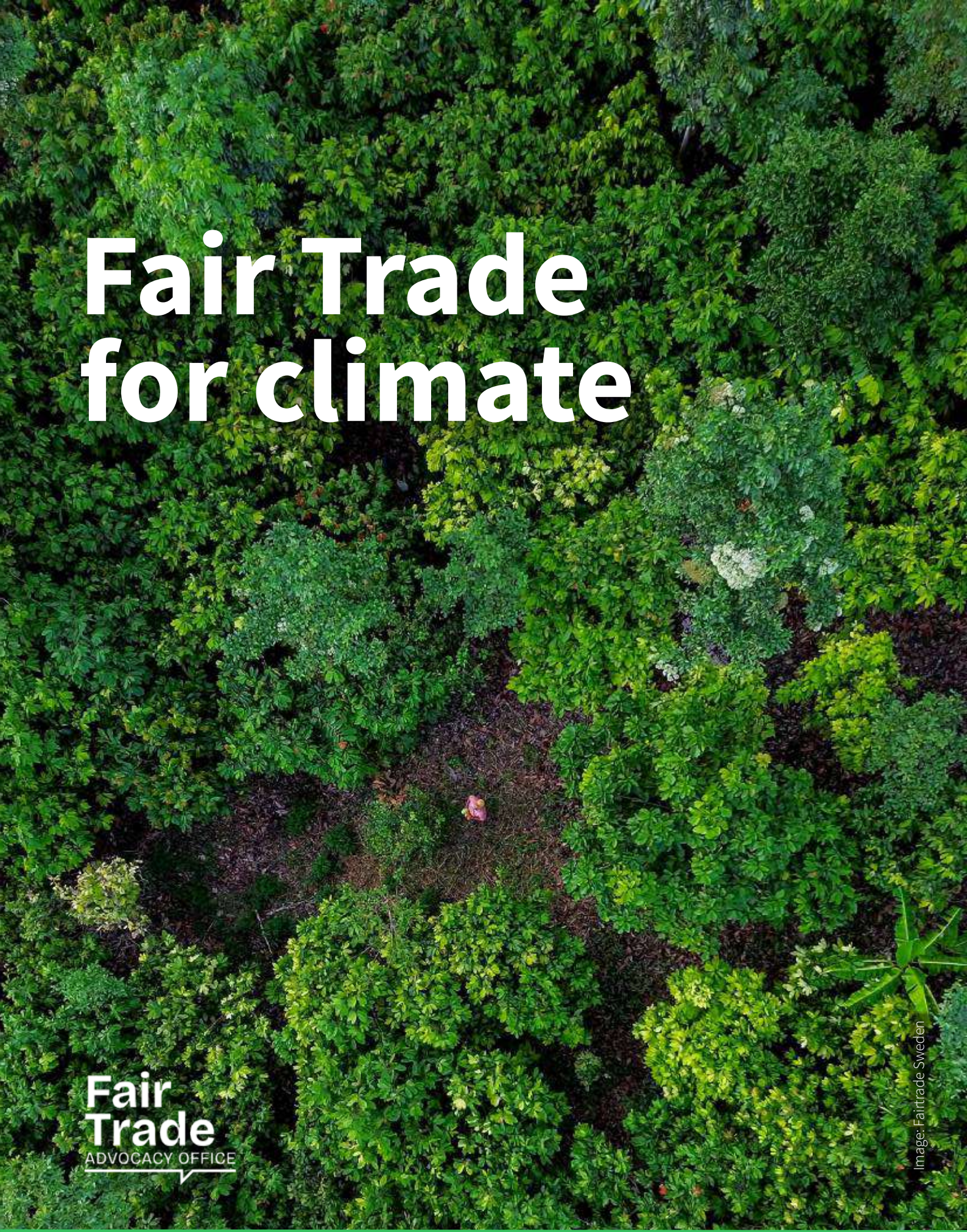
Fair Trade for climate



Fair Trade ADVOCACY OFFICE

Image: Fairtrade Sweden

How fair trade is central to climate resilience

Fair Trade
ADVOCACY OFFICE

Research & writing
Nikki Sullings

Design
Nikki Sullings
Communications for Social Change

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Contents

A guide to how Fair Trade is central to climate resilience

Image: FairtradeDeutschland e.V. – Dennis Salazar Gonzales

Introduction

The climate crisis is not only an environmental emergency, but also rooted in inequality, unfair trade and broken economic systems.

The expansion of global trade in agricultural and other products in recent decades has been a major contributor to both economic growth and the climate crisis. In many countries, small-scale producers form the backbone of the economy, yet they have not reaped the benefits of trade and growth. Instead, most remain in – or at risk of – poverty, while also directly facing the impacts of climate change.

By contrast, small-scale producers in Fair Trade systems are empowered to earn more liveable incomes and work together on climate change mitigation and adaptation at the local level. Ultimately though, they have very limited resources available for this and bear very little responsibility for the global problem of climate change. Thus, in order for climate action to be fair and effective, responsibility must be shared with those who have contributed most to causing climate change and also have the resources to address it, including large buyers, governments and others.

This guide aims to demonstrate that Fair Trade is a transformative economic model that puts people and planet before profit. It explores how the Fair Trade movement has evolved from solidarity-based trade initiatives into a transformative model of trade that also prioritises sustainability and climate action. Further, it explains how Fair Trade systems are now helping to build climate resilience among small-scale producers and their communities. Overall, it argues that trade systems based on fairness and environmental sustainability are integral to global climate solutions. This guide is offered as a support for policymakers, civil society and the climate movement in working towards a climate transition that is not only green, but truly fair.

Image: © Fairtrade Australia and New Zealand

Global problems

How agriculture and trade contribute to climate change

Image: Designed by Magnific – www.magnific.com

International trade, agriculture and climate change

International trade and agriculture are major contributors to climate change.

The percentage of **global greenhouse gas emissions generated by the production of internationally traded goods sits around 23 per cent**. The percentage of global emissions generated by the agriculture, forestry and other land use sectors sits between 13 and 21 per cent and the manufacture and use of nitrogen fertilisers commonly used in agriculture contribute a further 5 per cent.

The climate crisis has evolved in tandem with the expansion of global trade in recent decades. Both are rooted in the overexploitation of natural resources and of marginalised people at the producer end of global supply chains. If we are to effectively combat climate change, these systems must be transformed.

SHARE OF GLOBAL GREENHOUSE EMISSIONS

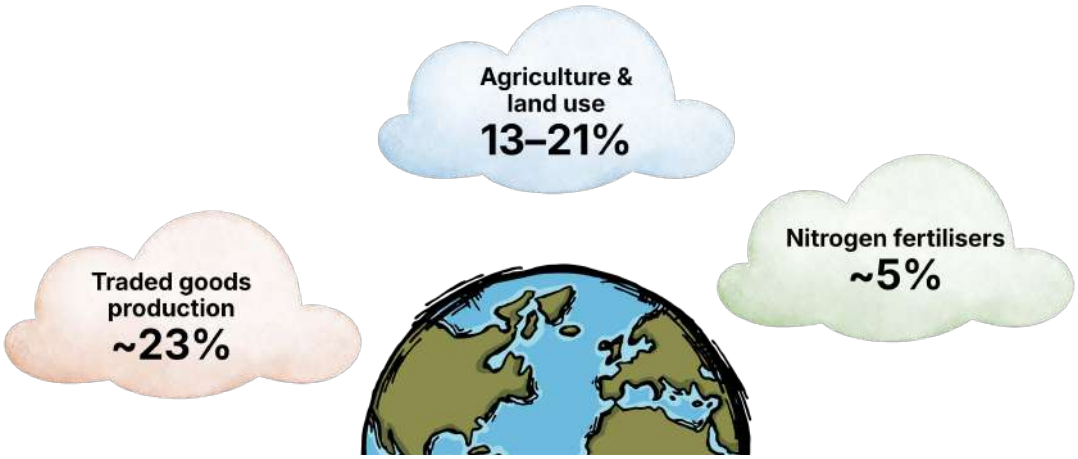


Image: MarkusLinder – Pixabay

Small-scale producers and vulnerability

Meanwhile, one third of the world's food is produced by smallholder farmers.

