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17 Fair trade, gender and the environment in Africa

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Introduction

Fair trade represents a promising approach to alleviating poverty and bolstering environmental sustainability in the global South through a strategy of 'trade not aid'. The fair trade model offers farmers and agricultural workers in the global South better prices, stable market links, and resources for social and environmental projects. In the global North, fair trade provides consumers with product options that uphold high social and environmental standards, and supports advocacy campaigns fostering responsible consumption practices. With its rising popularity, fair trade has come to represent an important counterpoint to the ecologically and socially destructive relations characteristic of the conventional global food system (Raynolds et al., 2007).

Fair trade joins a growing array of market-based initiatives that promote social and environmental concerns through the sale of alternative, often certified, commodities. In this sense fair trade is related to other environmental certifications found largely in food, forest and fiber products, and to other social certifications found largely in apparel, footwear and other manufactured items (Gereffi and Kaplinsky, 2001). Fair trade distinguishes itself from other efforts in its breadth in incorporating both environmental and social concerns, and in its depth in reshaping trade and production conditions (Raynolds, 2000; 2002). Although fair trade products continue to represent a minor share of the world market, certified sales are worth over US$1.4 billion and are growing rapidly (FLO-I, 2006a). Currently over 569 fair trade organizations across 54 countries in Latin America, Africa and Asia are registered, representing more than one million farmers and workers. There are over 18 fair trade certified products sold in 20 countries in Europe, North America and the Pacific (FLO-I, 2007a) and nascent markets are developing in middle-income countries in the global South, such as Mexico, Brazil and South Africa (Raynolds et al., 2007). The rapid expansion of fair trade certification into new commodities, regions and production relations brings with it substantial new opportunities but also new challenges.

This chapter analyzes the impacts of fair trade's efforts to narrow the global North–South divide, focusing particularly on the case of Africa. Africa is currently experiencing the largest growth in fair trade certified producer groups and products. Since Africa represents one of the most disadvantaged regions in the world, the need for fair trade to enhance environmental sustainability and social equality for farmers and agricultural workers is acute.[1] As we demonstrate, fair trade in Africa is closely linked to organic initiatives in seeking to halt environmental degradation in agro-export sectors. Fair trade's support for producer and organizational empowerment is linked explicitly to issues of gender equity, bolstering the initiative's social mandate. Although it is by no means a panacea, we conclude that fair trade provides an important avenue for addressing critical environmental and social problems in Africa today.

Fair trade principles and parameters

The fair trade movement has grown out of a set of North American and European initiatives seeking to transform North–South trade from a vehicle of exploitation to one of sustainable development (Renard, 2003). Operating initially in the handicraft sector, alternative trade organizations support disadvantaged producers by buying products at above-market prices and selling them directly to ethically aware consumers. In this way fair trade networks are designed to 'shorten the distance' between producers and consumers (Raynolds, 2002). Over the past 25 years, fair trade has expanded into major food commodities and fair trade certified foods are now sold in conventional retail venues (Raynolds and Long, 2007). Fair trade groups have aligned under the FINE umbrella,[2] forging a common definition of fair trade:

> Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. (FINE, 2003)

As this statement suggests, fair trade operates both 'in and against the market'. While it utilizes market channels to create new commodity networks for items produced under more favorable social and ecological conditions, fair trade operates against conventional market forces that create and uphold global inequalities (Raynolds, 2000; 2002).

Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO), the non-governmental organization that coordinates fair trade labeling, operates in 20 countries across Europe, North America and the Pacific. With earnings over US$1.4 billion per year, products certified under the FLO system comprise the lion's share of the fair trade market.[3] As noted in Table 17.1, the USA represents the largest and most rapidly growing market for certified fair trade products, with annual sales worth US$428 000 and a growth rate of 60 percent per year. The UK, Switzerland, France and Germany follow with the next-largest fair trade markets. Initially available only in small alternative shops, fair trade products are now sold by giant retailers and even by fast food chains (Raynolds et al., 2007). The rapid growth of fair trade sales has been fueled by increasing consumer concern over the environmental and social impacts surrounding global trade.

