

## Fair Trade – Its importance for developing countries and chances in our society

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### 1. Introduction

With two third of the countries being developing countries, their development represents a challenging task and raises the question about suitable development measures. Some people see economic development as the main criterion for long-term development, others think that the implementation of laws and stable political conditions are more important. In order to provide sustainable development to third world countries, the above-mentioned criteria must be pursued together with other challenges, such as education, health care and infrastructure. Nevertheless, economic development is considered a key point for sustainable development. Over the last few decades, developing countries have mainly tried to improve their economic situation by the exportation of raw materials and other goods like coffee, tea, sugar, rice, cocoa, fresh fruit and cotton. Nevertheless, in most cases trade did not lead to sustainable development since it was only seen under the objective of profit maximization. Developing countries did provide cheap goods and labour in order to join the international market. However, instead of improving the situation of developing countries, this form of trade increased poverty, undermined sustainable development and food security and often had a negative impact on the environment and local cultures.

There are problems in the international market. First of all, there is asymmetric information between the farmer and the trader. The trader has market information, whereas the farmer lacks this information. Thus, the farmer depends on middlemen, which leads to a lack of transparency in the supply chain and the exploitation of producers. As a consequence of these market failures, farmers often sell their products at prices that do not even allow them to cover the production costs. This problem hinders sustainable development since the farmers cannot carry out long-term investments, live in poverty and exploit the land. Moreover, many producers do even not have market access.<sup>1</sup>

This development raises the question whether an ethical form of trade that gives marginalized producers the opportunity to sell their products at a fair price and thus contributes to sustainable development of a larger part of society is possible.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.mtholyoke.edu/courses/sgabriel/FairTrade/Why.htm>

This paper will deal with Fair Trade and discuss if and to what extent Fair Trade can provide economic and also social development.

## 2.1 What is Fair Trade?

Fair Trade is a mechanism whose objective is to transform conventional trading structures in order to contribute to sustainable development for marginalized producers and their communities. Based on fairness, justice and transparency, Fair Trade aims at giving producers in developing countries the possibility to maintain a decent and dignified livelihood. This trade structure is supposed to make it possible for farmers to invest in their farms, communities, produce in an environmentally-friendly way, develop business skills and thus overcome poverty.<sup>2</sup>

Fair Trade is based on standards for both, producers and traders, which are set by the Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO). These principles differ from product to product and there are also differences for small farmers' organizations and hired labour situations. Nevertheless, there are important standards for both situations. A main principle is the Fair Trade Minimum Price. It is not a fixed price but rather a minimum price. On the basis of this minimum price, farmers and traders can negotiate a higher price for certain products and qualities. The Fair Trade Minimum Price also ensures that farmers can at least cover the costs of sustainable production, even if the market price falls below a sustainable level. In case the market price is higher than the minimum price, the market price must be paid by traders to the producers.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to that, traders must pay the Fair Trade Premium which producers have to invest in projects for social, economic and environmental development within their communities. Decisions for the expenditure of the premium are made democratically by producers within the farmers' organisation or by workers on plantations. Most investments concern healthcare, education, local infrastructure, farm improvements or processing facilities.<sup>4</sup>

When being asked for by producers, traders do partially have to pay in advance. This enables farmers' organizations to make investments and thus increase the quality of the products they provide and pay farmers when they deliver their crop. Long-term trading relationships are required so that farmers can expect a stable income and make plans for the future.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, this also increases the incentives to make long-term investments.

### 2.1.1 Fair Trade Standards for Small Farmers' Organisations

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.transfairusa.org/content/about/overview.php>

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[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/fairtrade\\_certification\\_and\\_the\\_fairtrade\\_mark/the\\_fairtrade\\_minimum\\_price.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/the_fairtrade_minimum_price.aspx)

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[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/fairtrade\\_certification\\_and\\_the\\_fairtrade\\_mark/the\\_fairtrade\\_premium.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/the_fairtrade_premium.aspx)

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[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/fairtrade\\_certification\\_and\\_the\\_fairtrade\\_mark/the\\_fairtrade\\_minimum\\_price.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/the_fairtrade_minimum_price.aspx)

Independent small farmers work on their own land and usually grow coffee, cocoa, cotton and rice. The marketing of their products is organised through a local co-operative or other associations they are organised into.