These farmers contribute the least to climate change, while also being highly exposed to its impacts and lacking the resources needed to adapt to it. Global supply chains are characterised by extreme imbalances of power. Small-scale producers – including farmers, workers and artisans – at the far end of the chain often face low and unstable incomes that do not enable a decent standard of living; rising production costs; hazardous and exploitative working conditions; difficulties in accessing land, water, seeds and other natural resources; as well as the escalating impacts of climate change on the ground. Thus, they usually carry the heaviest burdens with little to no support.

Conversely, large buyers at the other end of the chain reap massive profits and benefit disproportionately from trade relationships with small-scale producers. The short-term profit-driven motives of the powerful players in international value chains has been a driving force of both the impoverishment of producers and the climate crisis

SHARE OF GLOBAL FOOD PRODUCED BY SMALLHOLDER FARMERS

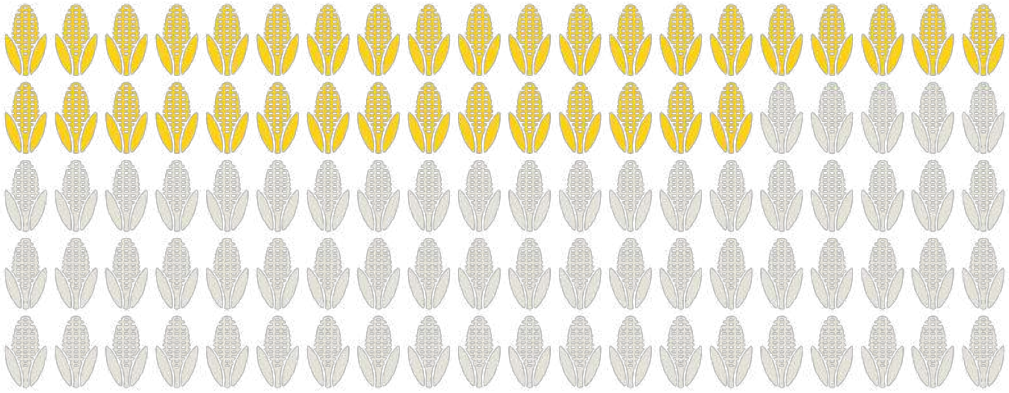


Image: © Mohamed Aly Diabaté - Fairtrade

With climate change, our production drops sharply as trees die, especially on farms near rivers in muddy areas. When the heat strikes, the trees just can't survive, and we lose most of those farms.

– Emmanuel Nana Sarpong, President, Asunafo North Cocoa Cooperative in Ghana

Image: Fairtrade / Dominique Fofanah – thegoodmessage.studio

Local solutions

How Fair Trade addresses climate change

Image: Plastics for Change

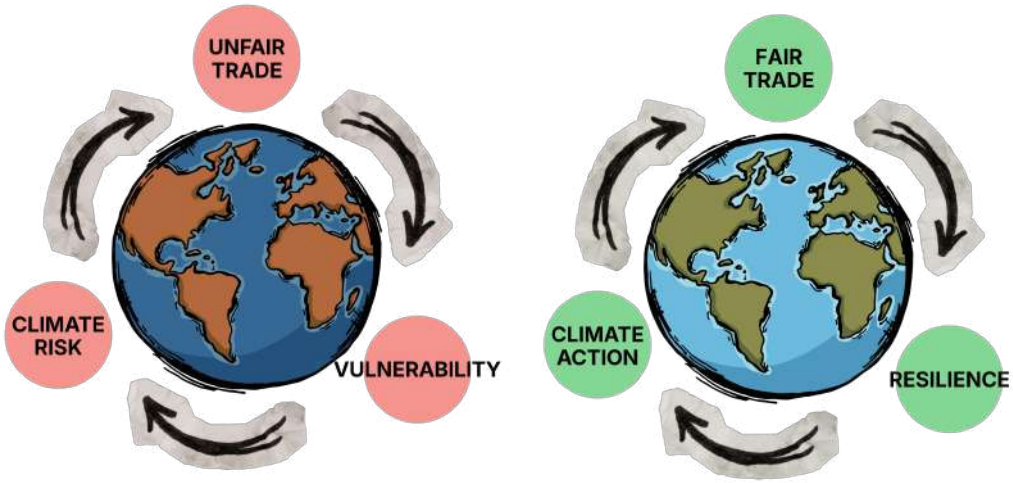
The Fair Trade alternative

Fair Trade systems developed as an alternative model of trade that empowers small-scale producers to earn a living income while also taking care of the environment.

Fair Trade systems work with over 3 million farmers, workers, and artisans across Africa, Asia, Europe, Latin America, North America and Oceania. Overall, this is estimated to **benefit more than 10 million people** including their family members and dependants.

In practice, Fair Trade means:

- Decent working conditions
- Fair minimum prices for producers
- Long-term contracts and trade partnerships
- Fairer distribution of value along supply chains
- Environmental stewardship embedded in production and trade
- Democratic producer organisations and worker representation
- A commitment to continuous improvement rather than minimum compliance



The Fair Trade movement encompasses a range of approaches, systems and organisations. Two of the most widely adopted Fair Trade systems are referred to throughout this guide:

Product-based

- based on standards for products (referred to herein as Fairtrade Standards for products)
- a certification mark for products that comply with the standards (the FAIRTRADE mark)
- mainly applied to agricultural products
- Premium payments for producer organisations in some sectors
- coordinated by the non-profit organisation, Fairtrade International

Organisation-based

- based on a standard for organisations (referred to herein as the Fair Trade Standard for organisations)
- a certification mark for organisations that comply with the principles
- mainly applied to handcrafted products
- coordinated by the non-profit organisation, World Fair Trade Organization

The Fair Trade movement shares a vision of a world in which justice, equity and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices so that everyone, through their work, can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full human potential.

– International Fair Trade Charter, 2018

Evolving systems for economic fairness *and* environmental sustainability

Fair Trade began as solidarity-based trade initiative, and it has evolved into systems that also integrate environmental sustainability into their principles, standards and practices.

The first 'alternative trade' initiatives brought handcrafts from impoverished producers to consumers in wealthier countries, in the 1940s. These solidarity initiatives expanded and began to include selling coffee from small farmer cooperatives in the 1970s, and gradually expanded to include tea, cocoa, sugar, cotton other products. Producers were encouraged to use production methods and materials that are as environmentally friendly as possible.

In the decades that followed, a Fair Trade approach developed for organisations. This evolved from shops selling handcrafts in the 1940s into formalised criteria for fair trade enterprises by the 1980s. More recently, a Fair Trade Standard for organisations was developed, which includes criteria for fair remuneration and conditions for producers as well as environmental sustainability.

Fair Trade is based on modes of production and trading that put people and planet before financial profit.

– International Fair Trade Charter, 2018

In parallel, by the late 1990s, global Fairtrade Standards for products had been developed with criteria that must be met for a product to carry a FAIRTRADE certification mark on its label. This was first applied to coffee, and later to other (mostly agricultural) products, including tea, cocoa, sugar, honey, fruits, vegetables, flowers, juices, rice, quinoa, nuts, herbs and spices, wine, cotton, gold and sport balls. Initially, the criteria mainly related to fair remuneration and working conditions for producers. By the early 2000s, it had evolved to include environmental criteria, which gradually increased to cover a wide range of topics from impact assessment and planning to production methods and materials. In 2015, a Fairtrade Climate Standard focused on carbon credits was also introduced.