Table 17.1 Fair trade certified sales in major markets (US$1000)

	2005	% annual increase (2004–05)
USA	428 000	60
UK	345 000	35
Switzerland	178 000	5
France	136 000	57
Germany	88 000	23
Total	1421 000	37

Source: FLO-I (2006a).

Table 17.2 Growth of fair trade certified sales by commodity (metric tons)

	2003	2005	% growth rate, 2003–05
Coffee	19 293	33 992	76
Cocoa	2 698	5 657	110
Tea	1 522	2 614	72
Sugar	718	3 613	403
Honey	1 164	1 331	14
Bananas	51 151	103 877	103
Other fresh fruits	1 291	8 289	542
Fruit juice	2 193	4 856	121
Total*	80 632	168 476	109

Note: * Total includes other certified products measured in metric tons.

Sources: FLO-I (2005a; 2006a).

There are now 18 certified fair trade commodities, and additional items are being introduced each year. Coffee, fair trade's first certified product, remains the key commodity, generating roughly a quarter of all fair trade earnings (FLO-I, 2006a). As noted in Table 17.2, fair trade certification in cocoa and tea is also well established, with solid and expanding sales in these sectors. Bananas represent the second-most valuable fair trade labeled commodity and volumes are growing rapidly (Raynolds et al., 2007). Even more impressive is the sales growth in more recently introduced fair trade commodities such as processed fruits and juices, and fair trade fresh fruits, such as citrus, pineapples, mangoes, grapes and apples.

Fair trade certification standards establish norms of fairness and sustainability in production and trade relations.[4] Traditionally the domain of small farmers, fair trade has expanded to include hired labor enterprises. Small farmer standards require producers to organize into democratic cooperatives to facilitate collective development goals, while estate standards require workers to be represented by independent unions. In addition, estates must follow key International Labor Organization conventions, including freedom of association, freedom from discrimination, prohibitions on forced and child labor, and the maintenance of basic wage, occupational health and safety conditions (FLO-I, 2007b; 2007c). In the environmental realm, fair trade production standards establish basic criteria (including restrictions on agro-chemicals and land clearing, and the promotion of composting and other natural soil enhancement techniques) and seek to bolster further ecological improvements through the promotion of organic certification. Buyer standards uphold fairness and sustainability via the required payment of guaranteed minimum prices and social premiums and the provision of credit and long-term contracts (FLO-I, 2007b; 2007c). While fair trade's recent growth may extend producer benefits, the rapidity of this growth makes guaranteeing these benefit streams more challenging.

Fair trade production

Due to fair trade sales growth and the proliferation of certified commodities, fair trade is incorporating additional producer groups and regions. Between 1998 and 2004, the

Table 17.3 Fair trade certified production by region, 2004 (metric tons)

	Africa	Latin America	Asia
Coffee	4386	24932	764
Cocoa	2073	1889	0
Tea	1620	0	766
Sugar	2027	5778	714
Honey	276	1339	0
Bananas	1317	64670	0

number of fair trade certified producer groups increased from 211 to 433, with producer countries expanding from 40 to 53 (Raynolds and Long, 2007). Latin America is the traditional hub of fair trade production, accounting for over 50 percent of all FLO certified groups and over 75 per cent of fair trade sales values and volumes. Table 17.3 highlights the importance of fair trade coffee in Latin America; the region also produces large amounts of bananas and cocoa. Asia, in contrast, is a relatively minor fair trade player, producing tea, coffee and sugar.

Africa is the second-most important production region for fair trade certified commodities, with exports valued at roughly US$24 million. This region is experiencing the most rapid expansion in fair trade production with the emergence of new certified commodities and producer groups. The number of FLO certified groups in Africa has risen dramatically, increasing from 78 to 171 between 2004 and 2006 (FLO-I, 2006b). Africa is the world's major supplier of fair trade certified tea and cocoa, and a secondary but critical supplier of certified coffee and bananas. As noted in Table 17.4, there are 33 producer groups involved in fair trade coffee production, 17 in tea and four in cocoa.

