalized around what is termed as a common meta-frame labelled as the ‘neo-liberal development frame’.

**Role of Media**

The media’s influence on the ethic of public life is assumed to be significant. The press primacy as the watchdog of government and continue in such forms. The media acts as a quasi official fourth branch of government, its institutions no less important because they are important (Cater, 1959). The media is interwoven into the very fabric of our society. From Newspaper to television to internet. They offer no escape. Media affect what we think about what we believe. During the last couple of decades, the number of top ranking media firms has decreased in proportion to their growing influence. Today it is only a handful of trans-national corporations that decide the daily agenda of the world. In this race to the top and a pursuit of the bottom line the erstwhile ideals of the fourth estate; truth, honesty, courage have been forgotten. The media which are a business like any other have now donned a new avatar that of the trumpets of capitalism and its 21st Century sibling neoliberalism (Herman & McChesney, 1997). In most general and basic sense, neoliberalism refers to a political movement that began in 1960s. The growing influence of globalisation has made the public institutions to give up their autonomy and increasingly influenced by corporate interest. Over the years a number of studies were conducted in the field of communication by scholars like Noam Chomsky, Robert Hackett, Edward Herman and Robert Hackett, Edward Herman and Robert McChesney which examined the correlation between the media and the international economy, polity and society. A special focus of these studies has been on treaties like the WTO and NAFTA.
Information sharing at local, national, regional and global levels is vital to humanitarian responses towards economy, environment and society. Media, while playing its role as the agent of information and protector of the Right to Know of the people shares information at broader level, actually raises the level of awareness about the issues which impact the livelihoods of the people and their role in society. Since economy, environment and society are interlinked and particularly policies, initiatives and dialogues on these subjects affect the people, majority of whom are not aware of them. Media, particularly the segment of media that deals with development issues, takes up the concerns of the stakeholders and communities through professional activism.

There are different role of media that reflect the issues of press freedom and media’s role in protecting the people’s rights, particularly relating to development. Due to monopolies in media beginning from the CNN and other multinational media giants, the global media is largely protecting the rights of the rich Multinational Corporation with commercial aspects thus compromising the rights of the people. In this sense, “Press freedom is the freedom of 200 rich people to spread their opinions”: [Paul Sethe, a German Conservative] “The press freedom of bourgeois society comprises the freedom of the rich systematically and incessantly to defraud, demoralize and make a fool of the exploited and an oppressed masses of the people, the poor.” [Lenin, 1917].

On the other hand, if media is mobilized and motivated on larger public interest developmental issues reflecting the opinions of majority of the people, then the role of a few rich or those in the power corridors could be reduced. Thomas Jefferson once said: “Were it left to me whether we should have a government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter” Both of these concepts of the freedom of press and media in one or the other way establish that the right to know of the people, the poor, the neglected and the exploited is supreme over the right to information of a few hundred rich. Here comes the media activism on the issues concerning the people related development. In the era of globalization, there is a dire need that media should not be allowed to be
overpowered by these few rich rather it should be mobilized in the larger interests of the communities being affected by certain regimes imposed on them by monopolists and exploiters.

The libertarian theory of media that dates from the 19th century sees the people as distinguishing between truth and untruth. Press was declared the “Fourth Estate” in this theory. It was also declared free of government influence and control. If we apply this theory, we find that though due to international pressure, governments’ influence or control on media is gradually reducing. But another phenomenon is fast emerging with the introduction of certain new agreements under WTO in the name of trade liberalization; and the multinational corporations (MNCs), as a result, are gaining monopolies and patents even on the life forms literally influencing rather taking over the role of governments. Like governments, MNCs also use media advertisement, a big source of revenue, as tool to influence media coverage. For example, you would hardly see media reporting critical of Pepsi, Nestle or Monsanto in Pakistan. The revenue generated through advertisements from government and MNCs sometimes plays havoc with the public interests. Even if there is well researched and substantiated information against any big giant such as Nestle, Monsanto and others, it would be covered partially if at all it gets space in media. Follow up or more news stories against the products of the MNCs normally do not get space in media because they provide large chunk of revenue to the newspapers and TV channels. Similarly, governments give pieces of press advice to the owners thus blocking coverage of certain issues that according to them could invoke negative reaction among the people. This kind of corporatization and commercialization of media badly damaged the people’s rights and liberties that undermined the Libertarian Theory.

Following failure of the Libertarian Theory of Media, Social Responsibility Theory of Media emerged with a rights-based approach to address real social problems facing various communities across nations. Under Libertarian Theory, it was the owners and the operators in the press who had to decide what should go or be blocked in print/broadcast media. The Social
Responsibility Theory rests on the notion of a free press acting socially responsibly. It is the reigning theory in the rich West, but applied only on their internal affairs. It rests on the notion of free press acting responsibly towards their society with a commitment both on the part of the journalists and owners of media organizations. Under the Social Responsibility Theory of Media, the Right to Know of the People has been recognized as the supreme right of the people. Citizens enjoy the right to know about what is going to happen that could affect their livelihoods and is in their interest. Media by virtue of its role and responsibilities is bound to safeguard the people’s right to know. It is considered a moral, social and professional duty of a journalist to be responsible towards society. That is why media persons are focused and concerned on the development issues affecting the lives of the people as to them, news is what affects the lives of the people and/or interests to them. These are the two premises on which journalists write news items and draft their stories and articles. Prevailing international norms say journalists should have the freedom to gather, draft and present news stories. It is their free choice what to cover. But if they are barred from doing their duty or someone else decides for them what is worth covering and what is not then this is denying them their professional right. Some people may have greater, in depth knowledge of some areas but journalists are supposed to have a general knowledge of a lot of specialized areas that they cover. They even make technical stuff digestible for consumption of the people. The professional perception is that they should remain true to their duty to inform their readers, listeners and viewers and promote a rights based approach to help reduce vulnerability. Rights based approach promotes people’s right to development with the emergence of worldwide rights movements, awareness of human rights and a widespread rights-based approach to settle disputes and reduce vulnerabilities are gaining space across communities and countries. The trend now is to give rights an explicit legislative basis, and to incorporate them into a wide range of agreements and policies including commercial contracts and labour agreements.
Media Influence and International Trade

Agricultural trade liberalization is without question the most contentious international trade issue. It is an issue that deeply concerns and affects a diversity of groups, ranging from Quebec dairy farmers to West African cotton growers, multinational agri-food corporations to small-scale cooperative coffee growers in Central America. Reforming the international agricultural trade system continues to be at the very top of the globalization agenda. At the World Trade Organization (WTO), agriculture has been the key focus of the current round of trade negotiations and as any negotiator will tell you, without a deal on agriculture, there will be no deal on anything else. Something very remarkable has happened over the last couple years, something without precedent. Most WTO members, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations (UN) system, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all have adopted an identical position on a crucial and controversial farm trade issue; they have expressed their support for putting an end to rich countries' agricultural subsidies. They argue that this step is the best way to aid struggling developing country farmers, reduce global poverty and inequality, and make the international trading system fair. This consensus is quite remarkable. Throughout the highly fragile and often turbulent current round of WTO negotiations, this diverse group of actors, many of which are antagonists in most other settings, appear to have coalesced along a single principled position. Within the WTO itself, the attack on subsidies has rallied the majority of the organization's one hundred and fifty-one members most of which are developing countries, led by Brazil, China, and India against the $US 300 billion worth of annual farm subsidies that countries such as the United States, European Union (EU) and Japan provide to their farm industries.

