

Fair trade in the face of globalization: company motivations and challenges**AMOKRANE Hakima**Laboratoire (DEFI), Mouloud MAMMERI Tizi-Ouzou University, , hakima.amokrane@ummto.dz**Received:** 13/03/2025**Accepted:** 16/05/2025**Published:** 25/05/2025**Abstract:**

Globalization has brought about major upheavals in the world's economic and social landscapes, exacerbating territorial disparities and inequalities, particularly in developing countries. At the heart of these changes lies the concept of fair trade, which has become essential for mitigating the negative effects of globalization and promoting a fairer, more sustainable economy. This type of trade aims to create equitable links in world trade, offering marginalized small-scale producers the opportunity to sell their products at fair prices and thus improve their living conditions. Adopting fair trade practices is becoming an imperative for the survival of the many autonomous players present in disadvantaged countries. While this approach is based on moral values, it is also an effective means of ensuring long-term growth. This article explores companies' motivations for adopting fair trade, their potential interest in this social approach, and the implications of this commitment for local producers and the environment.

Keywords: Fair trade, globalization, business, challenges, international trade.**JEL Classification:** F2, F02, Q56

1. Introduction:

Economic globalization has brought about major changes in the world's economic and social landscape, overturning trade relations, production structures and social dynamics (Bhalla.,1998). Differences are appearing between territories, and inequalities continue to grow, particularly in developing countries (PNUD., 2020).

Public opinion recognizes the ever-growing power of companies, due to the wealth and number of jobs they generate in the local area. As a result, they are becoming essential to local life as a whole. As a result, their power and responsibility extend beyond the jobs they create or eliminate. The same applies to the effects of their production on the environment, respect for others and the demonstration of solidarity towards the most disadvantaged territories.

At the heart of these transformations lies the issue of fair trade, a concept that has proved crucial in mitigating the negative effects of globalization and promoting a fairer, more sustainable economy (Fairtrade International.,2023). It's a form of trade that's becoming essential to the survival of an ever-growing number of self-reliant employees scattered across disadvantaged countries. To achieve this, we need to bring about a profound change in behavior. It's an instrument of efficiency that goes beyond moral values (Levi & Davis., 2008). The aim of this article is to examine what motivates companies to integrate the fair trade dimension into their management, to find out whether this social ambition can serve their interests, and to specify what are the stakes of this social commitment for local producers and the environment?

Today, the economic destiny of these players is intimately linked to the evolution of the environment. Adopting a responsible attitude undoubtedly consolidates the long-term growth model (Ostrom., 1990). However, the issues involved in the adoption of fair trade by companies in the context of globalization are not simple. They are manifold, affecting both the companies themselves and the territories in which they operate.

2. Research methodology:

To examine the motivations and challenges of fair trade in the context of globalization, a qualitative research methodology was adopted. This approach made it possible to explore the experiences and perceptions of the various players involved, such as producers, consumers, companies and certification organizations. Complementing this, a literature review of institutional reports, public policies and previous academic work relating to fair trade and global trade provided a theoretical framework and secondary data essential for triangulating the findings.

The literature review enabled us to situate our research in the wake of several important studies. Authors such as Renard (2003) and Raynolds et al. (2007) have shown that fair trade emerges as a response to the unequal effects of liberal globalization, seeking to reintroduce logics of solidarity into economic exchanges. Other works, such as those by Nicholls and Opal (2005) or Littrell & Dickson (1999), have highlighted the varied motivations of stakeholders, ranging from consumers' ethical concerns to corporate image strategies.

This methodology has made it possible to highlight the challenges and opportunities facing fair trade initiatives, while also accounting for the complexity of the dynamics at work in a globalized environment. The article opens with an overview of the global economic context of trade, followed by a presentation of the fundamental principles of fair trade and its integration into this framework. This is followed by an analysis of the main challenges faced by companies and territories in the field of fair trade, focusing on the strategic importance of these initiatives and the obstacles they encounter.

3. The impact of globalization on trade flows: a critical analysis :

Globalization extends the geographical scope in which companies conduct their business activities, encouraging them to organize their exchanges beyond their original economic sphere. However, while there is no universal definition of globalization, it is generally understood as the international integration of product, capital and labor markets (Bordo et al., 2003). This process of integration translates into a system of free trade encompassing capital, services, goods, people, technology and information. Initially characterized by the exchange of goods, the process is gradually giving way to multidimensional globalization. Since the middle of the 19th century, trade has grown rapidly, leading to major changes in the geographical structure of trade and in the relative size of the economies involved. These changes have had significant repercussions on other regions.