Africa has emerged as the major supplier of a number of new fair trade products, which have only become certified within the past five years. This region supplies the vast majority of newly certified fresh fruits (other than bananas), producing both tropical and temperate items. There are currently 40 groups growing these new fair trade fruits across seven African countries. South Africa is the regional and world leader, with 22 certified groups supplying fresh citrus, apples and grapes. This country is also a leading exporter of newly certified wine, which is now produced by 22 FLO registered enterprises. In addition, Africa is the world's largest producer of newly introduced fair trade cut flowers and ornamental plants,[5] with flowers grown largely in Kenya by 11 certified enterprises. What is striking about fair trade's growth in these new commodity areas in Africa is that almost all of this expansion is taking place in the large-estate sector. In South Africa, for example, only 7 percent of fair trade enterprises are within the smallholder sector (Kruger and du Toit, 2007). While this pattern of expansion threatens the traditional primacy of small-scale producers in fair trade, it may increase the standard of living for the large number of disadvantaged workers employed in African agro-export sectors and in some cases grant workers access to land or equity shares in estate enterprises (Tallontire et al., 2005;

Table 17.4 Certified fair trade producer organizations in Africa

	Coffee	Cocoa	Tea	Bananas	Other fresh fruits	Fruit juice	Flowers	Wine	Other*
Burkina Faso					2				2
Cameroon	2	1							1
Egypt					3				3
Ethiopia	3								
Ghana		1		1	8				
Ivory Coast	1	2							
Kenya			1				11		
Malawi									2
Mali					1				3
Mozambique					1				1
Rwanda	6								
Senegal					1				1
South Africa			5		22	2		22	1
Tanzania	7		6				2		
Uganda	12		4						1
Zambia	1								3
Total**	33	4	17	1	40	2	13	22	18

Notes:
* Includes honey, sugar, cotton, rice, herbs, vegetables and nuts.
** Includes countries not listed above.

Source: FLO-Cert (2005).

FLO-I, 2006a). In South Africa, for instance, fair trade estates must uphold national Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) policies, increasing black land ownership (Kruger and du Toit, 2007).

For small-scale producers in Africa, the most direct benefits from fair trade come from the higher guaranteed prices. The importance of these price guarantees is clearest in the case of coffee, where the FLO minimum price has far exceeded the world market price for most of the past 15 years (Raynolds et al., 2007; Tallontire, 2003). This price floor has meant the difference between survival and bankruptcy for many small-scale coffee growers. In addition to protecting producers from world price slumps, fair trade provides a social premium to be invested in community projects. The fair trade premium supports much-needed education, health, food self-sufficiency and farm improvement projects for small-scale producers. For large estates in Africa the FLO price floor provides economic stability, but it is the social premium that most benefits workers. This social premium funds the purchase of plantation ownership shares and supports educational, health, transportation and housing projects. For example, the Herkulu Tea Estate of Tanzania has utilized fair trade funds to repair workers' homes, improve school ventilation systems, build a medical dispensary and establish a fair trade shop so that workers may have access to essential food items at wholesale prices (Transfair USA, 2007a). Research suggests that both small farmers and estate laborers benefit most from fair trade's multifaceted informal and formal support for organizational capacity building (Raynolds et al., 2004).

Some question the benefits of fair trade in Africa, given the prevalence of national, regional and household food insecurity. Although the concern with local food production is well taken, it must be recognized that most African small-scale producers already produce market crops, often for export, and rely on their sale for household survival. This strategy of combining food and cash crop production is common particularly among small farmers. Fair trade standards require that producers be paid a better price for crops they already export and restrict the conversion of food croplands to export production or the clearing of new lands. As Barratt-Brown (2007) suggests, fair trade may foster food security in Africa directly through the investment of social premiums in environmental and household food production projects, and indirectly through the payment of higher prices for exports, freeing up resources for food crop production.