Image: CLAC

In recent years, climate change specifically has been adopted as a key concern for the whole Fair Trade movement. This has emerged from growing understanding of climate change as a global phenomenon; increasing requirements for producers to comply with sustainability criteria set by international buyers, buyer countries' legislation and/or other certification schemes; and perhaps most significantly, from the necessity for Fair Trade producer organisations to adapt and respond to the escalating impacts of climate change at the farm level. Since 2018, the International Fair Trade Charter, which has been endorsed by over 250 organisations, outlines the movement's principles and recognises the role of Fair Trade in addressing climate change and the importance of supporting producers who are faced with its impacts. The movement has widely adopted agroecology – a holistic approach that applies both ecological and social principles to farming, with the aim to transform food systems – as a principal approach to agriculture. The Fair Trade movement now supports producers to develop their climate resilience through a range of approaches which are addressed throughout this report.

FAIR TRADE MOVEMENT – FROM SOLIDARITY TO SUSTAINABILITY

1940s

The Fair Trade movement emerged as a **grassroots response to poverty and displacement**, creating direct market opportunities for disadvantaged artisans and refugees.

1970s

Fair Trade expanded beyond handcrafts and started to include products like **coffee from small farmer cooperatives**.

1980-90s

Product-based **certification schemes** emerged and expanded across global markets, initially focused on **social criteria,** but progressively incorporating environmental requirements.

2000s

Environmental criteria were added, alongside a stronger focus on responsible production and climate considerations.

2010s

The movement has placed **climate resilience and sustainability** at the centre of its work.

Standards drive climate-friendly production

Fair Trade systems now explicitly require small-scale producers, cooperatives, artisans, and organisations to implement measures on climate change adaptation and mitigation.

The section below highlights how environmental and climate considerations are embedded within two of the most widely recognised Fair Trade systems, led by Fairtrade International and the World Fair Trade Organization.

Climate and environmental criteria in Fairtrade Standards for products

The Fairtrade Standards for products include climate-related criteria on:

- reducing greenhouse gas emissions;
- increasing carbon sequestration.

Additional requirements for sustainability introduced at the same time are also relevant to addressing climate change, including:

- preventing soil erosion;
- enhancing soil fertility;
- using water sustainably;
- preventing deforestation;
- protecting biodiversity.

Image: © Jorge Conesa

These climate requirements, which were introduced in 2019, are already leading to real impact. **By 2023, around 38 percent of all Fairtrade-certified producer organisations (720 organisations) had adopted climate adaptation plans**, and 32 percent (610 organisations) reported that they were implementing environmental risk mitigation. In 2024, a further 441 organisations adopted such plans.

The requirements to take action on climate change were not entirely new, rather they built on existing requirements in the Fairtrade Standards for products for producer organisations to use sustainable agricultural and environmental practices that had been developed over many years. These already included criteria on: using energy efficiently; reducing pesticide and herbicide use; handling waste via reduce-reuse-recycle practices; protecting and conserving wildlife; and working together with other producers to share knowledge and good practices on sustainability. Producers are also required to monitor their environmental impact and efforts to ensure sustainability on an ongoing basis. They must also adopt plans to ensure improvement on sustainability over time.

Image: Designed by Magnific – www.magnific.com

Fairtrade Climate Standard

In addition, a Fairtrade Climate Standard focused on carbon credits was introduced in 2015. Under this Standard, Fair Trade producers can generate carbon credits through activities such as increasing energy efficiency, using renewable energy or forestry. The carbon credits are sold to buyer organisations that are seeking to compensate for greenhouse gas emissions generated within their own business or other activities. **So far, more than 653,000 verified equivalent tonnes of carbon emission reductions have already been generated through Fair Trade carbon credits.**

Climate and environmental criteria in Fairtrade Standards for organisations

The Fair Trade Standard for organisations also requires compliance with criteria to build climate resilience and improve sustainability. This Standard is mainly followed by organisations involved in handcraft supply chains, and includes criteria on: minimising overall harm to the environment; implementing measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change; minimising greenhouse gas emissions; using renewable energy where possible; conserving natural resources; protecting wildlife and biodiversity; using organic, sustainable and agroecological practices; diversifying crops; avoiding the use of harmful chemicals; minimising pesticide use; dealing with waste according to reduce-reuse-recycle principles; using packaging materials that are recycled or sustainably sourced; and working together with other producers to share knowledge and good practices for compliance with these criteria; and working with farmers and indigenous people to protect and conserve their territories and ensure culturally respectful and appropriate approaches to climate action. The organisations must comply by assessing the environmental impacts of their operations and address them via clear policies and action plans involving continuous improvement over time

Across the Fair Trade movement, standards are updated regularly and new and improved ways to trade more sustainably are constantly being developed, so it is expected that efforts to address climate change will continue to grow and evolve.

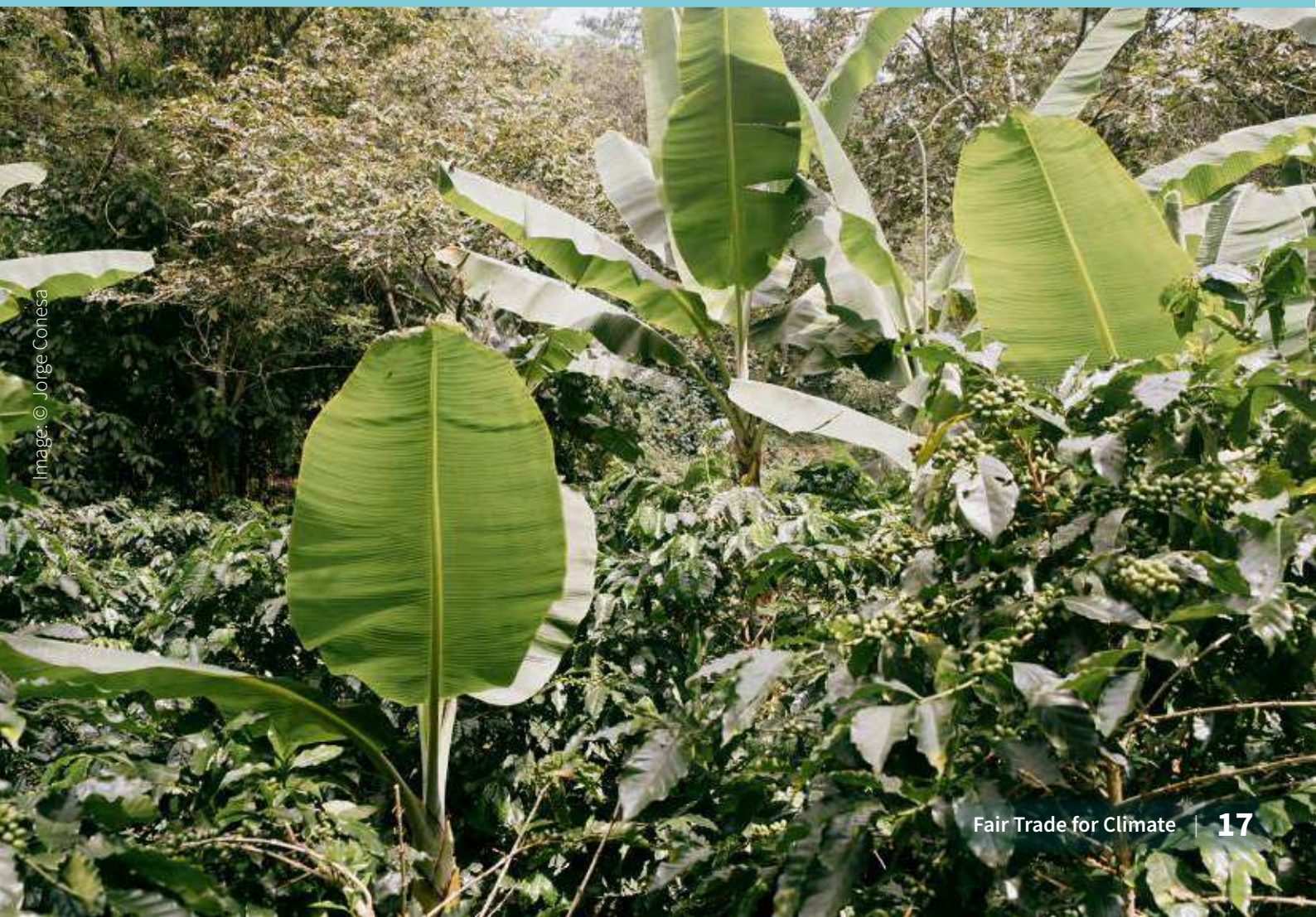


Image: © Jorge Conesa

Stable trade relationships, fair prices and premiums empower producers

Through stabilised trade relationships, fair prices and premium payments, Fair Trade systems provide producers with some of the resources they need to develop their own resilience against climate change.