The political significance and long-term impacts of this development for the multilateral trading system should not be underestimated. In fact, this unified chorus of criticism has grown louder and louder at the negotiating table since the Doha Development Agenda kicked off in 2001. Perhaps its apex was in evidence when diverging positions between Northern and Southern countries
on farm subsidies helped bring the WTO trade negotiations to a spectacular crash in Hong Kong in 2006, the date by which a draft agreement on agricultural trade was scheduled to be completed. WTO negotiators are still desperately picking up the pieces and the future of the agriculture negotiations, and the WTO more generally, remains uncertain. For those who follow international trade negotiations, it is quite striking that the collapse of the WTO's Hong Kong ministerial was for much different reasons than those that led to the failure of the 1999 ministerial meeting in Seattle. The events of 1999 themselves were a defining moment in the history of the multilateral trading system. If we recall, a broad coalition of NGOs, labour, environmental and human rights groups, as well as private citizens, converged on the streets of Seattle to protest the launch of a new round of WTO negotiations. They represented a diverse set of concerns. Some expressed fear of their members' jobs being outsourced to low-wage developing countries. Most of these groups took part in peaceful protests and engaged in lively political street theatre while others took more confrontational approaches, such as making it difficult for WTO delegates to get to their meetings by blocking roads and entrances to meeting places and hotels. There were also skirmishes between protesters and riot police. These events fed a media frenzy that came to dub the protests the "Battle in Seattle." Media attention brought the WTO negotiations to a heightened level of public awareness and scrutiny as never before. Supporters of economic globalization saw Seattle as a failure to spread economic prosperity and blamed this on the pejoratively labelled "anti-globalization movement." Inside the meeting rooms, developed and developing countries disagreed on what issues should be at the core of the trade negotiations. Developed countries wanted to expand the mandate of the WTO in areas such as investment, services, and intellectual property but there was also wide disagreement between them over agricultural subsidies. Developed countries were hesitant to expand the WTO mandate any further with many feeling that the concessions they had won in the last round had yet to be implemented. Combined, the tension that permeated inside the meeting rooms as a result of disagreement between states and that produced outside as the protests intensified, delayed but did not stop a new round of trade negotiations. WTO
negotiations, however, would never again happen out of sight and out of mind of public scrutiny.

While the failure of the 1999 Seattle ministerial was a result of diverse concerns emanating from within and outside the WTO over its future scope and advancing neo-liberal globalization, the failure in Hong Kong six years later was largely attributable to the prominence of one highly sensitive issue: agricultural subsidies. There are reason to understand so as to why is it that agriculture is so contentious and divisive? That is a complicated story. A short and simple answer is to say that agriculture matters significantly to developing countries' economies, much more so than to those of developed countries. It is important to consider that seventy-five percent of the developing world's inhabitants live in rural areas and work in agriculture. Many poor countries depend heavily on export earnings from products such as coffee, cocoa, and cotton. By contrast, farming is of fairly minor economic importance in developed countries and employs less than one percent of the labour force in Europe and North America. Agriculture is highly protected in developed countries. This means that Northern farmers are much more insulated from price volatility and changes in consumer demand. In addition, many Northern farmers benefit from government-run insurance programs in the case of extreme weather or natural disasters, tariffs to keep out foreign goods, and subsidies to enhance international competitiveness. If you are a farmer in a developing country, you are likely to feel the repercussions of market volatility far more than your Northern counterpart. Developing country farmers do not have access to the same forms of assistance their Northern counterparts do. And in very poor countries, farming is already a very unstable and tenuous existence. Farming is not just a job for those in the poorest regions of the planet, it is often the only source of survival. But the problem of subsidies is not just one of inequality of the resources available to farmers in the North and South (i.e., the North has them and the South does not). The problem lies in the effects of Northern subsidies, which are not just local but have global ramifications. Economic globalization has led to an expansion of international food trade, meaning that Northern and Southern farmers increasingly compete with one another in the global market place. Economists
have long-argued that subsidies encourage Northern farmers to over produce. According to laws of classical economics, when supply goes up and demand remains constant, this causes prices to drop. That means farmers receive less and less for what they produce. In the case of poor farmers, declining prices mean lower incomes which can drive them out of business and ever deeper into poverty. There is also another more complicated and more convoluted dimension to this situation arising out of international politics, international trade rules, and fifty years of development policy. One of the main reasons agricultural trade is so contentious is that international trade rules have long favoured rich countries. In fact, multilateral agricultural trade rules did not come into existence until relatively recently. It was only during the recent Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations (1986-1994) that agriculture was put on the multilateral negotiating table. By contrast, trade rules on industrial goods have been negotiated successively since the implementation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948. Whereas subsidies to industrial goods had been gradually reduced over time and later prohibited as international trade expanded in the post-World War II era, no limits existed on how much countries could subsidize their farm sectors. In fact, agriculture was considered exempt from GATT rules in part due to the refusal of the United States to cede authority over its farm policy. Historically, agricultural subsidies had helped to mechanize farming in order to build massive productive and export capacity in developed countries. Such subsidies were particularly important in the post-war reconstruction of Europe. However, once agricultural sectors in developed countries had stabilized by the 1960s, subsidies became an increasing source of political friction between countries. As global trade in farm goods increased, the absence of any meaningful constraints on subsidization meant that rich countries would end up in a vicious cycle of outspending each other on subsidies in order to keep their farm goods "competitive" and maintain their shares of export markets. This competition came to a head in the early 1980s when a farm trade war erupted between the United States and European Union. At that time both provided their farm sectors with egregious amounts of subsidies. This conflict became the final straw for many developed and developing countries which saw the subsidy conflict as dangerously destabilizing international agricultural
markets and prices. In addition to directly and negatively impacting their farm sectors. They called for more disciplinary policies on the use of farm subsidies and this was a central issue during the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations which led to the creation of the WTO.

The end result was the Agreement on Agriculture. This agreement sought to progressively reduce, but not eliminate, the level of rich country farm subsidies. Proponents of the WTO claim the agreement was a good start and would make the international market for farm goods less distorted and allow developing countries to take advantage of their so-called comparative advantage in agricultural production. The minimizing of trade distortions which the agreement was argued to provide was supposed to have led to higher farm gate prices, and thus higher income for all producers. No one could deny, however, that these rules mostly benefited developed countries because they institutionalized and legalized their ability to provide farm subsidies, instead of prohibiting subsidies altogether as in the case of industrial goods. Developing countries, the majority of which did not significantly provide subsidies prior to the agreement (nor could afford to for that matter), felt they failed to get the parity in trade rules for which they were looking. To make matters worse, the agreement ended up with a subsidy reduction formula calculated by the United States and European Union to minimize the overall impact.

Over the ensuing years, developing countries’ frustration with the existing WTO farm subsidy rules was increasingly vocalized within the WTO. With the launch of the Doha Development round of multilateral trade negotiations, most developing countries (and a handful of developed countries) adopted the position that a new agriculture agreement would have to see developed countries end their subsidy programs as a minimum requirement. This concern over Northern farm subsidies took on special significance after Brazil launched a trade challenge in 2002 against the United State's cotton subsidy program arguing that the program did not conform to WTO subsidy rules. The United States is by far the world's biggest cotton exporter and its cotton industry is significantly subsidized. It was not uncommon in some years for
more than half of the price received by American cotton producers to be made up of subsidies. Because of its status as the world's major exporter of cotton, these subsidies had major impacts on international cotton prices. When they had the effect of lowering world cotton prices, they harmed the economies of poor African cotton producing states which are highly dependent on cotton exports for a significant share of national income and employment. The United States lost the case and was ordered by the WTO to reform and reduce its cotton subsidy program. This decision marked a major legal and political victory, as well as a moral one for those who saw Northern subsidies as major impediments to economic development in the South. In the years leading up to the Hong Kong meeting of trade ministers, the call for ending rich farm subsidies took on greater and greater symbolic significance. It became a major rallying point for developing country WTO members, NGOs, and WTO critics alike. As more than just another trade concession to be made by the developed world. Rather, it was cast as a necessary step to right the injustices of the international trading system. In particular, the NGO community criticized the paucity of efforts by developed countries to reduce agricultural protection as a rejection of their commitments to developing countries to help reduce poverty and hunger in the developing world, especially in Africa. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF also support the end of Northern farm subsidies. They view efforts to further liberalize agricultural trade (which includes eliminating subsidies and tariffs, and privatization) as inherently desirable because this, they argue, will lead to greater incomes in the developing world and reduce poverty. Moreover, the World Bank and IMF hope that liberalizing agriculture will help foster growth in African states, the very same region where these institutions' own neo-liberal policy programs failed to usher in the growth and economic stability.