Although the potential environmental and social benefits of fair trade in Africa, as in other regions of the global South, are substantial, the increased geographic spread, product diversification and enterprise variation within certified networks makes realizing those benefits more difficult. The growth of certified fair trade production across Africa can bring substantial environmental benefits, particularly if this certification fosters organic production. This spread can simultaneously bring significant social improvements, especially as fair trade enters into commodity areas where women and other disadvantaged workers predominate, thus increasing their access to the flow of fair trade benefits.

Fair trade and the environment

Africa is a continent rich in biodiversity and natural resources. The livelihood of much of the African population depends on agriculture, yet increasing soil degradation, deforestation and desertification threaten current living standards and future production capacity (World Bank, 2001). According to the United Nations Environment Programme, regional poverty could be eliminated through more equitable and sustainable environmental resource management (UNEP, 2006). However, the expansion of the conventional global food system, foreign-agribusiness-dominated export sectors and disadvantageous trade policies are threatening the ecological resources upon which the poor depend (Gibbon and Ponte, 2005). The spread of chemical pollution, invasive species and genetically modified organisms (GMOs) further undermines agricultural sustainability, lending a contemporary twist to environmental degradation (UNEP, 2006; World Bank, 2001).

The growth of fair trade in Africa works to protect environmental resources in three key ways. First, fair trade certification standards require that producer groups uphold a set of general environmental criteria that address key ecological concerns in Africa.[6] Soil and water management standards prevent soil degradation and erosion, reducing the risk of desertification. Restrictions on wild species collection minimize natural resource depletion. Prohibitions against cutting virgin forests reduce deforestation, while buffer zone requirements serve to protect natural areas. In addition, fair trade encourages producer organizations to engage in environmental regeneration projects. Agrochemical restrictions and GMO prohibitions reduce the risk of chemical pollution and the entry of invasive GMO crops into local ecosystems (FLO-I, 2007b; 2007c; 2007d; World Bank, 2001). For instance, in the African cut-flower export sector – an industry renowned for its intensive agrochemical use and resulting detrimental impacts – the introduction of fair trade has restricted the use of hazardous agrochemicals, established buffer zone requirements and enhanced worker safety regulations (FLO-I, 2007e).[7]

The second way that fair trade is able to enhance environmental stewardship lies in its trade conditions. Fair trade goes beyond many other (often more rigorous) eco-certifications in ensuring that producers have the financial and organizational resources to uphold environmental standards (Raynolds et al., 2007a). While environmental standards may appear laudable on paper, if producers do not have the wherewithal to meet them, they are unlikely to have a significant impact on the ground. Poverty tends to exacerbate environmental degradation as people eke out a living in whatever way they can. By working to ensure that producers have a secure and livable income, fair trade reduces the need of impoverished households in Africa to overexploit natural resources. By promoting the organizational ability of producer groups, fair trade fosters collective capacity to address environmental problems (Raynolds, 2000). The fair trade social premium is often invested directly in environmental improvements. Indeed, in African cocoa and coffee sectors, fair trade premiums finance shade production systems and reforestation efforts, stemming erosion and providing critical wildlife habitat (FLO-I, 2007f; Transfair USA, 2007b; 2007c).

The third major way that fair trade works to protect environmental resources is by supporting the nascent rise of certified organic production in Africa. Although the global organic trade is booming, Africa currently trails other regions in supplying this dynamic market (Raynolds, 2004; Willer and Yussefi, 2006). In total, Africa has only one million acres of organic certified land. Twenty African countries export certified organic commodities and there is substantial opportunity for bolstering production given Africa's historical reliance on low-input farming practices and limited agrochemical use (Parrott et al., 2006).

Fair trade has proved critical in promoting certified organic production in Africa by providing the informational, organizational and financial resources necessary for producers to enter this demanding system. Although African producers may be farming in near-organic conditions, certification is a complex and costly process (Barrett et al., 2001). Fair trade networks help organizations bring their production practices into compliance with rigorous organic standards, typically funding required improvements in areas such as composting, terracing and buffer zone management.