Fair Trade systems facilitate long-term, stable trading relationships between producers and their buyers, with the aim to empower producers to have more control over the trading process they are involved in and more stability in their lives. This provides the financial security that enables producers to focus on climate change adaptation and mitigation activities, rather than just seeking survival through the next season or sale of their produce.

Studies have confirmed positive long-term economic outcomes from Fair Trade, including higher incomes for farmers, improved farm revenues, higher net returns and greater income stability, as well as positive long-term impacts on trade relationships in some sectors.

Fairtrade International

The Fairtrade International system sets a **Fairtrade Minimum Price** for many products that buyer organisations are required to pay to producers. This aims to guarantee minimum income levels and ensure a decent standard of living, especially for those producing agricultural commodities in markets with highly volatile prices. It can also enable producers to have savings to support themselves in emergencies like a major crop failure due to climate change, or to invest in planting a wider range of crops to diversify their income streams.

Buyer organisations are also required to pay a **Fairtrade Premium** to producers. This is an additional sum of money that is paid into a communal fund for producers. This money is allocated to assist producers to improve their social, economic and environmental conditions. Producer organisations must decide how this money will be spent in a collective, democratic and transparent manner. Producer organisations are required to have Fairtrade Development Plans, which are important for determining how they will spend their Fairtrade Premium funds. These plans should include measures to maintain or improve sustainable production practices and ecosystems. This could involve, for example, activities that increase soil fertility, promote the sustainable use of water, reduce the use of pesticides and other external inputs, enhance biodiversity, reduce carbon emissions, increase carbon sinks or promote measures to adapt to climate change.

The Fairtrade Premium earned by all producers collectively has amounted to more than €1.5 billion over the past 10 years. The use of the Fairtrade Premium for sustainability purposes is relatively new, therefore the diversity of ways that producers will use this for climate adaptation and

mitigation remain to be seen. However, the results so far are positive – in 2023 producers invested around € 2 million of their Premium funds in environmental initiatives. This already amounts to a significant impact for sustainability at the local level and is expected to increase in future.

World Fair Trade Organization

The World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) system comprises **Fair Prices** – transparently negotiated and agreed between buyers and sellers to include fair wages, profits and an equitable share of the value distributed across the supply chain. **Fair Wages** are also negotiated and must meet at least a **Local Living Wage**. This is defined as pay for a standard 48-hour week that is sufficient for a decent standard of living, covering essentials like food, housing, education, healthcare, transport, clothing, and provisions for unexpected events.

In this system, a Local Living Wage Ladder tool is used to benchmark wages against local wage estimates, minimums and alternatives. Updates are shared with workers, producers and partners to inform wage negotiations, and training and information are provided for equitable dialogue. Legal minimum wages are ensured, with fast remediation where gaps are identified. The aim is to progressively move towards paying Local Living Wages to workers and Fair Prices to producers and suppliers. This approach is supported by gap analyses, realistic timelines and continuous improvement plans.

Through fair payments and empowerment within supply chain negotiations, producers are enabled to have some savings to support themselves in financial hard times, to diversify crops or invest in developing new product lines, and to continue negotiating to ensure their needs are met, all of which can help to increase their resilience to climate change.

Overall, fair prices, premium funds and long-term trade relationships amount to higher and more stable incomes and lives for producers. At the collective level, this empowers whole communities to work together not only to improve their standard of living, but also to address local climate change and sustainability concerns.

Image: © Jorge Conesa

Image: CLAC

Cocoa Productivity Improvement Programme helps farmers build climate resilience

PERU

The Cocoa Productivity Improvement Programme is working with farmers in Peru to strengthen their climate resilience and improve their livelihoods.

The farmers face persistent challenges including low productivity, declining soil fertility, pest outbreaks and limited access to organic inputs. These are exacerbated by climate change and are threatening farmers' incomes as well as their organic certification status.

The programme has been designed to respond to the needs of cocoa growers' cooperatives and supports farmers through an integrated and agroecological approach. It combines training in sustainable agronomic practices with the establishment of demonstration plots and distribution of improved seedlings.

Farmers are also supported to produce organic fertilisers locally, enabling them to reduce dependency on external inputs while also restoring soil health. Bio-based solutions to combat pests and diseases affecting cocoa plants (such as moniliasis) are also utilised in the programme, assisting farmers to strengthen their phytosanitary management.

At the same time, the programme prepares farmers for compliance with the EU Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) through plot georeferencing, deforestation mitigation strategies and forest nursery development. This helps farmers to gain or maintain access to markets in the European Union.

The programme is implemented by **CLAC**, the network that represents all Fairtrade certified organisations in Latin America, and the **Fairtrade Foundation**.

It is funded by large cocoa buyers, **Co-op** (United Kingdom) and **ICAM** (Italy). In 2024, Co-op generated GBP 465,987 in Fairtrade Premium for cocoa farmers across West Africa, Central and South America. However, the consumer co-operative recognises that farmers need additional support to strengthen their resilience and secure sustainable livelihoods. This programme is one of the ways that Co-op takes up that responsibility as a large buyer.

Overall, the programme links productivity, environmental stewardship and market access, enhancing the capacity of cooperatives to supply sustainable and deforestation-free cocoa. It demonstrates how targeted investment and Fair Trade partnerships can deliver tangible climate adaptation benefits while securing more resilient and equitable value chains.

Diverse approaches to climate resilience

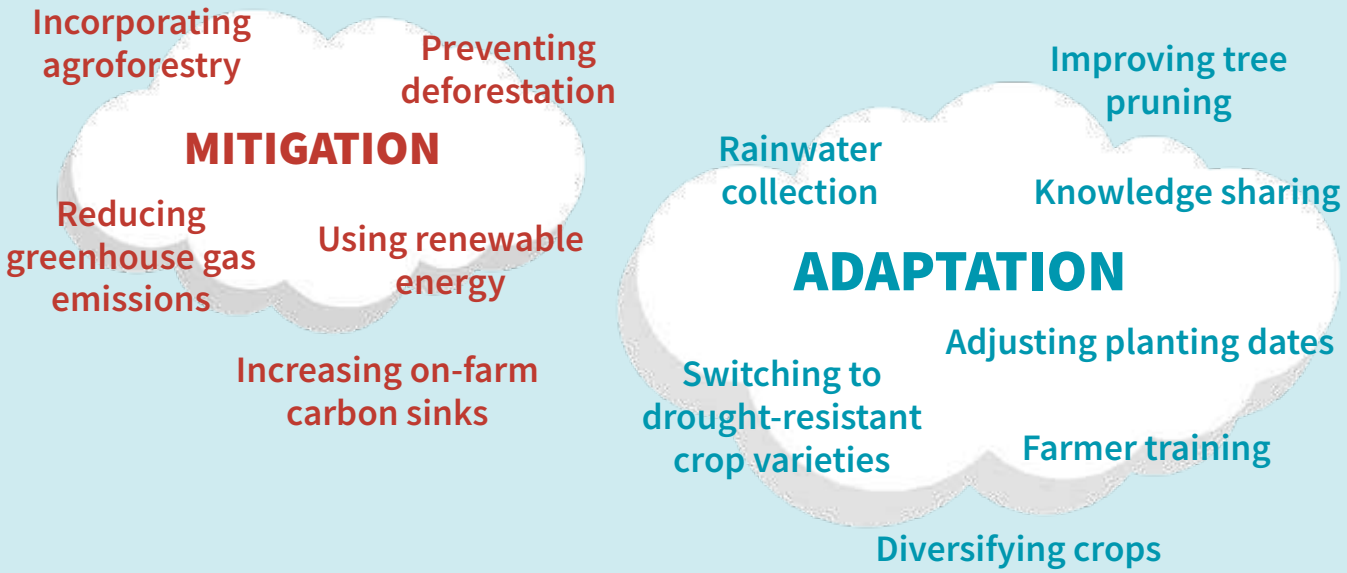
For Fair Trade and other small-scale producers, there are diverse ways to achieve climate resilience goals.

