

# Fairtrade and Climate Justice

Fairtrade is immediately recognisable to Irish shoppers. We are all aware of the challenges of climate change. **Melanie Drea** argues that we in the European Union have a special responsibility to farmers in the global south who are disproportionately affected by climate change.

We're all worried about climate change. Not all of us appreciate, however, how unequally it affects people. The wealthiest ten per cent of people produce fifty per cent of emissions, but it is those on low incomes who face the consequences. Those on low incomes, including the farmers and workers who grow crops like tea, coffee, cocoa and bananas, face more frequent natural disasters, extreme and unpredictable weather, and rampant plant diseases. Unfair trade means that these people can't earn enough for the basics, let alone the money to invest in adapting to climate change and sustainable farming techniques.

The majority of greenhouse gas emissions have occurred in the last thirty years, and, since records began in 1850, over ninety per cent of emissions have come from places like Europe and the US. Those who have



contributed the least to the carbon crises should not have to pay the highest price to try and resolve it. Yet, vulnerable rural populations in the global south are currently paying the highest price. Climate impacts are being seen in more frequent chaotic climate events like hurricanes, drought and floods. And these are being added to pre-existing vulnerabilities like poverty, exclusion and exploitation. Fundamentally, climate justice and a Just Transition need to include trade and economic justice, to ensure opportunities for everyone.

The climate crisis is an immediate and ever-increasing threat and those in climate vulnerable countries are already seeing its impacts from droughts and crop disease to floods,



Fermenting cocoa beans to make chocolate

Narong Khueankae © Shutterstock

heatwaves and shrinking harvests.

With the impact of the global COVID-19 pandemic, the challenges that farmers face now are bigger than ever before with falling commodity prices and widespread shocks reverberating along our global supply chains. Ongoing poverty in farming communities makes it increasingly hard to cope with the effects of climate change.

Farmers in the global south have made it clear that climate change is one of their biggest challenges right now. Low prices for their crops mean that they are struggling to fight back. With more money through Fairtrade they feel more equipped to meet their everyday needs and deal with the challenges posed by climate change.

Fairtrade works with over 1.2 million cocoa and coffee smallholders, in over forty countries. This is a subset of the millions of smallholder cocoa and coffee farmers who are reliant for income on selling to the European Union. The vast majority of these cocoa and coffee smallholders work on farms smaller than five hectares, and are living in extremely vulnerable contexts. Ensuring cocoa and coffee smallholder farmer inclusion is a precondition for the proposed EU legislation to reach its objectives.

The EU needs to be fair to small scale farmers as well as to forests in 2022. Changing the rules for international trade is as important as our shopping habits. Irish people should support small scale farmers who are at

danger of being banned from the EU market.

Fairtrade welcomes the EU regulations on deforestation as a necessary first step towards the ending of imported deforestation. However improvements need to be made in key areas so that the regulations better support and protect small holders and not further marginalise them. In terms of any just transition, it is widely accepted that developing countries have only contributed eleven per cent of carbon emissions since 1850, and that they should be supported to meet emission targets and adaptation strategies made necessary by the actions of others. Equally in terms of deforestation, fifty per cent of global deforestation in the last 9000 years coincided with European industrial development since 1900.

The EU and its members have a moral obligation to ensure that the proposed EU regulations on deforestation support the most vulnerable in EU supply chains and redress the lingering burden of history. Smallholder farmers need livelihoods at living income levels or the proposed regulation will fail to protect the forests and the farmers.

The EU needs to clarify the number and extent to which cocoa and coffee smallholders will be impacted by regulation before the proposal is enacted and damages their livelihoods. The

EU needs to engage responsibly with cocoa and coffee smallholders and their cooperatives, including encouraging companies to set long-term and supportive sourcing contracts, and to require companies placing products on the EU market to respect land and tenure rights of local communities and Indigenous and Traditional peoples.

The EU can use financial support in EU partnerships and programmes to help smallholder farmers comply with new EU sustainability requirements, provide adequate support and safeguards on data ownership for cocoa and coffee smallholders and their producer organizations in relation to traceability requirements, and tackle the root causes of deforestation as a precondition to reduce the EU deforestation footprint.

Bismark Kpabitey a Fairtrade cocoa farmer based in the Ahafo region of Ghana, who recently attended COP26 on behalf of Fairtrade, stated: 'Looking at the situation now it is very difficult to go into agriculture because the rainfall pattern has changed. There is a long drought – currently we are experiencing a very hot sun, which is affecting our crops and has really reduced production. And once production is reduced, financially you become handicapped. That is the challenge.' ❤️

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Bismark Kpabitey