Perhaps most importantly, fair trade capacity-building activities foster the administrative structures needed to create the internal monitoring systems required to verify compliance with organic certification standards. The fair trade social premium typically pays the substantial costs of internal and external organic monitoring (Raynolds, in press). As research in Africa suggests, without such external support few producers could afford organic certification (Parrott et al., 2006). Although certified organic products tend to garner a premium in world markets, these prices are not guaranteed and have fallen significantly over recent years due to increased global production (Raynolds, in press; Willer and Yussefi, 2006). In the face of eroding prices, fair trade's requirement that buyers pay a premium for organic certified commodities – above and beyond the FLO guaranteed price – has also proved critical.[8] In Ethiopia, for example, 11 Oromia coffee cooperatives have joined fair trade networks and invested their social premiums in acquiring organic certification, thereby gaining access to higher prices and fostering environmental sustainability in this ecologically fragile region (Fairtrade Foundation, 2007; FLO-I, 2007f).

Fair trade and gender inequality

A key facet of fair trade's social agenda focuses on promoting gender equity and bolstering the incomes of marginalized women workers and producers. Fair trade's gender sensitivity was established in the movement's inception in the predominantly female handicraft sector. As fair trade extended into agriculture, gender concerns were institutionalized into small-farmer and hired-labor standards. Given women's extensive engagement in African smallholder and estate farming sectors,[9] fair trade's growth in this region has opened up new possibilities for significantly improving the situation of women involved in agriculture.

Fair trade standards in the small-farm sector address gender concerns directly by requiring that certified producer organizations follow anti-discrimination policies and that programs related to recruitment, staffing and leadership work to improve the position of underrepresented groups, including women. In Africa, as elsewhere in the world, women have historically been excluded from important producer organizations and programs. This exclusion has meant that female farmers in Africa have significantly less access than their male counterparts to agricultural training, credit and other critical resources (FAO, 2005). By fostering non-discriminatory organizations and bolstering female organizational engagement, fair trade promotes women's independent access to key production inputs and to the equal rights and respect often denied them.

The Kuapa Kokoo Cocoa Cooperative in Ghana, for example, has addressed issues of gender equity on a number of fronts. Currently 30 percent of Kuapa Kokoo members are women and their representation continues to rise. Female cocoa producers in the region have gained recognition and respect as well as access to trade information and production credit. In fact women now serve in all cooperative leadership levels and are at least as likely as male members to represent Kuapa Kokoo in international forums (Tiffen et al., 2004). However, despite the increase of female membership within African fair trade cocoa cooperatives, the promotion of gender equity has been less successful within producer organizations operating in other export sectors such as coffee, where male dominance has been more firmly entrenched (Tallontire, 2000).

Even where African women are not members of small-farmer cooperatives, they may benefit from fair trade policies and programs. Fair trade's favorable price guarantees are intended to provide income security to entire families, while the fair trade social premium is designed to support a variety of social programs benefiting entire communities. Returning to the case of Kuapa Kokoo, we find that the fair trade premium has underwritten village water boreholes, corn mills, schools, meeting places and bridges (Transfair USA, 2007a). These efforts have eased female labor burdens in water collection, flour production and childcare across local communities.

Turning from the small farm to the estate sector in Africa, we find that fair trade addresses a set of critical gender issues in sectors where workforces are predominantly female. Women comprise the majority of workers in a number of African horticultural crops – such as fresh fruits and vegetables, cut flowers and wine (Barrientos et al., 2003; Dolan, 2005). Since these are some of the fastest-growing fair trade export areas, the labor standards required for participating enterprises may have significant positive gender impacts.

Fair trade's general estate standards build on key ILO conventions (FLO-I, 2007c). Gender equity is promoted first through non-discrimination and equal representation

requirements as FLO requires estates to provide female workers with equal opportunities and access to fair trade benefits. Moving beyond an ILO labor protection strategy to a more empowerment-based strategy, fair trade standards require estates to develop capacity-training programs for women, sexual harassment policies, and to progress toward proportional gender representation in company leadership. The joint fair trade body is also required to be gender representative, ensuring that women's concerns are heard and women's organizational rights are advanced. The second key set of fair trade standards address gender concerns related to worker health and safety, and amplify ILO maternal health conventions. By fostering non-discriminatory practices, bolstering female engagement and requiring female leadership, these fair trade standards lay the basis for transforming the situation of historically disadvantaged female agricultural workers in Africa.

