

Panel Session: Geo-Political Challenges

Panel Chair: Boris Braun

Participants: Stephanie Barrientos, Michael Price, Aurélie Carimentrand, Christine Gent

Abstracts:

1. **Barrientos, S.** *Fair Trade in times of geo-economic upheaval: Supply chain challenges and Opportunities*

Fair trade, and other voluntary sustainability standards (VSS), face significant challenges given contemporary geo-economic upheavals. These include rising trade protectionism, shifting global supply chains, pushback on human rights and environmental due diligence (HREDD) within voluntary standards and regulation. All amid deepening climatic and societal crises particularly affecting low-income countries. This paper focuses on global agrifood supply chains and asks: How can fair trade navigate supply chain challenges; and what are the opportunities for supporting better outcomes for small-scale farmers and workers? It explores the challenges at three levels: (i) *international trade trends and policies* (including HREDD): differentiating the global North and South; (ii) *global supply chain sourcing*: especially from low-income countries where climate-driven risks and rising costs are an increasing concern; (iii) *producers*: where farmer and worker well-being (including living incomes/wages) remains important for environmental and social sustainability. The paper draws on research for a forthcoming book involving over 70 interviews (2024-6) with relevant corporate and civil society practitioners in the global North and South. The analysis differentiates: (i) policy rhetoric *from* reality; (ii) ‘top-down’ *from* ‘bottom-up’ supply chain engagement; and (iii) corporate commercial *from* consumer/producer perspectives. In this complex scenario it assesses two countertrends: increasing vulnerability and pressures on small-scale farmers and workers in face of climatic and socio-economic crises; commercial requirements for more environmentally and socially sustainable integrated supply chains, particularly in agrifood. It argues a mix of VSS and regulatory HREDD will persist. Fair trade navigation of the countertrends remains a significant challenge. Yet it is positioned to enhance supply chain integration and sustainability by linking producers, retailers and consumers through the fair trade approach; and bottom-up enhancement of producer and worker well-being through its standards. Expansion of regional supply chains across emerging economies also opens new opportunities for fair trade within Africa, Asia and Latin America.

2. **Price, M.** *Peak Fair Trade? Developing the Fair Trade Movement in a Post-Internationalist World*

The Fair Trade movement emerged as an attempt to challenge global markets with applied principles of equity, cooperation, and social justice. Over the past twenty-five years it has achieved significant early traction, particularly in Northern European markets, helping to promote ethical consumerism and influence corporate, statutory, and individual practices. However, this period of expansion has been followed by a growing re-evaluation by mainstream commercial interests and, in the last decade, by a noticeable slowing of growth globally. We argue that Fair Trade’s current predicament reflects both its success and its limitations. On the one hand, the movement helped create, and extend, ethical markets in the Global North, offering a way for individuals to engage with the challenges of decolonisation. It shaped the language through which consumer understanding of the

concepts of responsibility, sustainability, fairness and justice were articulated. On the other hand, concerns over affordability, growing scepticism toward globalisation, the resurgence of overt national self-interest and climate impacts have contributed to the slowing of its growth. With this in mind, our research question asks how the Fair Trade movement can pursue its founding vision under conditions of post-internationalism, fragmented statutory and regulatory encroachment, and ethical market saturation? Employing a multicase study design, we analyse Fairtrademarked product strategies across the four largest European markets: Germany, the UK, Switzerland, and France. The major retailers will be examined through a twophase research process encompassing first, critical discourse analysis of relevant documents, followed by semistructured interviews. The study aims to illuminate strategic pathways for renewing Fair Trade's transformative potential in a constrained and increasingly contested ethical marketplace.

3. **Carimentrand, A.** *From Guaranteed Prices to Living Incomes: Is Fair Trade Losing Its Political Edge?*

Within the fair-trade movement, the concept of fair pricing has undergone a significant change, shifting from a « guaranteed price » to a « living income reference price (LIRP) ». This new approach differs from the traditional method of calculating fair trade prices based on production costs. It is defined as the minimum price necessary for small producers (of cocoa, vanilla, coffee, etc., depending on the case) to earn a net income high enough to ensure a decent standard of living for all members of their household. We aim to question the rationale behind the adoption of this concept.

To what extent does this logic distances the movement from the political objective of strengthening the bargaining power of producers in global commodity chains? Indeed, the level of knowledge and technical expertise required to calculate this price is such that the computation is carried out by experts selected by organizations in the Global North. James Ferguson (1994) and Tania Murray Li (2007) argue that development aid has become a technical apparatus, placed in the hands of experts, thereby stripping it of its political significance—what they term the “anti-politics machine.” That is, a mechanism of assistance to populations in the Global South grounded in expert knowledge and one that sidelines issues of power. With this new price-setting framework, does fair-trade not likewise risk losing its political dimension? This is the question we address, drawing on a content analysis of semi-structured interviews conducted with actors from the Global South, the discourses of fair-trade actors who justify this new framework, as well as on the initial technical reports aimed at implementing it (Gneiting, 2021; Beacom, 2024; Hänke, 2024).

4. **Gent, C.** *Refugee Artisans' integration into fair global supply chains, defining a working model*

Refugee artisans can generate significant income, leading to inclusion and resilience in their host countries, in places of displacement and on return to a war-torn country. The paper defines the challenges and outlines the solution offered by MADE51, developed by UNHCR in response to the need for longer-term economic solutions for refugees who have been displaced in some cases for many years. MADE51 operates within an ecosystem of partners, who provide support, guidance, due diligence and act as the commercial interface between the refugee artisans and the buyers. Refugee artisans face different challenges than other artisans, but a model rooted in Fair Trade and in the

experience of working with social enterprises offers potential. Key elements of the model include: Identifying partners and developing relationships.

The model depends on identifying and onboarding the right partners for effective delivery

- Methods for how refugee artisans are identified, defined, monitored, and linked to the Social Enterprise
- Process for selection and onboarding the partner Social Enterprises
- Building a strong ecosystem of organisations to support and advise on the organisational development, including the ownership model
- Key skills within the MADE51 team

Branding, marketing

Refugee-made products need to be market-ready and recognisable in the market

- Defining a refugee-made product
- Creating a market-ready refugee-made product
- Routes to market for refugee artisan-made products

Business development

To grow, products need to be carefully developed with market potential in mind, which in turn can depend on price and capacity.

- How to scale
- How products are costed and then subsequently priced, for fair wages and market penetration
- Building in indicators around minimum wage and fair wage.

Pathways

In order to grow the model, tools have been developed that are generic for use in all situations, which support in

- Recognising the context of the country and the situation of the refugee artisan to ensure protection and inclusion of refugee artisans
- Ensure a systematic route for recognition for countries of engagement, the partners and the products

In the paper, we explore the varied impacts of the model

Although the MADE51 model is only a few years old, there is data and reports which can be analysed for impact

- Data will be generated on the impact to date by research, including the review of the impact reports of MADE51 and the social enterprises.

In sum, the paper presents a detailed, practical model for working with refugee artisans that can be replicated by other practitioners. It also raises further questions and challenges that academics might address.