

Oxfam America

Global Trade Soccer Game



Activity Guide



Oxfam America's Global Trade Soccer Game

One way of helping people understand how global trade rules put some countries at a disadvantage is by organizing a metaphorical soccer game modeled on the rules and dynamics of global trade. You can engage a broad range of participants by dramatizing the impact of rigged rules and double standards, and have a lot of fun. Fair Trade soccer balls available at www.fairtradesports.com.

To prepare this activity you should locate a convenient spot to host a soccer game, publicize the time and location. Then follow these steps:

- Set up a field for a normal game of soccer.
- Gather the participants and review the structure of the game stressing that the facilitators, who act as referees, are committed to a “free and level playing field.”
- Split the group into two random teams and have each player affirm their commitment to a free and fair game on a level playing field.
- Tell the players that each side has three opportunities to call “foul” on the other side during the game. The referee(s) will make a ruling.
- Instruct them to begin playing a conventional soccer game utilizing the standard rules of soccer.
- After every four to five minutes, stop the game and add a new rule, which benefits one side consistently over the other. (See Potential Rules section below.)
- Stop the match after 20 minutes of play and ask debriefing questions. Make sure you devote at least 20 minutes to this discussion.
- Thank the group for their efforts and refer them to Oxfam America's web site for more information on the Make Trade Fair campaign and how they can get involved. (<http://www.oxfamamerica.org/trade>)

Structure of Soccer Game

- Each team represents an unnamed country. One team is from the Global North (the rules favor this team) and the other from the Global South.
- Each goal scored represents a profitable export to the other country. As one team builds more profits, they can exercise their economic power to leverage additional advantage on the playing field.
- The referees represent the World Trade Organization. They periodically renegotiate the rules, all in the pursuit of “free trade.”
- Each shift in rules parallels a specific dynamic found in world trade. Players will notice whether they feel helped or hindered by the changes in rules. If they feel unjustly disadvantaged they can cry “foul” and request a ruling by the referees

- At the end of the game, participants will come together to discuss the game. Lead a discussion of the symbolism of teams, goals, referees, and how the outcome of the game is similar to the outcomes seen in the real world of global trade

Potential Rules to Impose During Soccer Game

Depending on how much time you have, you can use some or all of the following rule changes during your game:

- Change the goal size
Enlarging the goal defended by the Global South illustrates how poor countries are forced to open their markets to imports. Reducing the goal size defended by the Global North symbolizes high trade barriers maintained by developed countries against the goods coming from poorer countries.
- Take away one side's goalie
This illustrates the insistence that poor countries eliminate protections on their economies. Adding more goalies to the stronger side can show the high protections developed countries maintain against imports.
- Buy-off players
After a few goals, allow one side to "hire" an opposing team member of their choice to represent the flow of high-skill jobs to wealthier countries.
- Manipulate the Score
Allow the stronger team to appeal to the referees to count an unmade goal that was blocked "unfairly." The officials can even debit a goal from the weaker team's score. This helps illustrate the disproportionate power of rich countries in multilateral and regional bodies such as the WTO and NAFTA, where secret tribunals rule on what are fair or unfair barriers to trade.
- Take away one side's ability to touch the ball with their feet and hands
- Have one side play without shoes
- Allow all players on the stronger side to utilize their hands or feet when touching the ball

Debriefing Questions to Ask After the Game

- What are you feeling right now?
- Is this a "free and level" playing field? Why or why not?
- How can you relate your situation on the soccer field to actual countries, governments or producer groups in the world economy?
- How do you think this relates to trade? (If not offered by the participants, interject facts about how trade is rigged and unfair. See more about trade at www.oxfamamerica.org/trade)
- Ask for final comments.