The UN supports efforts to reduce Northern subsidies. Like the World Bank and IMF, the UN views agricultural trade liberalization as a path towards economic development in developing countries. Moreover, the UN promotes agricultural trade liberalization as a tool to meet the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty and hunger by half by 2015. Exactly how we are to interpret the meaning of the agreement of developing countries, NGOs, and
international organizations on the subsidy issue is far from clear. Is it an indication that we are moving toward a more just trading system where the voices of the poor will be heard? Does it suggest new possible alliances between civil society, governments, and international organizations? Maybe these are plausible interpretations. But there are also very good reasons to be cautious and scrutinize this broad agreement in terms of what it suggests in the longer term for agricultural trade and development in the South. One particular concern is the way these groups are framing the problem and the solution to the Northern farm subsidy issue. The way the debate has been articulated by these groups has been to characterize rich countries’ farm subsidies as the primary obstacle in the way of facilitating economic growth and poverty reduction in the South. In essence, they argue that Northern subsidies unequivocally reap havoc on developing country farmers. While Northern subsidies are harmful to developing countries, the problem of poverty in the South is much more complex and there is considerably more than just farm subsidies to consider. In this debate, it is important to be sceptical and to try to separate the rhetoric of trade politics and the potential impacts of different policy options. While there is certainly a global and popular appeal, and political points to be won in the North and South by those groups critical of farm subsidies, there is also much reason to be concerned with the broader implications of this position. It is clear that the elimination of subsidies will likely be painful for certain farming groups in developed countries and this will certainly cause domestic political strife. However, it is much less clear if the elimination of subsidies will necessarily help improve the livelihood of developing country farmers. The first and most obvious reason is that most subsidies, with the exception of cotton and sugar, are directed to agricultural commodities that the poorest developing countries do not grow. The poorest developing countries are still dependent on cocoa, coffee, and tropical fruits and vegetables. These commodities receive minor amounts or no subsidies in the North (the major exception being the European Union which subsidizes its fruits and vegetables). One has to be cautious about putting too much faith in the argument that ending subsidies will have major positive impacts on developing countries. Many economists suggest that reducing subsidies may lead to increases in commodity prices. While this might benefit some
developing country producers, it is sure to make life more difficult for many
developing countries in Africa and Asia which are net-food importers by
increasing their food bills. Outlays for food already represent a high
proportion of income in developing countries, especially for the poorest. Even
small increases in food prices disproportionately disadvantage the people in
the worlds’ poorest states. Development economists Nancy Birdsall,
DaniRodrik, and Arvind Subramanian (2005, 5) argue that ending Northern
subsidies will mostly benefit Northern taxpayers and consumers while the
economic benefits to developing countries are likely to be negligible. When
we examine the position taken by states, international organizations, and
NGOs on farm subsidies more closely, it becomes highly problematic because
what they are in effect doing is naturalizing and reaffirming neo-liberal
approaches to trade and development. The main intellectual thinking
underpinning their position is that by ending rich countries’ farm subsidies,
markets will correct themselves and efficiency gains will be accrued by all.
Therefore, the WTO farm subsidy debate is suspect because it appears flawed,
and overly simplistic. Most observers concede that economic liberalization is
subject to social and political forces. Trade policy is not immune from such
forces. In fact, the politics of trade are always highly visible in the process.
Markets and trade flows do not operate as textbook economics suggest they
do. This should make us aware that eliminating farm subsidies alone will not
fix the injustices, unfairness, and the structural inequalities inherent in global
farm trade. While states, international organizations, and NGOs place such
high expectation on the subsidy problem, they are also demonstrating a lack of
imagination and do not offer constructive alternatives to addressing the serious
structural problems and power imbalances at play in the global trading system
or some of the domestic problems facing agricultural economies in developing
countries. Leaving the solution to the market has been a key problem with
neo-liberal thinking for over two decades now.

The current group supporting the elimination of subsidies misses a key point.
Many of the problems that affect the prospects for improving developing
country agriculture are going to need much more constructive approaches. As
I stated earlier, developing countries remain dependent on a small group of
export-oriented commodities, a continuing legacy of imperialism in many cases. A key issue that has yet to be raised and addressed is the large degree of market concentration in agriculture. Unfortunately, these sorts of market “distortions” arising from the oligopolistic structures of agri-business are not on the WTO negotiating table because the behaviour of private actors are beyond the scope of international trade rules. However, states play a major role in creating conditions for monopoly and oligopoly control of commodity chains. Many decades ago, the UN system was entrusted to look at these issues and to examine commodity specific solutions. While this mandate still exists, there seems very little interest in or political support for reviving this sort of role for the on looking back at the WTO ministerial collapse in Hong Kong, the friction over agricultural subsidies suggests to us that the major disagreements at play are not really about alternative visions to the existing agriculture trade system. It appears that the subsidy debate reflects an intensification of the neo-liberal policy paradigm instead of constituting a challenge to it. The agenda and support around eliminating subsidies suits middle-income developing countries like Brazil and Argentina who have powerful domestic farm oligopolies, international organizations such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank who unquestionably believe in the benefits of trade liberalization for the South, and even NGOs that see subsidies as manifestations of inequality and injustice in the global trading system. While the position taken on subsidies by these diverse actors meets a variety of strategic objectives, in the end it supports the status quo of neo-liberal economic globalization by promoting free-market ideals. Despite the time, energy, and political will expended in order to achieve the objective of reducing Northern subsidies, it seems unlikely to result in radical improvements to the livelihoods of hundreds of millions poor farmers in the developing world.

**Media and Subsidies**

The implementation of the agreement on agriculture by the major developed countries has given rise to serious anxieties. The developed countries had the obligation to reduce their domestic support to agriculture by 20 percentage
over five years i.e. during the period 1995-1999. As in the case of textiles, they have generally fulfilled this obligation technically. But the disturbing fact is that they have actually increased the subsidy to agriculture, instead of reducing it, by cleverly using the agreement towards this end. The agreement excludes some subsidies from the reduced obligation. These exceptions are contained in Article 6.5 of the agreement and in Annex 2 of the agreement. The former refers to direct payments under production-limiting programmes, generally used by the developed countries, particularly the EU. The latter list many types of subsidies used mainly by the developed countries, e.g. income support, government financial participation in income insurance and income safety-net programmes, payments for relief from natural disasters, structural adjustment, assistance through producer retirement programmes, resource retirement programmes and investment aids, etc. Developed countries claim that these subsidies are not trade distortive; and is perhaps the rationale for excluding them from the reduction obligation.

The claim is untenable. These amounts are paid exclusively to farmers and not to the general population or to other classes of the population like the teachers, journalists, etc. The farmers receive the cheques from the government and it does not make a difference whether they receive them under one provision of the agreement on agriculture or another. The economic strength of the farmers is thereby artificially enhanced by the financial support from the government. Their capacity to continue undertaking their uncompetitive farming is increased through these payments. Both production and trade are grossly distorted in this manner. It is relevant to cite some direct interviews and some expert opinion on this point. Below is an extract from an New York Time 15 October 2002 for New York edition.