In order to ensure social development, these organisations must have a democratic structure and a transparent administration. This ensures that decisions are made on behalf of its members and actions taken can be controlled. Moreover, any form of discrimination against members for example on the basis of their gender, race or religion is strictly prohibited.

The organisation must be able to export their product and contribute to economic development within the community through an effective use of the Fair Trade Premium based on a democratic decision of its members.<sup>6</sup>

Environmental Development is another aim which has to be pursued. The farmers have a responsibility for the protection of the environment and natural resources. In order to ensure an environmentally friendly production, there is a set of environmental standards which have to be met. Among these, the most important principles are the reduce of agrochemicals which should only be utilized when absolutely necessary, their replacement with natural fertilisers and biological methods of disease control, safe disposal of hazardous waste, the disposal of organic waste in a sustainable manner and a decrease in water consumption. Moreover, the use of genetically modified organisms is strictly prohibited. Furthermore, conservation areas and virgin forests must be left uncultivated.<sup>7</sup>

### *2.1.2 Fair Trade Standards for hired Labour*

Workers on commercial farms grow products like tea, bananas and flowers and can join Fair Trade if they are organized and their employers are ready to support the workers' development. If additional revenues are made through Fair Trade, the company is obliged to share them with the employees. Companies working with hired labour have to support the social development with the purpose of improving the situation of their workers. In order to be certified, these companies have to comply with the requirements of the standards, which are based on the conventions of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Thus, the workers' basic rights include fair working conditions such as decent wages, working hours and sick leave, freedom of association and collective bargaining, freedom from any kind of discrimination and a safe working environment. Moreover, forced or child labour is forbidden.

The Fair Trade Premium is supposed to be used on behalf of the workers, their families and their communities and provide economic and social development. Therefore, a Joint Body which comprises elected worker representatives and a few management representatives, decides in a democratic way what the premium will be used for. This means that the Joint Body can only make decisions after consulting the workforce. The premium is typically invested in healthcare, infrastructure, education, farm improvements, processing facilities and the protection of the environment. The Joint Bodies are also expected to have other positive effects such

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[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/fairtrade\\_certification\\_and\\_the\\_fairtrade\\_mark/fairtrade\\_standards.a\\_spx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/fairtrade_standards.a_spx)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.transfairusa.org/content/Downloads/FTCenvironmental.doc>

as the improvement of working relationships, the empowerment of workers and project planning and management.

With regard to the environmental development, the standards for commercial companies are identical with those for small-scale farmers.<sup>8</sup>

## **2.2 How does Fair Trade work?**

Fair Trade follows a standardized process, which guarantees transparency and fairness. Producer organizations that want to join Fair Trade have to send a written application to FLO-CERT, which is owned by FLO International but works independently. It inspects and certifies producer organizations and traders on the basis of the Fair Trade standards. If the application is accepted, a third-party audit takes place at the production site in order to ensure that the organization adheres to the principles. A regionally based FLO-CERT inspector prepares the audit. He holds an opening meeting with Board representatives, working committees and other farmer's representatives and explains how the audit will happen and discusses Fair Trade standards. During the audit, documents are reviewed and interviews are conducted to gain information about working conditions, internal policies, occupational health and safety and the organization's administration. A central component of the audit is the physical site visit, including visits of the central office of the cooperative, individual farms, processing facilities, and farming activities being performed by workers. If possible, the inspector also attends a General Assembly. Finally, a closing meeting is held with the purpose of discussing the organization's strengths and detected non-conformities. Once the audit is concluded, a report is compiled and sent to FLO-CERT for evaluation.<sup>9</sup> The FLO-CERT certification Committee evaluates corrective measures suggested by the organization in order to ensure that the standards of Certified Fair Trade are met and takes the final decision on whether an organization is certified or not. In case an organization receives a certificate, it is valid for an agreed period. Re-inspection is required for a renewal of the certificate.

During the trading process, the Trade Audit department within FLO-CERT monitors the trader's and retailer's compliance with the Fair Trade standards. By means of a specially developed trade auditing system, it is possible to check if the products offered have been produced by a Fair Trade Certified Producer and if the Fair Trade price has been paid. Once the process is successfully completed the product is certified and receives the Fair Trade Label.