Finally, fair trade standards require enterprises to provide temporary workers with equivalent benefits and employment conditions. These regulations benefit large numbers of African women given their predominance in the temporary workforce in many export crops. Standards protecting temporary workers may be particularly important since non-permanent female workers are typically less aware of their rights, more vulnerable to discrimination and sexual harassment, and more likely to suffer from poor health and safety conditions (Barrientos et al., 2003; Dolan et al., 2003).

The cut-flower industry in Kenya provides a good illustration of fair trade's potential positive impacts on women workers. Conventional flower enterprises in Kenya are notorious for their poor employment conditions, health and safety standards, and treatment of female workers (Dolan, 2007). Partly in response to rising concerns over these conditions, fair trade has expanded rapidly in the cut-flower sector, with 13 certified African enterprises (see Table 17.4). Preliminary evidence suggests that fair trade engagement provides a number of benefits for large numbers of temporary and permanent female flower workers, and is fueling gender equity more broadly. In addition to more general employment gains, female workers in the fair trade flower sector benefit from important improvements in terms of maternal rights, safe housing and transportation services, and access to childcare (FLO-I, 2007e; Fairtrade Foundation, n.d.). Fair trade standards are likely to fuel positive impacts for women workers in other sectors of African large-scale agriculture as well. Yet despite these important gains, fair trade labor standards cannot be expected any time soon to erase deeply entrenched gender inequalities in Africa or elsewhere in the world.

Conclusions

This chapter outlines the contours of fair trade's recent rapid growth as it expands across Africa. While fair trade has historically grown on the basis of smallholder production of key tropical commodities, its current expansion, as we demonstrate, involves an array of new items produced predominantly by large hired-labor enterprises. Fair trade's expansion in Africa holds substantial promise given the region's historically severe trade disadvantage, ecological fragility and social development needs. As we demonstrate, fair trade enhances environmental sustainability in the region through the support for organic agriculture and standards that stem ecological degradation. What makes fair trade different from other ecological initiatives is that it provides communities with the financial security and resources necessary to engage in meaningful environmental stewardship. On the social front, we find that fair trade's support for producer and organizational

empowerment incorporates key gender issues, enhancing the position of female producers and workers in Africa. What makes fair trade's efforts potentially more powerful than other labor standards efforts is the inclusion of temporary as well as permanent workers and the clear focus on women's empowerment and full representation. While by no means a panacea, fair trade provides an important avenue for addressing critical environmental and social problems in Africa today.

Notes

1. For an enlightening analysis of how trade relations fuel environmental and social problems in Africa, see Gibbon and Ponte (2005).
2. FINE is an acronym made up of the first letter of the name of its members: FLO, IFAT, NEWS! and EFTA.
3. Non-certified (largely handicraft) items account for an additional US$169 million in fair trade sales (Krier, 2005).
4. See Raynolds et al. (2007a) for a more detailed analysis of fair trade social and environmental standards in the coffee sector and comparisons with competing certifications.
5. For an insightful analysis of the growth of ethical certifications in the African flower industry, see Hughes (2001).
6. FLO environmental standards are specified by commodity but all follow these general guidelines; for crop specific rules, see FLO (2007g).
7. Despite the controversy surrounding industry practices, the African cut-flower and ornamental plant industry offers large-scale employment opportunities and is important for a number of national economies, including that of Kenya.
8. In coffee, for example, FLO standards stipulate that buyers pay a guaranteed minimum of US$1.21 per pound for conventional coffee, with certified organic coffee receiving an additional US$0.20 per pound (FLO-I, 2007a).
9. Women comprise 47 percent of the total agricultural labor force in Africa (FAO, 2005).

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