*The Chicago Tribune reported a study conducted by Farm Credit Systems, a company dealing in farm loans. According to the study, subsidies are in a weak climate like the one that prevails today, the only barrier to insolvency. “Without federal assistance over the last three years, we would have seen large number of farm bankruptcies,” said*
Doug Yoder, director of marketing for the Illinois Farm Bureau, adding that one in seven of the states 79000 farms is losing money this year, while many others are barely breaking even. Take the case of LannyBezner, a successful family farmers in Texas. According to him the key to his family's prosperity is federal farm subsidies.

An article by Timothy Egan to the New York Times of 24 December 2000 throws some insight into the dependence of US farmers on government subsidies in agriculture. Some portions of the article state:

The departing (US) agriculture secretary, Da Glickman, says farming has “become largely an income transfer program,” with the government underwriting rural business and requiring very little return....Mr Glickman says that without government, thousands of farmers and the businesses that depends on then would go bankrupt within a year or two..

If the Montana growers were to try and get in the free market they would lose about $2 on every bushel of wheat they grow.

One thing that the people who grow the food and the people who write the (Cheques) agree on is that if the government were to suddenly disengage itself from its monumental entanglement with rural America, upwards of half of the 1.6 million farmers in the United States who now receive some form of federal assistance would go out of business.

The same article gives a picturesque account of the US farm subsidies, as follows:

Fort Benton (Montana) – For somebody who works the hard northern land that was first cut by homesteaders
ploughs) less than a century ago, the big harvest of government (cheques) usually happens in the fall - $40,000 for just being a farmer, another $40,000 for emergencies like bad market conditions, more than $100,000 for not making any money on what is grown, and $50,000 for taking other land out of production.

Good crops or bad, high yields or low it hardly matters, the (cheques) roll in from the federal government, the biggest payroll in farm country. By the end of the year, some farmers can receive $280,000 simply by having another miserable year of failure...

National wide, 1.6 million farmers receive an average of more than $13,000 each last year in government money. After congress raised, the cap on one of the bigger farm subsidy programmes this year, an individual farmer can get more than $280,000 a year from various payments.

It appears almost cynical to claim that any such subsidy given to the farmers in the major developed countries is not trade-distortive. Some facts given slightly later will demonstrate that the income of the farmers as well as the low prices which raise the competitiveness of their agricultural products hinges greatly these subsidies. Of course, different types of these subsidies may have differing trade-distortive effects, but to declare then outright non-trade distortive would mean absurd. The media has been critical of the subsidies granted to the farmers who constitutes very few in number. The media’s acrimony seems to derive from the legislation which disallows US to dispense the subsidies, at the same requires it to reduce them at a drastic pace of around 20 percentage if it needs to comply with the commitments. The major developed countries have exploited this loophole of non-reducible subsidies in the agreement on agriculture to fulfil their obligation of subsidy reduction and yet increase the overall subsidies available to farmers.
While reducing the subsidies covered by the reduction obligation, they have increased the other subsidies that are excluded from the obligation. The developed countries including the US and the EU have substantially enhanced the overall subsidies to agriculture by adopting this clever method. Some specific comparative amounts are relevant in illustrating this. The EU has enhanced its subsidies from US$83 billion in 1986-88 (the base period for calculation of subsidies under the agreement on agriculture) to US$95 billion in 1996. The corresponding increase in the US was from US$50 billion to US$58 billion. The media effectively covered its serious to the public about the loss of resources from the Budget exchequer.

Indian Media and WTO

The Indian media (also monopolised by a few firms) display stark similarities to commercial media elsewhere and expectedly take a sympathetic stand towards WTO and globalisation (Sonwalker, 2002). The clear example is the way the media has portrayed a very positive image for Enron even though it claimed that the project would generate electricity to uplift poor and usher prosperity but it could not fulfil the promise since it went bankrupt and stopped operation but the media were still accepting advertisement and carrying news stories and editorial in favour. There are instances of reporting format wherein it is found that the Indian media especially some news paper inspire other media house to toe Ruport Murdoch’s line and trade a newspaper like a business rather than a public forum and very often the Time of India is often referred to as the Indian equivalent of Murdoch’s News Corporation and as such is an obvious choice for the study. After a news frame study of all Indian papers seems to suggest that WTO has ushered in a new era and the growth ever since WTO has started has consistently remained high (Himanshu, 2003). Even though some articles talk about the inequalities that the globalisation and the WTO has brought about the Indian media are largely supportive of the WTO and globalisation, even though here and there dissenting voices can be heard. Nonetheless overall they would rather have us believe that it is not advisable for a country like India, “that plans to be developed country by 2020, to stay away from the WTO. The ToI has its
readers believe that “While many in the west would be happy to let the WTO go, a vulnerable third world has a far greater stake in an internationally agreed mechanism, regulating global trade. Similarly the Indian Express “exhorts, “One of the persistent myths in developing countries is that developing countries. The WTO or its special brand of free-trade isn’t god send and many of us have been led to believe. Despite knowing the weaknesses Indian media are largely supportive of the WTO and globalisation.

Despite such damning evidence, the Indian media are largely supportive of the WTO and globalization, even though here and there dissenting voices can be heard. Nonetheless, overall they would rather have us believe that it is not advisable for a country like India, “that plans to be a developed (whatever that means) country by 2020” to stay away from the WTO. The TOI has its readers believe that, “While many in the West would be happy to let the WTO go, a vulnerable third world has a far greater stake in an internationally agreed mechanism for regulating global trade.” Similarly, the IE exhorts, “One of the persistent myths in developing countries is that developing countries do not need the World Trade Organization (WTO). And that the WTO is more pain than gain.”

A commonly employed strategy is using language like, India cannot ‘afford’ to stall the process of liberalization, it ‘needs’ a rules based system of trading, reforms ‘must’ go on. Similarly, the TOI says, “It (the WTO) is our biggest hope because we aren’t part of any trading block and depend on multilateral trade.” And that, “at the same time, India and other developing countries should work very hard to further consolidate the WTO process which is a rational multilateral regime.” The use of such language clearly implies that there is no alternative besides the WTO if India hopes for economic development. Other articles attempt to give the impression of an already existing consensus around globalization, which in reality doesn’t exist. IE says, “We in India have always believed that an equitable rule based multilateral trading system is vital to ensure global economic development.” Or that, “On this (trade and investment liberalization) there is a now a broad global consensus.” Similarly, the TOI claims, “We had achieved a consensus
in the nineties that government should not be in business. Why is there such continuing hostility to the free market?”

The word ‘we’ not only projects the over one-billion-strong Indian population as a single monolithic block, but also personifies them as a collective of similar minded individuals. The interests of the dominant classes are often passed off as those of the entire populations. Often vast majorities do not agree with the so called mainstream opinion, the only people who do are the media and the political elites. Parenti calls this the “established establishment view” which is given highest media visibility, usually to the exclusion of views held by dissident sectors of the populace.

Thus we see how the ideas and opinions of a small percentage of Indians are projected as views “universally” held by a vast majority of Indian citizens. An overwhelming majority that includes farmers, workers from the unorganized sector, public sector employees and activists oppose India’s membership of the WTO. In fact, India joined the WTO despite mass protests throughout the early nineties (Shiva, 2000[b]:121).