### **2.2.1 Labelling**

The labelling of Fair Trade products guarantees customers and distributors that the certification process has been successfully completed and the Fair Trade standards have been met by both, the producer organization and the traders.

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[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what\\_is\\_fairtrade/fairtrade\\_certification\\_and\\_the\\_fairtrade\\_mark/fairtrade\\_standards.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/what_is_fairtrade/fairtrade_certification_and_the_fairtrade_mark/fairtrade_standards.aspx)

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.flo-cert.net/flo-cert/main.php?id=81>

A labelling initiative was created in order to make it possible to sell Fair Trade products outside World shops and thus reach a larger consumer segment and increase sales significantly. In the following years, several non-profit Fair Trade labelling organizations were set up in Europe and North America. They had different Fair trade standards, monitoring systems and labels. In 1997, these organizations formed FLO International, an umbrella organization for 20 Labelling Initiatives that is the standard setting and certification organization for labelled Fair Trade.



Countries with a Labelling Initiative are highlighted in blue

Moving to international standards and certification, the organizations gave up their individual labels and created the International Fair Trade Mark. The aim was to improve the visibility of the Mark for consumers, facilitate cross border trade and simplify procedures for importers and traders. Apart from two Labelling Initiatives, TransFair USA and TransfairCanada, all Labelling Initiatives have adopted the new International Certification Mark.<sup>10</sup>



International Certification Mark



TransFair Canada

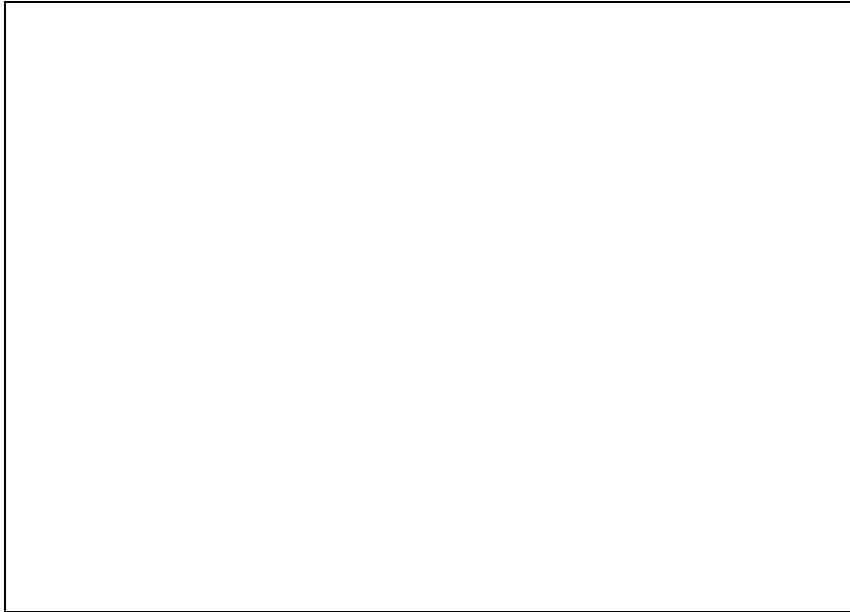


Transfair USA

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.fairtrade.net/certification\\_mark.html](http://www.fairtrade.net/certification_mark.html)

### 3.1 The Development of Fair Trade

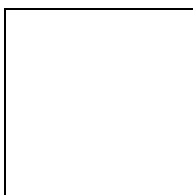
The development of Fair Trade during the last years has been very impressive. Not only has the volume of sales increased worldwide, but also have more producer organizations joined the FLO system.

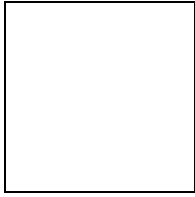


The diagram shows a continuous augmentation of the number of Fair Trade certified producer organizations from 2001 to 2007. In 2007 the organizations were located in 58 countries and represented 1.5 million farmers and workers. Since Fair Trade does not only benefit the workers but also their families and communities, FLO estimates that Fair Trade has had a positive influence on the lives of 7.5 million people.

The significant increase of Fair Trade sales proves that Fair Trade has had a decade of success and that the willingness of consumers to buy these products has augmented.

The statistics show that Fair Trade sales exceeded 2.3 billion euros by the end of 2007, thus an increase of 47 percent compared to 2006. This is almost seventy times more than ten years ago. Denmark, Ireland, Norway, Spain, Sweden and the UK are among the countries that have experienced the largest increase in Fair Trade sales from 2006 to 2007.