Achieving climate resilience involves both mitigation – reducing or eliminating negative impacts on the climate, and adaptation – finding ways to cope with the impacts of climate change. For Fair Trade and other small-scale producers, approaches to climate resilience need to be defined on a farm-, site- or regionally-specific level.

Mitigation could include incorporating forestry, using green manures and increasing organic matter in soil to sequester more carbon; reducing greenhouse gas emissions by using renewable energy; using household cookstoves that do not need to burn wood or fossil fuels to reduce local deforestation; or even just adequate maintenance of processing equipment for more efficient energy use, for example.

Adaptation measures could be applied at plant level – such as using improved tree pruning practices; at farm level – such as adjustments in crop planting dates to avoid periods with high temperature stress, switching to more drought-resistant crop and livestock varieties, installation of rain water collection tanks, or planting a range of different crops for more diverse sources of income in case one or more crops fail due to climate change impacts; or at producer organisation level – such as training and knowledge sharing among farmers on climate change and adaptation measures, among many other possibilities.

DIVERSE APROACHES TO CLIMATE RESILIENCE



In this era of climate change at our doorsteps, felt by all, integrating timber and shade trees into cocoa farms is vital. It strengthens cocoa crops while serving humanity's greater good.

– Gottfried Baidoo, Project Coordinator, Sankofa Project in Ghana

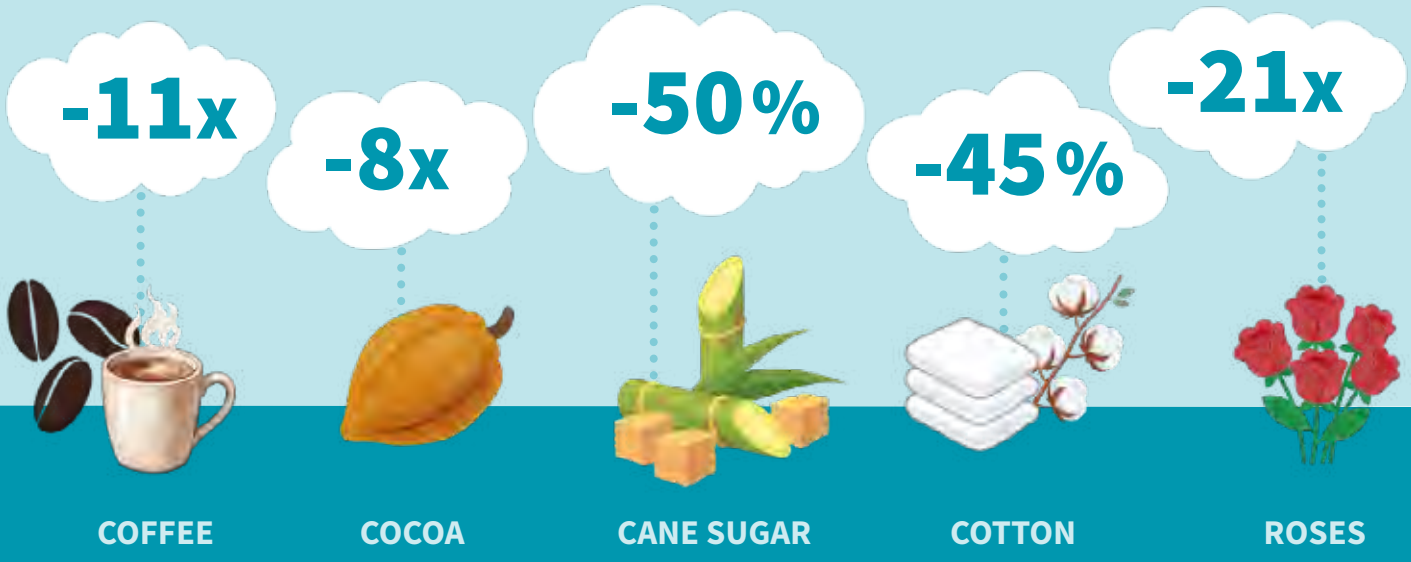
Image: Wara Vargas - Fairtrade Italia - Fairpicture

Sustainable production methods lower carbon footprints

WHAT WE KNOW SO FAR ABOUT FAIR TRADE'S CARBON FOOTPRINT

Lower greenhouse gas emissions than equivalent products grown on conventional farms

See text below for details



Early studies have shown that some Fair Trade products have much lower carbon footprints than their conventional equivalents because they use more sustainable production methods.

Many agricultural products – coffee, tea, cocoa, rice and cotton, for example – cannot be produced in, or near, the countries where they are ultimately consumed. For example, coffee cannot be grown in Europe, because the climatic conditions are not right for coffee plants. This means they must be transported long distances between producers and consumers. This applies to the majority of Fair Trade products, just like their non-Fair Trade counterparts. The overall carbon footprint of Fair Trade products has not been comprehensively evaluated at this point, however, several studies already indicate that many Fair Trade products are generating lower greenhouse gas emissions than equivalent products from conventional farms.

A recent study compared the greenhouse gas emissions, water usage and chemicals used in the production of cotton grown in India under Fairtrade certified, organic certified, in conversion to organic or conventional conditions (or some combination of these). **The study found that Fair Trade organic cotton generates 45 per cent less greenhouse gas emissions compared to conventional (non-Fairtrade) cotton**. It also found that Fair Trade organic and in-conversion farmers use uses 14 per cent less water and yield 20 per cent more cotton from their water use compared to conventional farmers. Further, 96 per cent of Fair Trade organic and in-conversion farmers avoided chemical pesticide use altogether, compared to only 60 per cent of conventional farmers.

Image: Fairtrade Česko a Slovensko

Another study compared greenhouse gas emissions and other environmental impacts of roses produced in Kenya under Fair Trade conditions with roses produced in the Netherlands. The **results showed that Fair Trade roses from Kenya have a smaller environmental footprint than roses produced in the Netherlands, even when factoring in transport to Europe**. Fair Trade cut roses from Kenya required 22 times less energy and generated 21 times lower greenhouse gas emissions than the Dutch roses when transported to Switzerland by sea. When transported by air, the Fair Trade roses from Kenya still had a lower impact than the Dutch roses – requiring 6.4 times less energy and generating 2.9 times lower emissions. Regarding water use, the study also found that the Fair Trade roses grown in Kenya and transported to Switzerland by sea used 65 per cent less water than the roses grown in the Netherlands. The main reason for the lower environmental footprint of the Fair Trade roses is the low-energy sustainable production methods used, compared to the roses from the Netherlands which are grown in greenhouses with lighting and heating that is not necessary in Kenya.

A report by the Spanish Coordinadora Estatal de Comercio Justo, analysed the greenhouse gas emissions generated by Fair Trade coffee, cocoa and cane sugar in comparison to the same products produced by conventional farms. The analysis found that the Fair Trade products generated between 45 and 91 per cent less emissions than the conventional products. For example, **Fair Trade unrefined cane sugar produced in Paraguay was found to generate less than half the emissions of conventionally produced sugar. Fair Trade coffee grown in Guatemala and Uganda was found to generate up to 11 times less emissions compared to the average for conventionally produced cane sugar.** Fair Trade cocoa grown in São Tomé and Príncipe was found to generate eight times fewer emissions than the average for conventionally grown cocoa. The report also compared chocolate bars made from Fair Trade cocoa grown in Peru with conventional chocolate bars made from conventional cocoa from Ivory Coast. The report's calculation revealed that **CO_2 emissions were 57 per cent lower for Fairtrade chocolate, even though the Fair Trade chocolate was transported further in order to arrive in Europe**. Most significantly, the report found that the lower greenhouse gas emissions of all the Fair-Trade products analysed were a result of the more sustainable production methods used on Fair Tade farms. Some of the key practices that led to lower greenhouse gas emissions included the use of natural compost and non-chemical fertilisers, as well as manual cultivation and harvesting techniques, and practices that prevent soil erosion.