3.1 Current trends and developments in world trade dynamics

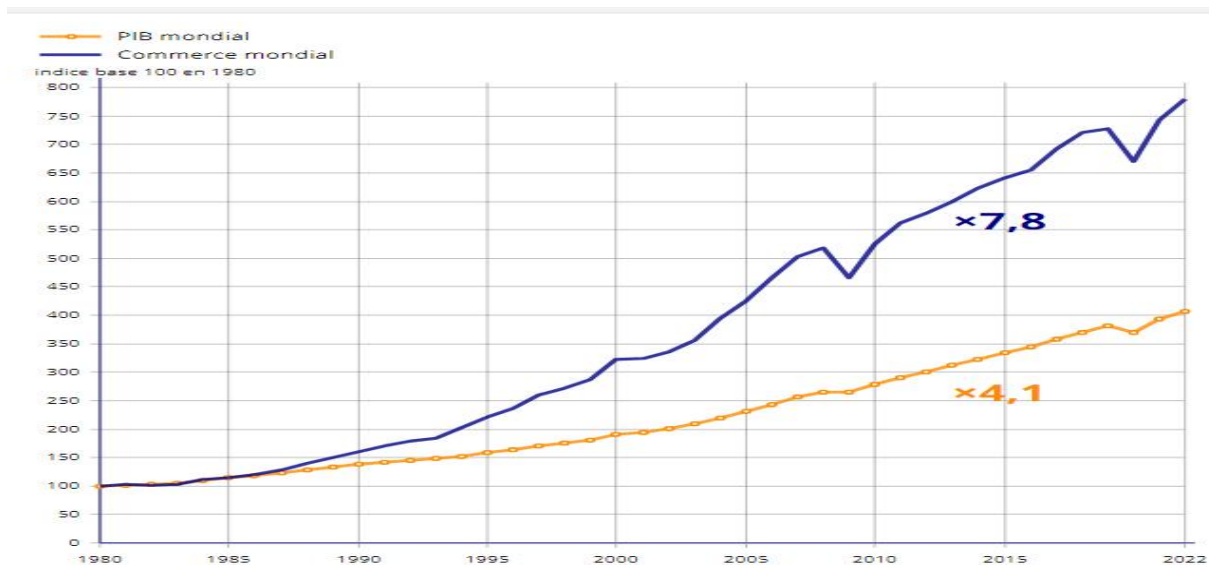
Globalization has amplified trade between countries, bringing with it constant transformations in the evolution of the territories involved. The growth of international trade is supported by the establishment of regional economic blocs, creating free-trade zones. The aim of these blocs is to facilitate trade between member countries by reducing trade barriers to the circulation of goods and services. This involves reducing customs duties and other non-tariff barriers, such as simplifying administrative procedures. This is the case for the European Union in Europe, which forms a single market, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between the United States, Canada and Mexico, ASEAN in Southeast Asia, and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) grouping fifteen Asian countries, including Japan, China and South Korea. The majority of trade takes place within these zones, characterizing what is often described as north/north trade.

The creation of agreements and organizations aimed at improving the functioning of international trade, both at regional level (regional trade agreements) and international level (UNCTAD, GATT and subsequently WTO), has encouraged the intensification of international trade. This trend has been accompanied by considerable technical progress in the fields of transport and telecommunications, which has facilitated trade and significantly reduced exchange costs. According to the World Economic Forum (2013), a substantial improvement in transport and communications infrastructures, as well as in customs clearance procedures, could boost global GDP by 4.7%(1). In 2022, total world trade volume, representing the average of exports and imports, excluding re-exports or imports for re-export, is around 45 times higher than in 1947 when the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) was created, equivalent to a 4,500% increase between 1950 and 2022.

History teaches us that the evolution of world trade is not a linear process. It is often punctuated by periods of crisis, as in 2009 and 2020, as well as dramatic changes, notably with the emergence of new industrialized countries, sometimes with far-reaching consequences.

Graph 1: Trends in world trade and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) between 1980 and 2022

Index base 100 in 1980

**Source:** FMI, World Economic Outlook, April 2023 data.

Between 1980 and 2022, the volume of world trade increased by 7.8 times, outstripping the growth rate of world GDP. This growth is largely attributed to the general reduction in protectionist measures on trade in goods and services. Nevertheless, the development of world trade remains dependent on global economic, financial and health stability. The crises of 2008 and the pandemic in 2020 illustrated that, in the event of a crisis, trade falls faster than Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

3.2. International trade players: a look at the forces at play

Despite the growth in world trade, most of it is concentrated between three geographical poles, often referred to as the Triad. This Triad represents the three main economic centers where the key decisions of the global economy are concentrated: North America, Europe and Southeast Asia. By 1985, these regions formed a coherent market, absorbing and producing more than three-quarters of the world's high-tech products(2). The majority of trade takes place between these three poles, limiting opportunities for peripheral regions to assert themselves.

Today, the concept of the Triad has lost some of its relevance, as the phenomenon of emergence has spread to all emerging countries, representing over 40% of global GDP by 2021. The group of five countries - Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) - which accounted for just 10% of the world economy in 1990, now account for more than 25%, and India has become the world's 7th largest economy in 2021(3).