This positive development was achieved through numerous campaigns and initiatives like the Fair Trade Town Campaign, which requires that a town's council adopts a resolution supporting Fair Trade and purchases Fair Trade certified products in order to gain the title. Fair Trade Schools, Universities and Churches also contributed to this development by showing consumers clearly their power and responsibility in the Fair Trade movement and by winning young people over to Fair Trade. This boosted the number of customers willing to buy Fair Trade products. Moreover, Fair Trade Weeks, Fortnights and Months supported by celebrities and politicians were aimed at raising awareness about Fair Trade. These initiatives and campaigns are of great importance, since they can mobilize society and convince consumers to contribute to the development of Fair Trade by purchasing Fair Trade certified products.

### **3.1 Recent developments - New markets and South to South Fair Trade**

The above-mentioned initiatives and campaigns have also helped to open new markets for Fair Trade. Estonia and Hong Kong are two examples for the successful introduction of Fair Trade products to new markets. The Fair Trade Labelling Initiative in Finland supported Estonia in its efforts to offer Fair Trade certified products to its population and plans to introduce Fair Trade to other Baltic States because of their recent success in Estonia. In Hong Kong, Oxfam launched a campaign with the purpose of raising awareness of Fair Trade among local consumers and introducing this alternative trading structure into the country. As a consequence, three companies signed license agreements with FLO allowing them to use the Fair Trade Mark. Furthermore, several stores offer Fair Trade certified products to their consumers.

Since its beginning, Fair Trade products have only been available to people in industrial countries. However, a new consumer class in developing countries is willing to contribute to sustainable development by supporting Fair Trade in their own and other developing countries. Therefore, in 2007 FLO started an international licensing system in order to allow companies in emerging economies with no Fair Trade Labelling Initiative to sell products bearing the Fair Trade Mark.<sup>11</sup>

These are important and necessary steps in order to increase Fair Trade sales. Moreover, the introduction of Fair Trade to new markets and the South-to-South Fair Trade show the growing acceptance of Fair Trade

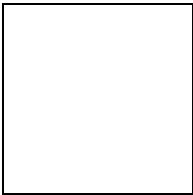
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<sup>11</sup> [http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/content/FLO\\_AR2007\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/FLO_AR2007_low_res.pdf)

among consumers and their willingness to support this development as responsible consumers. This is important since the development of Fair Trade will always depend on the demand.

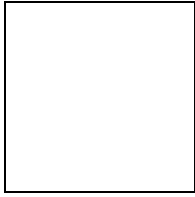
**3.2 The development of Fair Trade Coffee**

Coffee farmers are extremely vulnerable to the volatile international coffee markets and its strong price fluctuations. Over the last decades, several coffee crises forced hundreds of thousands of farmers out of business. Since prices crashed that much, they had to abandon their land and thus give up their source of income.



The statistics show that unpredictable incidents have an enormous impact on the coffee price and thus on the business and lives of coffee farmers. A large number of coffee farmers who only receive the New York price have to abandon coffee culture when the price falls under a sustainable level, since they cannot even cover the production costs. Especially in October 2001, during the lowest world coffee price, coffee farmers experienced how a low price can destroy their livelihood and affect their lives. On the contrary, the Fair Trade Minimum Price can make a real difference to the coffee farmers' lives. Apart from being paid a higher price, it is the stability the Fair Trade Minimum Price brings to the farmers' lives. Most of them are small-scale farmers. Therefore, a fixed income allows them to support their families, plan ahead and invest in their farms, which can improve the quality of the coffee, they produce. They depend on the Fair Trade Minimum Price in order to live and work on their land with dignity.

The Fair Trade Price for coffee consists of the Fair Trade Minimum Price which is 121 cents/lb and the 10-cents/lb premium. If the New York price is 121 cents/lb, farmers receive this plus the usual Fair Trade premium. More and more producers become aware of the positive impact Fair Trade coffee has on the farmers' lives and their communities, as well as on the quality of coffee. As a consequence, the number of consumers purchasing Fair Trade coffee has steadily increased over the last few years.