While transportation distances are often called into question when considering a product's carbon footprint, the results of these studies indicate that production methods may be a more significant factor here. These early analyses highlight that sustainable production methods play a key role in the lower greenhouse gas emissions from Fair Trade products, compared to conventionally farmed products.

Image: © Subindu Gharkel

Myth busting

about Fair Trade and sustainability

MYTH	REALITY
Fair Trade has nothing to do with the climate or environment	**It's about people and the planet** Fair Trade systems require producers to comply with environmental sustainability and climate-related criteria. Read more
Fair Trade is not a systemic solution	**It's a scalable model for systemic changes** Fair Trade means comprehensive systems that set fair prices, stabilise trade relationships, require environmental protection, reduce power imbalances across supply chains and involve democratic governance. Overall, Fair Trade is a scalable model which can also be embedded into mainstream trade relationships. Read more
Fair Trade is about charity or aid	**It's about empowerment through trade** Fair Trade means rights-based market-driven systems that enable producers and workers to build resilience and agency through trade, not dependency on aid donors or charities. Read more
Fair Trade products have a higher carbon footprint than other products	**Many Fair Trade products generate less emissions** Many products – e.g. coffee, tea, cocoa, rice, cotton – cannot be produced in Europe, so they must be transported long distances. This is the case for both conventional and Fair Trade products. However, early studies have shown that some Fair Trade products have much lower carbon footprints than their conventional equivalents because they use more sustainable production methods. Read more

Enablers

How to support producers in the climate transition

Image: CLAC

Shared responsibility across supply chains scales up climate action

Support for mitigation and adaptation must come from large buyers and those who bear the most responsibility for climate change.

Sharing responsibility for climate action across value chain means, above all, that buyers must pay fair prices, offer long-term contracts and adhere to fair trading practices such as premium payments. First, this ensures that producers have the resources to afford a decent standard of living and a stable way of life for themselves, in which they are able to think and plan for the medium and longer term. Second, this in turn enables producers to start making the necessary adjustments and investments for climate adaptation and mitigation that are within their financial means and the scope of their responsibility.

In reality, the income that producers earn from some mechanisms like the Fairtrade Minimum Price and Premium is not enough to cover all the costs involved in climate adaptation and mitigation. Nor, of course, is it producers' responsibility to cover all of these costs alone. Buyers and others involved in the Fair Trade movement are also sharing responsibility by providing financial and other forms of support for producers' climate initiatives. This can involve a wide variety of approaches such as providing funding for investment in planting new diversified crops, providing technical support for adapting farming methods to new climatic conditions, working together to develop carbon credit projects or subsidising the installation of solar panels to provide energy for processing equipment, among many others.

By reshaping how trade works, how value is distributed and how responsibility is shared, producers, buyers and the wider Fair Trade movement can work together to both dismantle the structural drivers of climate vulnerability and scale up actions for long-term climate resilience.

Image: No Logo – Fairtrade Foundation

Image: The Good Roll

GHANA

NETHERLANDS

The Good Roll – Sharing responsibility for sustainability

The Good Roll uses climate-friendly materials and supports economic and infrastructure development in the local community of producers.

The company is on a mission to become the world's first brand of Fair Trade toilet paper, made from recycled paper and bamboo.

Bamboo is a fast-growing plant that absorbs large amounts of CO_2 and releases oxygen, making it a promising raw material for climate-friendly production. One study showed that bamboo forests can form very efficient carbon sinks, absorbing up to 25 tonnes of carbon per hectare annually.

The Good Roll sources bamboo directly from Ghanaian farmers and processes it in its own factories in Ghana, where women are offered new employment opportunities.

In Ghana, bamboo grows abundantly on farmers' land and is often used for construction, but it is not widely traded. So, The Good Roll's direct purchasing model now provides farmers with an additional and ongoing source of income. The company has already set up a supplier network of over 800 local farmers in the Volta Region in Ghana, which has led to a 59 per cent increase in their incomes.

While most trees that are harvested to make toilet paper take around three years to mature, bamboo only takes around one year, and does not require the use of fertiliser, so farmers can continue harvesting it sustainably over time.

Bamboo is not currently certified by organisations in the Fair Trade movement, largely because it is not yet widely traded. When possible, The Good Roll wants to get certified because the company not only wants to pay a fair price for the bamboo it buys, but also to generate positive impacts for all stakeholders in the supply chain.

The Good Roll also helps to reduce deforestation by using recycled packaging produced by a social enterprise that supports more than 75 workers.

Sharing the responsibility for sustainable development, the company also spends 50 per cent of its profits on providing access to safe and clean toilets in the Volta local community. So far, they have already installed over 200 toilets, benefiting over 6,500 people. The company shows that real impact is possible across value chains when a business truly rolls up its sleeves.

Strong producer organisations build collective climate resilience

When producer organisations are empowered through Fair Trade, they are more able to develop their own resilience against climate change.

Smallholders around the world are facing escalating impacts of climate change at the farm and local community levels. These impacts, such as unpredictable weather patterns, prolonged droughts and more frequent floods, combined with a lack of resources to adapt to them, are creating major challenges for farmers.

In this context, Fair Trade organisations and producer networks play a key role in providing training, technical support and facilitating knowledge sharing that enables farmers to work together to try new approaches and develop new skills and methods to adapt to climate change. This could include a wide range of measures, for example training on understanding climate change and its impacts on local weather patterns, planting crop species that are more resilient to high temperatures or planting a more diverse range of crops to mitigate against income losses in a season where one crop fails due to climate-related issues.

For example, the Climate Academy Project in Kenya worked with 10 producer groups to develop their climate resilience. A diverse range of approaches to climate resilience were adopted. Some producer groups switched to a different breed of chickens that are more disease tolerant, produce more eggs and grow more flesh. Other groups formed village saving and loaning associations, structures in which members lend and borrow money among themselves enabling them to better manage income from crops that only comes once per year and to access loans to invest in new farm activities to diversify their incomes.

HOW FAIRNESS BUILDS COLLECTIVE RESILIENCE

PRODUCER ORGANISATION

PRODUCER ORGANISATION

+ fair prices

PRODUCER ORGANISATION

+ fair prices
+ market access
+ training
+ living incomes
+ living wages

Multiple studies have shown that Fair Trade training and support programmes are leading to increased knowledge and awareness of issues related to climate change and adaptation among producers, such as improved farm management and agrochemical application, disaster risk management training and planning, and sustainable farming practices. The studies also show that as a **result of training and support, Fair Trade farmers are using less fertilisers, pesticides, and herbicides, as well as practicing soil, water, and forest conservation, and using energy efficient technologies such as solar panels**.

An important way for small-scale producers to adapt to climate change may be to strengthen reduce the need for external inputs and to work together to increase the sustainability of local production systems – thus reducing carbon emissions in transportation and strengthening local communities to develop their own economies around sustainable production. For example, the GREAN project in Uganda brought together coffee farmers to increase their climate resilience by adopting agroforestry and other sustainable agriculture techniques as well as developing new business opportunities. Beyond coffee farming, the project also led to the development of whole new Fair Trade businesses producing climate-friendly cookstoves and briquettes made from coffee husk waste. These new businesses led to employment for more than 500 women and young people. Through the use of the improved cookstoves, the coffee producing organisations also generated Fair Trade carbon credits which will be sold to generate additional income. Through this project, we can see how Fair Trade producers working together on climate adaptation and mitigation can lead to the development of a wider community of sustainable businesses.