Furthermore, most arguments offered in favour of the WTO are rhetorical in nature, with no supporting facts being forwarded. For instance, according to the TOI, “[f]ree trade will lead to greater prosperity and a better quality of life for our people.”14 And that, “[i]n the process (of staying away from the WTO), they (the Third World) will keep ‘condemning’ their ‘disadvantaged’ citizens to further suffering.15 Again, notice the use of strong words like ‘condemning’ and ‘disadvantaged’, assigning a sense of desperation and anxiety to the whole scenario. In a similar vein, the IE quotes erstwhile Commerce Minister of India, ArunJaitley as claiming that, “The process (WTO negotiations) must move forward because trade is the way forward for development and

**Comparative Analysis**

After realising the real issues of the Media and its role in international trade it becomes pertinent to undertake a vigorous analysis of reporting format of the
key paper and ascertain the pattern that is emerging from the key global and national papers. Before we go into analysis we take a broader look at the use of content analysis today and the many form it take. Communication researchers, social scientists, psychologists and commercial analyst study a wide array of messages ranging from news accounts (e.g. Bengston et al, 1999; Jordon and Page, 1992) to academic and popular journals (e.g. Henslin and Roseti 1976; Malone and Orther 1988) and transcripts of hearings and interviews (e.g. Taber, 1992; Korsmo, 2002) and websites (e.g.Musso et al.). In addition, the studies explore a variety of dimensions of communication ranging from the structure of the message alone to characteristic of its source.

Today many studies funded by government agencies or by the private sector, examining messages content to inform policy making and governance. In the 1970s the US Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and the Department of Health, Education and Welfare funded separate content analysis in Michigan as part of efforts to gauge the effects of alcohol advertising and Children’s programmes respectively (Neundorf, 2002). Taber (1992), a political scientist, conducted a content analysis of Congressional Record Documents to build a model to anticipate decision of policy makers to specific events, including a invasion of Korea by North Korea. Hubner and colleagues (1997) conducted a study of news article written over a years time to gauge the impact of media coverage on public opinion surrounding President Clinton’s Universal health insurance proposal.

**The Study methodology**

Based on a quantitative content analysis of 221 newspaper articles from US, Europe and India on the WTO Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations, it was tested whether the this article had a common frame to explore the international news coverage of WTO negotiations. The main conclusion is that news coverage of WTO negotiations has become institutionalised around what is termed a common meta-frame, here labelled the ‘neo-liberal development frame’. Institutionalisation is viewed as the result of a two-axial homogenisation of news content, a situation where news content
is fixed across both time and space. The concept of meta-frame is introduced to denote a common narrative containing the same defining elements as individual news frames but underlying many different framings of individual news stories. Employing new institutional media theory allows the article to touch upon the wider political significance of a situation where coverage is characterized by an institutionalized meta-frame. It argues that institutionalisation of news coverage is most likely to evolve around prolonged and technically complex negotiations dealing with unobtrusive international issue-areas such as trade.

The WTO Doha Development Agenda negotiations have stumbled on since their launch in 2001, with each negotiation breakthrough soon to be followed by as tall jeopardizing the progress made and pitching national trade interests against each other. The wide spread belief in fair and free trade as a an improvement to today’s international trade patterns – ripe with subsidies. There lies huge difference in the approach between countries. The odd combination of huge potential and seemingly insurmountable differences has haunted negotiations and has often prompted competitive finger pointing and an intense public blame game among negotiators. The battle about whose agricultural subsidies do the most harm to the billions of poor farmers in disadvantaged parts of the world has mainly been played out between the EU and the US. The analysis seeks to understand transnational regularities in news content and employ new institutionalist media theory to conceptualize persistent and robust regularities as content institutionalisation – that is, institutionalized traits of the news agenda, such as e.g. a persistent description of the trade talks as being about furthering development or of the main problem in the talks as being the unequal distribution of negotiation resources. The analysis will exclusively explore in that it will only seek to identify institutionalized parts of DDA news coverage, without aiming to explain why coverage has these regularities or who might be driving news coverage. This would require, firstly, a fully different methodology looking not only at news content but also at the political and social forces at work in setting the media agenda. Secondly, to explain news coverage in three countries located in three different continents across a 10-year period, it would either require a project of enormous scope or a incredibly simplified view of the factors that may
influence news content. Thus, the aim is not to explain that the news provides an institutional image of what the talks are about because of this or that actor influencing coverage or this or that media setting the agenda for the rest, but simply explore if we can find institutionalized aspects of the news image of WTO negotiations.

In working within the new institutionalist media theory framework, the present comparative analysis will argue that regardless of why coverage has been institutionalized, the finding that it has been institutionalized is (perhaps even more) important in itself. This finding means that, as with all other institutions, the institutionalized news agenda will be resistant to change and thus influence coverage across time, space, and media outlet, acting as a constraint upon both news producers and political actors seeking to influence the news agenda. Identifying institutionalisation in all major parts of the agenda studied. The analysis will further aim to compare whether a common framework can be seen as connecting the different institutionalized parts of the news agenda, thus itself representing what is here labelled an institutionalized meta-frame. An institutionalized meta-frame is conceptualized as a common frame connecting the institutionalized descriptions found on the news agenda into a meaningful image – an image whose parts appears scattered across hundreds of texts, and maybe not clearly articulated in any single location. The institutionalized meta-frame is best thought of as something akin to a background guide to how to understand WTO negotiations – not determining the content or framing of any particular news story, but influencing bits and pieces of coverage here and there, pointing the aggregated picture towards certain understandings of what is going on – or even possible – in the WTO negotiations, and away from each other. The analysis will first elaborate on the link between institutional media theory and framing theory. Thereafter, the data the analysis will be based on will be presented, and the analysis will be contextualised by looking briefly at the WTO negotiations and news coverage thereof. Next step will be to show how different aspects of coverage have across time become steadily more homogeneous heterogeneous across the different countries, leading to institutionalisation. The concept of a meta-frame will be brought into the analysis and whether there lies a difference between
the approach of being developed or developing or the neo-liberal development frame can be seen as underlying the traits. Lastly, the comparative analysis will preliminarily discuss the conditions conducive to institutionalisation of meta-frames

**Fusing Institutional Media Theory and Framing Theory**

The central pivot of the analysis will be to combine insights from framing theory as developed by Entman (Entman1993, 2004, 2006) with an understanding of social change drawn from new institutional theory (Hall & Taylor1996; Aspinwall & Schneider, 2000) and specifically new institutional media theory as developed by Cook (1998). The main approach will be to looks at news content through the conceptual lens of institutional media theory. This emergent media research programme has already produced a number of highly interesting outcomes, as is evident from the 2006 special issue of Political Communication devoted to the emergent research programme. Two basic uses of institutional media theory can be detected in the research so far. First, Tim Cook’s path breaking research constituted the field by convincingly. Framing theory is concerned with “the process of selecting and highlighting some aspects of a perceived reality, and enhancing the salience of an interpretation and evaluation of that reality” (Entman2004: 26), and so is the present study. The parts of the agenda studied here parallels the functional elements of frames as laid out by Entman – to “promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation” (Entman 1993: 52, see also Entman 2006: 217). This enabled this article to develop the concept of a meta-frame in response to coherent institutionalisations going on in all the corresponding parts of the DDA media agenda. Thus, as we shall see, the meta-frame contains an account of the situation at hand, the problem to be solved, the causal mechanisms and actors causing the problem, why the problem is problematic, and how to go about solving the problem. Second, whereas Entman takes the existence of specific frames as a starting point, calculating the relative presence of different elements supporting a government frame and an opposition frame respectively, this study takes the frame as its end rather than starting-point.
Then a special emphasis is made to identify the relative presence of a high number of different portrayals of the WTO negotiations, found through iterative reading of a subset of coverage, and whether these scattered elements of the portrayal of negotiations add up to a coherent frame.