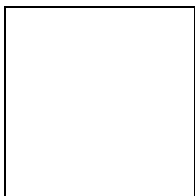


In 2007, Fair Trade coffee sales volumes have reached 62.219 metric tons. This represents a yearly increase of 20 percent since 2002. Because of consumer's demand for Fair Trade coffee, the number of producer's organizations selling them has increased from 175 in 2002 to 256 in 2007.<sup>12</sup>

This positive development represents the willingness of consumers to pay a fair price for their coffee and thus influence the farmers' lives and their communities in a positive way rather than exploiting developing countries by purchasing cheap coffee. Fair Trade certified coffee is one of the products that is more and more accepted by society and has great potential for the future.

#### **4. Selected companies and their commitment to Fair Trade**

Companies and retailers have an enormous responsibility in the Fair Trade movement since they purchase the goods from the producers and sell them to the consumers. As the statistics below and news articles prove, some companies show a strong commitment to Fair Trade, whereas others are not interested in participating in Fair Trade or do not understand their responsibility in this movement.



##### *4.1 Starbucks*

Starbucks is one of the leading companies with regard to the support of Fair Trade. The decision to offer Fair Trade certified coffee was taken after several street demonstrations and critical articles emerged with the purpose of convincing the company to support Fair Trade. In 2000, Starbucks began to sell Fair Trade certified coffee in its stores and on the Starbucks Website. Moreover, they also advertised Fair Trade coffee with the help of posters and brochures in order to attract consumers and convince them to buy Fair Trade certified coffee. In 2002, the Starbucks Coffee Company collaborated among others with Oxfam America to help small-scale producers in Mexico to expand their access to the global market and increase the availability of high-quality Fair Trade certified coffee. Furthermore, thorough their work with organizations like Fair Trade, Starbucks helps farmers to get a premium, which allows them to support their families and contributes to social

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<sup>12</sup> [http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user\\_upload/content/FLO\\_AR2007\\_low\\_res.pdf](http://www.fairtrade.net/fileadmin/user_upload/content/FLO_AR2007_low_res.pdf)

and economic development of the communities. The company has steadily increased its purchase of Fair Trade certified coffee over the last few years and raised awareness among consumers. In 2005, the company purchased 11.5 million pounds of Fair Trade certified coffee, which represents twenty-one percent of the Fair Trade certified coffee imported into the US in that year. This makes the company the largest purchaser of Fair Trade certified coffee in Northern America. Moreover, Starbucks makes use of its global presence, selling Fair Trade certified coffee in twenty-three countries, as well as of its popularity among consumers, promoting Fair Trade certified coffee through the support of Fair Trade Days, Weeks and Months. During Fair Trade Weeks and Months, the company offers Fair Trade coffee as the “Coffee of the Week”. Despite the company’s commitment to Fair Trade, there remain negative news about Starbucks’ efforts to support Fair Trade. In 2007, only six percent of the coffee it buys is Fair Trade certified coffee, whereas the remaining ninety-four percent of the coffee is purchased at market prices.

#### *4.2 Marks & Spencer, Wal-Mart, Mc Donald’s and Tesco*

Other companies having a strong commitment to Fair Trade are Marks & Spencer, Wal-Mart, Mc Donald’s and Tesco. Marks & Spencer for instance was the first major UK retailer to introduce clothing made from 100% Fair Trade cotton. The retailer also sells Fair Trade coffee and fruit. Moreover, as a part of its “eco-plan”, which aims at turning their business green, Marks & Spencer wants to use Fair Trade cotton in 20 million items of clothing. This would represent a third of the world’s supply. Furthermore, the retailer also runs campaigns in its stores in the UK, informing consumers about how its products are sourced and made. This is an important step since it can convince consumers to buy more Fair Trade products.

Tesco and Wal-Mart are among other retailers that have developed their lines of Fair Trade certified products. Tesco, for instance, is now the world’s second-biggest buyer of Fair Trade cotton after Marks & Spencer and Wal-Mart has a line of Fair Trade certified coffee.

Mc Donald’s is another company, using its popularity to support Fair Trade and increase the Fair Trade sales around the world. A large part of the Mc Donald’s restaurants have chosen to exclusively serve Fair Trade certified coffee.

Even though Fair Trade certified products represent a much smaller percentage than the products they purchase at the market prices, these companies have already acknowledged the importance of Fair Trade and the responsibility they have in this movement and have thus taken first steps to support Fair Trade.

