

# Play Shadows of an Unsettling Reality

Roderick MORGAN  
&  
Jooa VUORINEN

## *The Experience*

“It is not a secret that I threatened to blow up the President of the World Trade Organisation. As a result my country could not attend the next WTO meeting due to increased security precautions, and the poverty among my people increased. Crime also increased.

“This is what happened: my country produced rice and generic medicine, the latter bringing us the scarce livelihood. We worked hard to earn enough money to attend the WTO meeting, which had to decide between registering patents to original medicines or setting a safety-standard for each product sold in the international market.

“The rich countries, who were the majority of voting delegates and who all produced original medicines, voted for the patent. Who cares about safety anyway?

“Instantly, I knew what the decision meant: we had lost our largest source of income. All we were left with was slow and unprofitable rice production. I was so angry (I wouldn't have ever done it, honestly!) that I threatened the WTO President in the media: he must ensure that no more decisions abolishing the economy of poor countries are made or else he will be blown up.

“The rest is history. At the next WTO meeting, we were not allowed to attend, nor were any other poor countries. As a consequence of the decisions made during the meeting, half of our production units were closed. In the game, we lost

the scissors used for cutting the paper templates that represented our products.

“Despair brings solution: we stole new scissors (we had stolen the pens needed for production before and thus did not need more), established a secret factory (with no regulations or labour control) outside the conference room and clipped away.



Jooa VUORINEN was born in North Carelia, Finland, in 1981. She studied theology at the University of Joensuu and graduated with master's degree in 2005. She has been working as the European regional secretary of WSCF since January 2008.



Roderick MORGAN was born in the Welsh Valleys in 1989. He reads Peace at Bradford University and is in his second year. He campaigns on behalf of Christian Aid and Amnesty International.

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the reality of how international trade rules effect poor countries. The game demonstrates the unfairness of the way international trade rules are decided and how the inequalities are maintained. Indeed, the job of the WTO is described as policing and here, as in reality, it is the poorer countries that are penalised.

The game reveals some of the dynamics of greed and power as they work in ‘the systems, institutions, and national agendas that drive international trade.’ It does this in a simple but engaging way. Toolled up with paper and scissors, the country teams produce goods to sell on the international market in time to buy air tickets to attend the next round of WTO talks. How many delegates you send depends on how rich your country has become. In the real world, rich countries are able to fund large permanent delegations with legal and technical expertise. Haiti, the poorest country in the western hemisphere was unable to send any delegates to the 2001 WTO Doha meeting whilst the EU sent over 500. One African negotiator at these talks said, “On an average day there are 10 or 12 meetings, on different issues, all starting at the same time. It is not workable. They know you are weak and you walk out frustrated. I’ve been attending meetings for four years and it is hard to write two lines about how my country has benefited”.

Indeed, as the game enters the second round you realise that the disadvantage can only be increased by the decisions made. However, the resource pack vents this frustration through reflective questions about the game, about our principles and our attitudes towards unjust institutions and about the reality behind the game. In reality questions about power, representation and equality are at the heart of trade reform and there are growing networks campaigning to protect the rights of the poor and calling for trade rules that help communities develop.

“By the end of the game, the rich countries realised they were rich and felt like giving some charity. So they came to offer us a helping hand: *a pen*. I told them to stick their pen... So much for the dialogue. But it was just a game anyway, wasn’t it?”

*Jooa Vuorinen*

## ***A Fair Trade Role Play***

The World Trade Organisation began in 1994 as a way of agreeing and enforcing international trade rules. Current world trade is governed by these rules which are agreed upon by member countries. In theory the institution is democratic and fair but in practice it is exclusive and perpetuates inequalities. Jooa discovered this and vented her rage in, yes, a game played at the Solidarity Conference in 2008.

‘Trade Rules! A Simulation Game’, is produced by Christian AID in the UK as a ‘hands on’ introduction to