Image: © FLOCERT - Tobias Thiele

Image: Dora Atiiga – Giorgia Dal Fabbro

GHANA

Dora Atiiga – Youth leading the farming community towards climate resilience

In 2021, **Dora Atiiga** took part in **Fairtrade Africa**'s Women School of Leadership. Inspired by the programme, she started her own cocoa farm, opened a community school and built the foundations of the financial stability that helps her household withstand the impact of climate change.

She is now a cocoa smallholder farmer and member of the Kukuom Cooperative in Ghana's South Asunafo region, as well as a Fairtrade Youth Ambassador.

As a Youth Ambassador, she visits farming communities to provide training, identify risks such as child labour and connect households to cooperative support systems, strengthening the social foundations that make climate adaptation possible.

Dora shows that agricultural climate resilience doesn't always start with green farming practices, but with building strong communities and equitable systems.

Fair Trade as a scalable model for climate justice

When producer organisations are empowered through Fair Trade, they are more able to develop their own resilience against climate change.

Fair Trade is often misunderstood as a niche alternative for ethical consumers that has limited systemic impact. This is a misconception that weakens its potential contribution to trade justice and climate action. In reality, Fair Trade offers a transformative economic model that addresses some of the root causes of both poverty and climate vulnerability, which are embedded in global trade systems. This model can be scaled up – indeed it is already being scaled up – to benefit more producers and further contribute to the climate transition.

Fair Trade product sales have grown exponentially over decades already. The growing market for these products proves that there is demand for fairer models of trade and that these can be scaled up and their positive impact can be expanded. **There are now tens of thousands of Fair Trade products sold across more than two-thirds of countries in the world.** Thus, Fair Trade is evolving as a viable model for how international trade could better meet the needs of people and the planet.

> *The Fair Trade movement has set a model that others should seek inspiration from, and that can ensure that global supply chains work for the benefit of small-scale farmers and thus contribute significantly to the alleviation of rural poverty and to rural development.*
>
> – Olivier De Schutter, UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, 2008-2014

Fair Trade businesses show strong potential for scale. These enterprises are often economically viable and resilient over the long term. Research from universities in the United Kingdom found that **Fair Trade enterprises are four times less likely to declare bankruptcy in their first five years than other small and medium sized enterprises**. The researchers surveyed 62 Fair Trade enterprises, finding that 84 per cent were investing in new product development, 76 per

cent were sourcing from new producers and 68 per cent were investing in e-commerce. They also highlighted evidence from a financial lender to Fair Trade enterprises and cooperatives that these organisations have a high rate of loan repayment – having repaid 98 per cent of money borrowed over a 30-year period.

The same report also found that 92 per cent of Fair Trade enterprises reinvest all profits in their social mission and 85 per cent had sacrificed financial goals to pursue social or environmental goals. While conventional business models often prioritize short-term profits for shareholders, by contrast Fair Trade enterprises are often deeply embedded in their communities with many livelihoods depending on them and invested in their long-term success. These communities must also live in the environment where the businesses operate, making them more accountable for their environmental impact. While they are economically viable and scalable, their goals extend far beyond profit to prioritise social and environmental goals, making them more resilient over the long term.

While some Fair Trade enterprises would be suited to growing significantly larger, it would probably not suit all Fair Trade enterprises to grow this way. Many are small or medium enterprises that are effectively meeting the needs of their local community, for whom it may not be possible or desirable to scale up significantly. Another approach – horizontal scaling – would support Fair Trade enterprises to grow in number, rather than in size. Bigger businesses are not necessarily better for producers or the planet. In fact, a review of sustainability in Fair Trade coffee supply chains found an inverse relationship between firm size and demonstrated commitment to sustainability ideals. The Fair Trade movement provides much of the necessary infrastructure for a growing range of small and medium enterprises, such certification processes, marks for product labels, training and support, facilitating collaboration and market access, and advocacy and awareness-raising.

Altogether, scaling up the Fair Trade model would enable more producers to benefit from living incomes and to engage in climate adaptation and mitigation at farm and producer organisation levels.

Image: CLAC

Image: Tony's Chocolonely

COTE D'IVOIRE

NETHERLANDS

GHANA

Tony's Chocolonely – Scaling up Fair Trade and climate action

Tony's Chocolonely is on a mission to transform the whole cocoa industry and eliminate exploitation. They are growing their impact by growing their own company as well as bringing other companies on board with their mission via their collaborative initiative, Tony's Open Chain.

From 2024 to 2025, they increased the number of cocoa farmers in Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire that benefit from prices that enable a living income from 20,296 to 32,133 – a 58 per cent increase. This was possible because of the growth of Tony's Open Chain. The number of other companies – 'mission allies' – that follow their approach grew from 20 to 22.

These efforts are also enabling action on climate change to be scaled up. Tony's Open Chain has already achieved big results in mitigating its climate impact. For example, deforestation is a widespread issue in the cocoa industry and a major driver of climate change globally. Tony's Open Chain is 99.99 per cent deforestation-free according to monitoring results. The company has also switched its own factory and super store to using renewable sources of energy.

Rising temperatures, long dry seasons and extreme weather events are making it harder to produce cocoa and leading to reduced yields. Farmers are supported through a newly launched expanded productivity programme and additional labour for specialised tasks, like high branch pruning.

Tony's Chocolonely has started developing the Fair Carbon Income Model for insetting carbon emissions that could enable farmers to generate additional income, with the help of South Pole, a company that helps organisations with decarbonisation. Tony's Chocolonely will work with its value chain partners to reduce their carbon emissions as well, for example in dairy and packaging.

Policy to support producers in the climate transition

Policies – from governments, international institutions, businesses and other organisations – are an important pathway to scaling up fair approaches to trade and climate resilience for vulnerable producers.

Public procurement rules can be a powerful policy tool to promote social and environmental and social objectives. Fair Trade and climate action can be embedded these policies and implemented at various levels of government (municipal, local, regional and national). The European Union introduced a directive on public procurement in 2014 that aims to encourage the use of procurement to achieve social, environmental, and economic goals, among others. While its social and environmental requirements are limited, governments and public sector organisations in many European countries are going well beyond the minimum to create requirements for Fair Trade products and action on climate change, when implementing the directive. As public procurement represents at least 14 per cent of the Union's gross domestic product, this policy has enormous potential to scale up Fair Trade and action on climate change.

Policies to control deforestation and biodiversity loss are a vital tool in mitigating climate change. As these are often driven by agricultural expansion, they are of particular relevance to Fair Trade farming. The European Union introduced a regulation on deforestation-free products (also known as the EUDR) in 2023. The regulation aims to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, forest degradation and biodiversity loss by boosting the consumption of 'deforestation-free' products. The Fair Trade movement supports producers in their compliance obligations. Geolocation mapping is an important step for producers in complying with the EUDR. So, the Fair Trade movement established a satellite-based deforestation monitoring system which covers, and is accessible to, all Fairtrade-certified cocoa and coffee small producer organisations. Many Fair Trade producer networks also provide education programmes and training on related topics, such as agroforestry. In fact, prior to the adoption of the EUDR, the Fair Trade movement had advocated for a strong policy to reduce deforestation. Fair Trade Standards for products and organisations already required producer organisations to adopt measures to prevent deforestation and conserve forests, protected areas, vegetation and biodiversity. Fairtrade Standards even go beyond the requirements of the EUDR, obliging trade partners to support producers with their risk mitigation actions, so that farmers aren't carrying the burden alone. This requirement to share the responsibility for implementation could also be adopted at national level.

Further policy efforts from governments and international institutions, including the European Union, could embed economic fairness and environmental sustainability into all trade agreements and policies with clear, enforceable rules. Import standards could also be aligned with their own environmental, social and economic standards. In doing so, it is also important to support producers to implement policies, such as building strong partnership agreements and strengthened cooperation mechanisms with producer countries to support local capacity and readiness for relevant upcoming EU legislation. Funding could also be mobilised for partnerships between governments, development agencies and the private sector on initiatives related to economic fairness for producers and climate action. Initiatives in buyer countries to facilitate knowledge exchange and recognise relevant best practices could also be funded, involving local, regional and national authorities, as well as the private sector, civil society, schools and universities. Further, rewards for businesses that follow rules on supply chain transparency, corporate social responsibility and environmental sustainability could be established to incentivise compliance.