#### *4.3 Nestlé, Kraft and Sara Lee*

Nestlé, Kraft and Sara Lee belong to the group of the world’s largest coffee roasters and have thus an enormous responsibility for the coffee prices. However, in 2003 these three companies did not show any effort to participate in Fair Trade. Kraft has failed to purchase any Fair Trade certified coffee and Nestlé absolutely

refuses to buy Fair Trade coffee. In 2005, these two companies announced plans to launch their own brands of Fair Trade coffee. This was a cynical move since these companies' turnover in coffee fell at the same time as the sales of Fair Trade certified coffee rose. Nestlé's commitment to Fair Trade remains minimal and can be seen as a marketing tool. In 2006, only 0.2 percent of the company's coffee is purchased at the Fair Trade certified price. Moreover, Nestlé's Fair Trade coffee brand represents a dangerous trend, as it will be more widely available and probably cheaper than other Fair Trade certified coffee. As a consequence, uninformed consumers will opt for the easily available Nestlé Fair Trade coffee.

Certainly, these companies on one hand have to support Fair Trade and purchase more Fair Trade products, however on the other hand they should not only see it as a way into the more and more popular Fair Trade sector. They should rather be convinced that they could make a real change and increase Fair Trade sales by using their market power and popularity.

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper shows the necessity of Fair Trade in order to contribute to sustainable economic and social development in developing countries. It is undeniable that Fair Trade improves the situation of farmers and their communities. Producers get the chance to join the international market without being exploited. Market access, a fair price, a premium and long-term trading relationships allow them to cover the costs of sustainable production, support their families, plan ahead and invest in their communities. Reports prove that receiving a premium leads to investments in education, infrastructure, health care systems and the improvements of farms and processing facilities. Moreover, Fair Trade ensures fair working conditions, which represents a significant change for workers in developing countries. All these aspects are essential to sustainable development.

The complexity of the Fair Trade process guarantees transparency and the positive contribution of Fair Trade to society. International standards set by FLO International are necessary in order to make Fair Trade a global movement and increase the transparency of Fair Trade. Countries around the world must support the same ideals and standards. Otherwise, Fair Trade risks becoming more of a PR move for companies, destroying the actual idea of Fair Trade. Therefore, the foundation of FLO International and the Introduction of the International Fair Trade Mark were important steps. It also benefits consumers since it is easier for them to identify Fair Trade certified products. In addition, guarantees that these products meet the Fair Trade standards. The complex audit process of the production site and the trading process ensures the producers', traders' and retailers' compliance with the Fair Trade standards. On one hand, the Fair Trade process can be considered as extremely complex and time consuming, however, on the other hand it is necessary and ensures the transparency and fairness of Fair Trade, which is essential to a positive development of Fair Trade.

The wide acceptance of Fair Trade in society is reflected by the significant increase of Fair Trade sales over the last few years. Consumers have come to realise their responsibility in this movement. They are purchasing more Fair Trade products and thus pressuring companies and retailers to offer them. In this context, Fair Trade

has a real chance to increase over the next few years. More consumers are willing to pay a slightly higher price for certain products if they know that this supports producers and their communities in developing countries. It is a way for them to be more responsible consumers. However, the good quality of Fair Trade certified products is another relevant aspect for the purchase of these products. Consumers can be certain, that these products have been grown under strict environmental standards. No matter what the consumers' incentives to buy Fair Trade certified products are, consumers become more willing to support Fair Trade.

The companies' and retailers' support of Fair Trade is crucial for its success. The last part of the paper shows that some companies have made significant progress in their commitment to Fair Trade. It is important that these companies and retailers continue with their initiatives and support and increase the percentage of Fair Trade certified products they purchase. However, the lacking or minimal support of other companies, in particular Nestlé, Kraft and Sara Lee, represents a hindrance that needs to be overcome. Since these companies have crucial market shares, their participation in Fair Trade is necessary for the augmentation of Fair Trade.

In conclusion, Fair Trade on one hand can lead to sustainable development in developing countries. However, on the other hand a wider participation of multinational corporations in Fair Trade as well as the support from consumers is indispensable. Companies, retailers and consumers have to become conscious of their responsibility and augment their support and participation in order to increase Fair Trade sales and ensure that it benefits more producers and communities.

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