**A Problem-Based Approach**

As the introduction suggests, this analysis builds upon the basic finding of agenda setting theory, that the media is an important factor in shaping politics. Below the basic view of how press coverage is seen to influence trade policy formation and trade negotiation in the WTO is sketched out. This study employs the standard variables of agenda setting by examining how much, which issues and themes have been covered (priming) and from which angles these issues have been covered (framing). But the article looks at priming and framing through the prism of institutional media theory, and is therefore primarily concerned with when and how a homogenisation of priming and framing can be observed. A political agenda — whether in the political, public, or in the media arena — is in this article seen as a prioritised set of issues that are perceived to be problems which require political attention. This definition of agendas means, first of all, that agendas are inter-subjective social constructs. There is no such thing as an ‘objective’ problem in agenda-setting (Dearing & Rogers, 1996: 22). It is the perception of the issues as being problems requiring political attention that makes them part of the agenda. The inter-subjective and socially constructed nature of agendas means that agendas — even though they can confront actors as given social facts — cannot be completely fixed but will, at least in the longer run, be subject to changes. Problems are seen as the basic component of political issues and agendas since non-problems are per definition not perceived as something requiring political attention.

And the prioritisation of the issues on the agenda indicates that while some issues are seen as problems that require political attention, other issues are perceived problems but deserving none or little political attention (Dearing & Rogers, 1996: 1-2). Since problematic issues are seen as the nucleus of agenda-setting theory, the content analysis behind this article is structured around the
basic units of problems, namely what is the problem, who is seen as responsible for solving the problem, and who is seen as threatened by it. (Brändgård & Kuipers, 2003).

Ultimately, agenda-setting is not just about prioritising some issues as more politically problematic than others. Involved in the prioritization process is also from which particular perspective the issue is viewed as a problem, indicating how it is viewed to be requiring political attention. This is usually termed as the framing of problems, and was included in the research design as a specific topic. The concept of meta-frame was not a part of the original research setup, but emerged in response to the findings, as an attempt to capture the common traits of the highly institutionalized agenda. This concept thus did not guide the questions asked or methods employed in the data processing.

Institutionalisation And Homogeneity Across The Press Agenda – The analysis of the agenda is divided into five sub-analyses following the coding questions asked. Each part of the analysis thus portray a distinct aspect of the overall media agenda on the DDA negotiations and the sub-analyses link up as complementary parts of a single picture looking at the press agenda in terms of a set of prioritized political problems relating to a specific negotiation effort.

The presentation of the analysis will proceed by looking at the purpose of negotiations, the issues portrayed (what is the problem), issue framing (from which angle), responsibility attribution (who is seen as responsible for solving the problem), and vulnerability attribution (who is seen as threatened by it). These categories were developed through an iterative process departing from an initial focus on definition of the situation, captured through the purpose category, and four categories dealing with what is portrayed as problems, inspired by agenda setting theory. But, as it turned out, this process ended up with categories that roughly mirror the four framing functions described above – problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation and/or treatment recommendation (Entman 1993: 52). Following Cook’s emphasis on stability
across time and space, the basic analysis looked at trends within each sub-agenda across first time and then geographical origin of press coverage.

**The Purpose of Negotiations**

The news descriptions of specific problems encountered in negotiations are situated against a background understanding of purpose, of what negotiations are about, the story of why negotiators spend years discussing digits and formulas, which is sometimes left implicit and sometimes spelled out. The definition of a purpose of trade talks is important, since the different descriptions of a purpose will guide the audience’s attention to the articles and hence their interest in and interpretation of the Doha Round negotiations. So, if the purpose is defined as ‘harmonising the tariff structures of countries and furthering progressive liberalisation of certain areas of world trade’ it will most probably alert a quite different segment of the readership than if the purpose of trade talks is defined as ‘making world trade work for poor third world farmers’.

During the analysis mainly those frames in the article were taken which were taken from the 221 articles in WTO negotiation which are primarily related with WTO and Subsidies. For the iterative procedure and comparison the frames formed for the analysis were

**Agricultural Subsidies as the prime issue in the WTO negotiation:** this frame was suggested as the arguments move for and against the frame of analysis.

**Agricultural Subsidies as a necessary evil:** this frame was suggestive as the argument in which countries have felt that agricultural subsidies should be restricted but that will not solve the issue

**Agricultural Subsidies is waste of resources:** this argument was the main edifice of the frame which is essential to reduce the fiscal cost
Agricultural Subsidies as a part of environmental subsidy: this frame was analysed to check on the aspect of subsidy as the main force to sustainable development. Agricultural Subsidies as the main driver for Economic Justice: this frame was incorporated to see the media attention to reallocate resources to developing countries for poverty alleviation.

These purposes are drawn from the total data of 200 articles: 50 from India, 75 from US and 75 from the EU (Guardian Paper). Instead of simply reporting absolute numbers, the coverage shares in this article will be in terms of their relative shares of weighted coverage. This ensures that if a purpose (or any of the other categories analyzed) is mentioned on the front page, in the headline, or in the lead paragraph, it is weighted as more important than if it is at the bottom of an article halfway through the newspaper, reflecting. The coverage seems to indicate that the main issue on all the negotiation was the subsidies part which remained the bone of contention as given all the frame of reference.

Figure 1 Content analysis with respect to time

The main driver as shown is the during the Doha round there was a build on the issue of agricultural subsidies as the prime issue for development and
negotiation matures the shape change to lesser importance in the media. Subsidies as a necessary evil has been very less reported

The other startling results that seem to indicate are that news content in US and EU have been very different since the US media has a mixed response on wasteful resources at the same time there is very less mention of Economic Justice and less concentration of fiscal issues. The reports are countered by the media as a necessity option since small farmers welfare is clearly linked to it. On the contrary the EU media has been concentrating on subsidy as the main contributor to development and environmental sustainability.

**Outcomes and Future Implication**

Information sharing at local, national, regional and global levels is vital to humanitarian responses towards economy, environment and society. Media, while playing its role as the agent of information and protector of the Right to Know of the people shares information at broader level, actually raises the level of awareness about the issues which impact the livelihoods of the people and their role in society. Since economy, environment and society are interlinked and particularly policies, initiatives and dialogues on these subjects affect the people, majority of whom are not aware of them. Media, particularly the segment of media that deals with development issues, takes up the concerns of the stakeholders and communities through professional activism.

Neundorf (2003) offered a useful model of content analysis that enables us to content analysis studies according to whether they focus on one or more of the following qualities; the source of the message; the message and channel it follows; and the receiver of the message. One limitation of content analysis is that it can only describe message characteristic or identify relationship among message characteristics. Content analysis cannot substitute for other methods such as surveys, and interviews used to understand communication. But in combination with one or more of these other methods, content analysis methodology can help research study relationships between messages, senders and receivers.
Agricultural trade liberalization is without question the most contentious international trade issue. It is an issue that deeply concerns and affects a diversity of groups, ranging from Quebec dairy farmers to West African cotton growers, multinational agri-food corporations to small-scale cooperative coffee growers in Central America. Reforming the international agricultural trade system continues to be at the very top of the globalization agenda. At the World Trade Organization (WTO), agriculture has been the key focus of the current round of trade negotiations and as any negotiator will tell you, without a deal on agriculture, there will be no deal on anything else. Something very remarkable has happened over the last couple years, something without precedent. Most WTO members, the World Bank, International Monetary Fund (IMF), United Nations (UN) system, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), all have adopted an identical position on a crucial and controversial farm trade issue; they have expressed their support for putting an end to rich countries' agricultural subsidies. They argue that this step is the best way to aid struggling developing country farmers, reduce global poverty and inequality, and make the international trading system fair. This consensus is quite remarkable. Throughout the highly fragile and often turbulent current round of WTO negotiations, this diverse group of actors, many of which are antagonists in most other settings, appear to have coalesced along a single principled position. Within the WTO itself, the attack on subsidies has rallied the majority of the organization's one hundred and fifty-one members most of which are developing countries, led by Brazil, China, and India against the $US 300 billion worth of annual farm subsidies that countries such as the United States, European Union (EU) and Japan provide to their farm industries.