Image: © Fairtrade - Nipah Dennis

Image: Wara Vargas Fairtrade Italia Fairpicture

ITALY

National government procurement policy requiring Fair Trade and reduced emissions

In 2017, **Italy's government** adapted its national Public Procurement Code to include mandatory criteria for reduced greenhouse gas emissions, products that are fairly-traded and/or carrying environmental certifications, and other sustainability criteria.

The new Minimum Environmental Criteria applies to purchases in energy, food and catering, waste management, public parks, construction, electronics, textiles, office furniture, stationery and other categories.

In some cases, Fair Trade products are specifically required:

- Public offices, universities and military canteens – bananas, pineapples, cane sugar, cocoa, coffee, tea
- Schools, welfare structures and detention facilities – bananas, pineapples, chocolate
- Hospitals – bananas and pineapples

Implementation of the new requirement for products sourced through recognised Fair Trade systems, combined with streamlined procurement processes, has made it easier for public sector organisations to choose ethical suppliers.

Results of the new public procurement criteria are monitored and an evaluation in 2024 showed that a large majority of regional purchasing bodies, metropolitan areas and health institutions evaluated were applying the Minimum Environmental Criteria.

The new criteria are also creating real impact for the climate. In the Emilia-Romagna region, over 294,000 tonnes of CO_2 were avoided in 2024, as a result of sourcing from companies that prioritise sustainability and carry relevant certifications. It is estimated that overall, the new requirements for products that are sustainable, as well as products sourced from within Europe, could reduce emissions by more than 2.2 million tonnes of CO_2 per year, and generate around € 8 billion in sustainable production activities.

Italian courts have also reinforced the binding nature of the public procurement criteria, as outlined in ministerial decrees.

Overall, the new criteria are generating increased sales volumes of Fair Trade products – which is crucial in scaling up Fair Trade and action on climate change. At the same time, thousands of tonnes of greenhouse gas emissions are being reduced, through using Fair Trade products and procuring energy from renewable sources.

Young advocates strengthen support for climate resilience

Faced with the overlapping crises of climate instability, inequality and democratic erosion, young advocates are a leading source of support for the Fair Trade movement's increased focus on addressing climate change.

Across the Fair Trade movement, young people are organised, mobilised and empowered through international programmes and networks such as Young Fair Trade Advocates and the young Fairtrade Ambassadors programme, as well as national initiatives including Génération Équitable and Fair Activists. Some are young Fair Trade farmers in climate change-affected regions of producer countries who are actively sharing knowledge with their peers and raising their voices for their collective needs, while others are young advocates in buyer countries working to promote Fair Trade approaches and products on university campuses, in policy forums and elsewhere. Throughout the movement, they are reshaping Fair Trade priorities, methods and narratives with intergenerational and intersectional approaches. Their work contributes to advocacy, cultural change and political pressure.

They consistently emphasise that:

- climate action and trade justice must be addressed simultaneously;
- Fair Trade must challenge the current socio-economic model, not simply improve it at the surface level; and
- those who will most endure the consequences of today's decisions must have a voice in shaping them.

We want to live in a world that isn't solely driven by profit, but one that respects diversity and marginalised people and that fully comprehends the impending climate 'disaster'.

– Young Fair Trade Advocate

Image: Gaëtan de Baene

BELGIUM

Gaëtan De Baene – Youth leading advocacy on trade and climate justice

Gaëtan De Baene is a young Belgian activist whose actions demonstrate that climate action and Fair Trade go hand in hand.

Since 2022, he's been shaking things up with the Young Fair Trade Advocates in Brussels, making the connections between Fair Trade, climate change and the future of young people around the world.

He works on implementing regulations relating to animal welfare, climate/environmental protection and public health for the public service of Wallonia in Belgium.

At the same time, he has also been a municipal councillor in Ittre, where he advocated for better public transport to enable residents to reduce the use of their cars and their contribution to CO2 emissions.

From 2023 to 2025 he held the role of United Nations Climate Youth Delegate for the French Community of Belgium, taking his passion for Fair Trade and climate action to the international level.

For Gaëtan, taking action on climate change means working towards a fair, inclusive economic and social transition that prioritises the needs of both people and the planet.

Conclusion

**Fair Trade leads to better outcomes for people and the climate.
At the same time, producers need support to develop their climate resilience.**

This guide has addressed the challenges faced by small-scale producers as a result of extractive and exploitative systems of trade at the global level and escalating impacts of climate change at the local level. It is clear that without fairer trading structures, small-scale producers lack the security and resources necessary for climate adaptation and mitigation.

There are solutions. Throughout this guide, it has been demonstrated that Fair Trade offers an alternative and transformative economic model. By reshaping how trade relationships work, how value is distributed, how risks are shared, and whose voices are heard, Fair Trade contends with the structural drivers of climate vulnerability embedded in global trade systems. Presenting practical approaches and living examples from across the Fair Trade movement, this guide has illustrated what integrating trade and climate justice can look like, from global to local level.

Based on studies conducted so far, it is also evident that Fair Trade not only leads to better outcomes for small-scale producers, but also better outcomes for the climate, including lower carbon footprints than equivalent conventionally produced and traded goods.

The Fair Trade approaches described here are scalable – their benefits can be extended to many more of the world's vulnerable small-scale producers and their sustainable production methods can be expanded to contribute further to addressing climate change.

Climate policies that do not encompass trade justice risk placing additional burdens on those least responsible for – and most affected by – the climate crisis. Support is needed from governments, large buyers and other international actors to ensure that climate action also serves small-scale producers, and helps to build a fair, resilient and sustainable economy for all.

Recommendations

For policymakers and public authorities

- Embed environmental, social and economic sustainability in all trade agreements and policies with clear, enforceable rules.
- Build strong partnership agreements and strengthened cooperation mechanisms with pro ducer countries to support local capacity and readiness for relevant upcoming EU legislation.
- Ensure transparency and accountability across supply chains, rewarding businesses that follow sustainable and socially responsible practices.
- Promote a positive agenda for sustainability within and outside EU borders, setting import standards aligned with environmental, social and economic standards in the European Union.
- Leverage partnerships between governments, development agencies and private-sector actors to mobilise additional funding for climate and environmental initiatives.
- Support Fair Trade initiatives through EU programmes involving young people and the private sector, rewarding best practices and facilitating knowledge exchange among local, regional and national authorities, civil society, schools and universities.

For citizens

- Use your purchasing power by choosing products that reflect your values. Everyday decisions can drive demand for sustainable and fair production.
- Engage in platforms like national Domestic Advisory Groups related to EU trade agreements and other civic spaces to help shape sustainable development policies..
- Educate your community, friends, family, school, university and workplace about the links between trade, climate resilience and social justice..
- Choose Fair Trade products at home, at work, at university and whenever possible to directly support sustainable livelihoods and climate-resilient production.

For NGOs, schools and universities

- Engage with institutional donors, foundations and governments to secure dedicated funding to enhance climate resilience and environmental sustainability, broadening partnerships with NGOs, universities and research organisations.
- Facilitate regular dialogue spaces to share challenges, innovations and needs on climate and environmental sustainability.
- Promote long-term commercial partnerships and co-financing schemes to enable producers to implement climate adaptation and mitigation measures.

Image: Fairtrade Česko a Slovensko

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Fair Trade ADVOCACY OFFICE

CONTACT US

The Fair Trade Advocacy Office
Village Partenaire – Bureau 2
Rue Fernand Bernierstraat 15
1060 – Brussels, Belgium

+32 (0) 2 543 19 23
info@fairtrade-advocacy.org
@FairTradeFTAO
Fair Trade Advocacy Office
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