The political significance and long-term impacts of this development for the multilateral trading system should not be underestimated. In fact, this unified chorus of criticism has grown louder and louder at the negotiating table since the Doha Development Agenda kicked off in 2001. Perhaps its apex was in evidence when diverging positions between Northern and Southern countries on farm subsidies helped bring the WTO trade negotiations to a spectacular crash in Hong Kong in 2006, the date by which a draft agreement on
agricultural trade was scheduled to be completed. WTO negotiators are still desperately picking up the pieces and the future of the agriculture negotiations, and the WTO more generally, remains uncertain. For those who follow international trade negotiations, it is quite striking that the collapse of the WTO's Hong Kong ministerial was for much different reasons than those that led to the failure of the 1999 ministerial meeting in Seattle. The events of 1999 themselves were a defining moment in the history of the multilateral trading system. If we recall, a broad coalition of NGOs, labour, environmental and human right groups, as well as private citizens, converged on the streets of Seattle to protest the launch of a new round of WTO negotiations. They represented a diverse set of concerns. Some expressed fear of their members' jobs being outsourced to low-wage developing countries. Most of these groups took part in peaceful protests and engaged in lively political street theatre while others took more confrontational approaches, such as making it difficult for WTO delegates to get to their meetings by blocking roads and entrances to meeting places and hotels. There were also skirmishes between protesters and riot police. These events fed a media frenzy that came to dub the protests the "Battle in Seattle." Media attention brought the WTO negotiations to a heightened level of public awareness and scrutiny as never before. Supporters of economic globalization saw Seattle as a failure to spread economic prosperity and blamed this on the pejoratively labelled "anti-globalization movement." Inside the meeting rooms, developed and developing countries disagreed on what issues should be at the core of the trade negotiations. Developed countries wanted to expand the mandate of the WTO in areas such as investment, services, and intellectual property but there was also wide disagreement between them over agricultural subsidies. Developed countries were hesitant to expand the WTO mandate any further with many feeling that the concessions they had won in the last round had yet to be implemented. Combined, the tension that permeated inside the meeting rooms as a result of disagreement between states and that produced outside as the protests intensified, delayed but did not stop a new round of trade negotiations. WTO negotiations, however, would never again happen out of sight and out of mind of public scrutiny.
While the failure of the 1999 Seattle ministerial was a result of diverse concerns emanating from within and outside the WTO over its future scope and advancing neo-liberal globalization, the failure in Hong Kong six years later was largely attributable to the prominence of one highly sensitive issue: agricultural subsidies. There are reasons to understand so as to why is it that agriculture is so contentious and divisive? That is a complicated story. A short and simple answer is to say that agriculture matters significantly to developing countries' economies, much more so than to those of developed countries. It is important to consider that seventy-five percent of the developing world's inhabitants live in rural areas and work in agriculture. Many poor countries depend heavily on export earnings from products such as coffee, cocoa, and cotton. By contrast, farming is of fairly minor economic importance in developed countries and employs less than one percent of the labour force in Europe and North America. Agriculture is highly protected in developed countries. This means that Northern farmers are much more insulated from price volatility and changes in consumer demand. In addition, many Northern farmers benefit from government-run insurance programs in the case of extreme weather or natural disasters, tariffs to keep out foreign goods, and subsidies to enhance international competitiveness. If you are a farmer in a developing country, you are likely to feel the repercussions of market volatility far more than your Northern counterpart. Developing country farmers do not have access to the same forms of assistance their Northern counterparts do. And in very poor countries, farming is already a very unstable and tenuous existence. Farming is not just a job for those in the poorest regions of the planet, it is often the only source of survival. But the problem of subsidies is not just one of inequality of the resources available to farmers in the North and South (i.e., the North has them and the South does not). The problem lies in the effects of Northern subsidies, which are not just local but have global ramifications. Economic globalization has led to an expansion of international food trade, meaning that Northern and Southern farmers increasingly compete with one another in the global market place. Economists have long-argued that subsidies encourage Northern farmers to overproduce. According to laws of classical economics, when supply goes up and demand remains constant, this causes prices to drop. That means farmers receive less
and less for what they produce. In the case of poor farmers, declining prices mean lower incomes which can drive them out of business and ever deeper into poverty. There is also another more complicated and more convoluted dimension to this situation arising out of international politics, international trade rules, and fifty years of development policy. One of the main reasons agricultural trade is so contentious is that international trade rules have long favoured rich countries. In fact, multilateral agricultural trade rules did not come into existence until relatively recently. It was only during the recent Uruguay round of multilateral trade negotiations (1986-1994) that agriculture was put on the multilateral negotiating table. By contrast, trade rules on industrial goods have been negotiated successively since the implementation of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) in 1948. Whereas subsidies to industrial goods had been gradually reduced over time and later prohibited as international trade expanded in the post-World War II era, no limits existed on how much countries could subsidize their farm sectors. In fact, agriculture was considered exempt from GATT rules in part due to the refusal of the United States to cede authority over its farm policy. Historically, agricultural subsidies had helped to mechanize farming in order to build massive productive and export capacity in developed countries. Such subsidies were particularly important in the post-war reconstruction of Europe. However, once agricultural sectors in developed countries had stabilized by the 1960s, subsidies became an increasing source of political friction between countries. As global trade in farm goods increased, the absence of any meaningful constraints on subsidization meant that rich countries would end up in a vicious cycle of outspending each other on subsidies in order to keep their farm goods "competitive" and maintain their shares of export markets. This competition came to a head in the early 1980s when a farm trade war erupted between the United States and European Union. At that time both provided their farm sectors with egregious amounts of subsidies. This conflict became the final straw for many developed and developing countries which saw the subsidy conflict as dangerously destabilizing international agricultural markets and prices. In addition to directly and negatively impacting their farm sectors. They called for more disciplinary policies on the use of farm subsidies
and this was a central issue during the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations which led to the creation of the WTO.

The end result was the Agreement on Agriculture. This agreement sought to progressively reduce, but not eliminate, the level of rich country farm subsidies. Proponents of the WTO claim the agreement was a good start and would make the international market for farm goods less distorted and allow developing countries to take advantage of their so-called comparative advantage in agricultural production. The minimizing of trade distortions which the agreement was argued to provide was supposed to have led to higher farm gate prices, and thus higher income for all producers. No one could deny, however, that these rules mostly benefited developed countries because they institutionalized and legalized their ability to provide farm subsidies, instead of prohibiting subsidies altogether as in the case of industrial goods. Developing countries, the majority of which did not significantly provide subsidies prior to the agreement (nor could afford to for that matter), felt they failed to get the parity in trade rules for which they were looking. To make matters worse, the agreement ended up with a subsidy reduction formula calculated by the United States and European Union to minimize the overall impact.

Over the ensuing years, developing countries' frustration with the existing WTO farm subsidy rules was increasingly vocalized within the WTO. With the launch of the Doha Development round of multilateral trade negotiations, most developing countries (and a handful of developed countries) adopted the position that a new agriculture agreement would have to see developed countries end their subsidy programs as a minimum requirement. This concern over Northern farm subsidies took on special significance after Brazil launched a trade challenge in 2002 against the United State's cotton subsidy program arguing that the program did not conform to WTO subsidy rules. The United States is by far the world's biggest cotton exporter and its cotton industry is significantly subsidized. It was not uncommon in some years for more than half of the price received by American cotton producers to be made up of subsidies. Because of its status as the world's major exporter of cotton,
these subsidies had major impacts on international cotton prices. When they had the effect of lowering world cotton prices, they harmed the economies of poor African cotton producing states which are highly dependent on cotton exports for a significant share of national income and employment. The United States lost the case and was ordered by the WTO to reform and reduce its cotton subsidy program. This decision marked a major legal and political victory, as well as a moral one for those who saw Northern subsidies as major impediments to economic development in the South. In the years leading up to the Hong Kong meeting of trade ministers, the call for ending rich farm subsidies took on greater and greater symbolic significance. It became a major rallying point for developing country WTO members, NGOs, and WTO critics alike. as more than just another trade concession to be made by the developed world. Rather, it was cast as a necessary step to right the injustices of the international trading system. In particular, the NGO community criticized the paucity of efforts by developed countries to reduce agricultural protection as a rejection of their commitments to developing countries to help reduce poverty and hunger in the developing world, especially in Africa. International financial institutions such as the World Bank and IMF also support the end of Northern farm subsidies. They view efforts to further liberalize agricultural trade (which includes eliminating subsidies and tariffs, and privatization) as inherently desirable because this, they argue, will lead to greater incomes in the developing world and reduce poverty. Moreover, the World Bank and IMF hope that liberalizing agriculture will help foster growth in African states, the very same region where these institutions' own neo-liberal policy programs failed to usher in the growth and economic stability.

The UN supports efforts to reduce Northern subsidies. Like the World Bank and IMF, the UN views agricultural trade liberalization as a path towards economic development in developing countries. Moreover, the UN promotes agricultural trade liberalization as a tool to meet the Millennium Development Goals of reducing poverty and hunger by half by 2015. Exactly how we are to interpret the meaning of the agreement of developing countries, NGOs, and international organizations on the subsidy issue is far from clear. Is it an indication that we are moving toward a more just trading system where the
voices of the poor will be heard? Does it suggest new possible alliances between civil society, governments, and international organizations? May be these are plausible interpretations. But there are also very good reasons to be cautious and scrutinize this broad agreement in terms of what it suggests in the longer term for agricultural trade and development in the South. One particular concern is the way these groups are framing the problem and the solution to the Northern farm subsidy issue. The way the debate has been articulated by these groups has been to characterize rich countries' farm subsidies as the primary obstacle in the way of facilitating economic growth and poverty reduction in the South. In essence, they argue that Northern subsidies unequivocally reap havoc on developing country farmers. While Northern subsidies are harmful to developing countries, the problem of poverty in the South is much more complex and there is considerably more than just farm subsidies to consider. In this debate, it is important to be sceptical and to try to separate the rhetoric of trade politics and the potential impacts of different policy options. While there is certainly a global and popular appeal, and political points to be won in the North and South by those groups critical of farm subsidies, there is also much reason to be concerned with the broader implications of this position. It is clear that the elimination of subsidies will likely be painful for certain farming groups in developed countries and this will certainly cause domestic political strife. However, it is much less clear if the elimination of subsidies will necessarily help improve the livelihood of developing country farmers. The first and most obvious reason is that most subsidies, with the exception of cotton and sugar, are directed to agricultural commodities that the poorest developing countries do not grow. The poorest developing countries are still dependent on cocoa, coffee, and tropical fruits and vegetables. These commodities receive minor amounts or no subsidies in the North (the major exception being the European Union which subsidizes its fruits and vegetables). One has to be cautious about putting too much faith in the argument that ending subsidies will have major positive impacts on developing countries. Many economists suggest that reducing subsidies may lead to increases in commodity prices. While this might benefit some developing country producers, it is sure to make life more difficult for many developing countries in Africa and Asia which are net-food importers by
increasing their food bills. Outlays for food already represent a high proportion of income in developing countries, especially for the poorest. Even small increases in food prices disproportionately disadvantage the people in the world's poorest states. Development economists Nancy Birdsall, Dani Rodrik, and Arvind Subramanian (2005, 5) argue that ending Northern subsidies will mostly benefit Northern taxpayers and consumers while the economic benefits to developing countries are likely to be negligible. When we examine the position taken by states, international organizations, and NGOs on farm subsidies more closely, it becomes highly problematic because what they are in effect doing is naturalizing and reaffirming neo-liberal approaches to trade and development. The main intellectual thinking underpinning their position is that by ending rich countries' farm subsidies, markets will correct themselves and efficiency gains will be accrued by all. Therefore, the WTO farm subsidy debate is suspect because it appears flawed, and overly simplistic. Most observers concede that economic liberalization is subject to social and political forces. Trade policy is not immune from such forces. In fact, the politics of trade are always highly visible in the process. Markets and trade flows do not operate as textbook economics suggest they do. This should make us aware that eliminating farm subsidies alone will not fix the injustices, unfairness, and the structural inequalities inherent in global farm trade. While states, international organizations, and NGOs place such high expectation on the subsidy problem, they are also demonstrating a lack of imagination and do not offer constructive alternatives to addressing the serious structural problems and power imbalances at play in the global trading system or some of the domestic problems facing agricultural economies in developing countries. Leaving the solution to the market has been a key problem with neo-liberal thinking for over two decades now.

The current group supporting the elimination of subsidies misses a key point. Many of the problems that affect the prospects for improving developing country agriculture are going to need much more constructive approaches. As I stated earlier, developing countries remain dependent on a small group of export-oriented commodities, a continuing legacy of imperialism in many cases. A key issue that has yet to be raised and addressed is the large degree of
market concentration in agriculture. Unfortunately, these sorts of market "distortions" arising from the oligopolistic structures of agri-business are not on the WTO negotiating table because the behaviour of private actors are beyond the scope of international trade rules. However, states play a major role in creating conditions for monopoly and oligopoly control of commodity chains. Many decades ago, the UN system was entrusted to look at these issues and to examine commodity specific solutions. While this mandate still exists, there seems very little interest in or political support for reviving this sort of role for the on looking back at the WTO ministerial collapse in Hong Kong, the friction over agricultural subsidies suggests to us that the major disagreements at play are not really about alternative visions to the existing agriculture trade system. It appears that the subsidy debate reflects an intensification of the neo-liberal policy paradigm instead of constituting a challenge to it. The agenda and support around eliminating subsidies suits middle-income developing countries like Brazil and Argentina who have powerful domestic farm oligopolies, international organizations such as the WTO, IMF, and World Bank who unquestionably believe in the benefits of trade liberalization for the South, and even NGOs that see subsidies as manifestations of inequality and injustice in the global trading system. While the position taken on subsidies by these diverse actors meets a variety of strategic objectives, in the end it supports the status quo of neo-liberal economic globalization by promoting free-market ideals. Despite the time, energy, and political will expended in order to achieve the objective of reducing Northern subsidies, it seems unlikely to result in radical improvements to the livelihoods of hundreds of millions poor farmers in the developing world.

The main results of the content analysis seem to suggest that the subsidy has remained the main contributing factor for the negotiation and developing country reports are critical of the subsidies granted by the development countries and does not have any mention of its of subsides which are exempt. There is clear lack of awareness on part of the media in India in terms of the issue of WTO negotiation and the subsidy. There is also no mention of environmental aspect as linked to subsidy and restricts access to as waste of
resources and reduction of subsidies as key to any development. Indian media is very silent about the economic justice part asking as the prime reason for development. Another main observation observed on news content across the period of ten years is the change of reporters and editors working on the issue of trade and for every year the experts change and we have new people working on the issue. In general the media though critical appreciate the general framework WTO and do not criticise and want all disputes to be settled within the same framework. Another glaring observation in the reporting format is the lack of interest in the media on writing about issue on subsidies since over time the emotions have mellowed on the aspect of agricultural subsidy.