The European Union region accounts for around 35% of world trade, while the Asian zone, including Japan, China and other emerging countries in Southeast Asia, accounts for just under 35%, and North America for around 18%. These three main trading poles exchange nearly 85% of world trade between them. In 2017, the top five countries in international trade were China, the USA, Germany, Japan and the Netherlands, together accounting for over a third of world trade, or 38.2%. Similarly, in 2016, China, the United States, Germany, Japan and France were among the world's top five exporters and importers of goods by value, accounting for over 38% of global trade in this area. (World Trade Organization (WTO), 2017).

While economic globalization is largely associated with multinational corporations, it also has a significant impact on producers in developing countries. This is why the WTO offers developing

countries an important opportunity to improve their trading position and benefit more from the liberalization of international trade, by promoting their integration into world trade.

3.3 Impacts and repercussions of international trade on world economies

Foreign trade has always been considered the engine of economic growth, helping to reduce the price of goods and services, diversify products and increase incomes (Krugman., Obstfeld., Melitz., 2018). Encouraged by international organizations, notably the WTO, whose main objective is to promote smooth, predictable and free trade. According to some studies, trade liberalization can increase economic growth by 1.0 to 1.5 percentage points on average, translating into a 10-20% increase in income after a decade(4). However, despite the benefits of international trade such as lower prices, specialization and economies of scale, not all countries benefit equally from free trade. The productivity gains and technological advances associated with trade development can also lead to job destruction in certain regions or sectors, not to mention negative repercussions on the environment. The positive and negative effects of trade are at the heart of a debate that has long pitted free trade against protectionism. Indeed, sustainable development emphasizes that international trade generates negative externalities, particularly from transport, which the market does not take into account.

3.3.1. The influence of international specialization

One of the advantages of free trade is that it fosters international specialization, enabling each country to make the most of its resources by concentrating on sectors where it has a comparative advantage, as Adam Smith's theory of comparative advantage emphasizes. This specialization enables each country to contribute to the reduction of unit costs, thus lowering the price of traded goods. At the same time, specialization leads to an improvement in the quality and quantity of products manufactured in these sectors, thanks to economies of scale. According to the arguments in favor of free trade, all trade participants benefit. But how do inequalities between them evolve in this context ?

3.3.2. Effects on inequalities between regions

Despite attempts by solidarity organizations to mitigate the damaging effects of post-war international trade, the global trading system continues to widen inequalities, particularly in trade between North and South (Alphandéry, 2012). Trade remains predominantly between developed countries, further concentrating international trade among the world's major powers. Although this trend is evolving, certain regions such as Africa, the Middle East and Central and Eastern Europe remain marginalized.

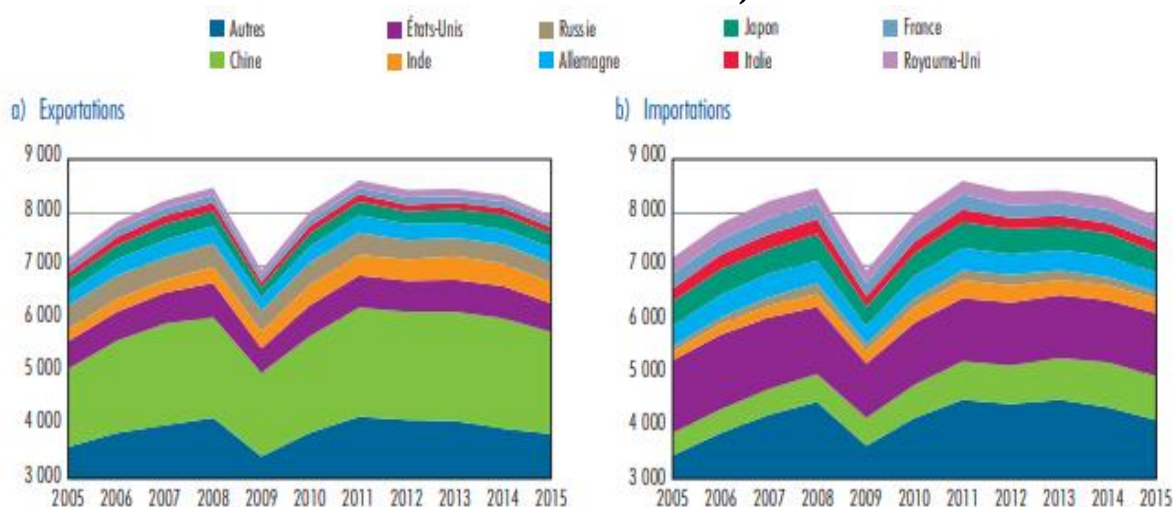
Developing nations frequently face obstacles that limit their access to global markets: high trade costs, anti-competitive practices, restrictive regulations on investment and business growth, and inadequate infrastructure that compromises their competitiveness. In addition, many of the world's poorest people live in landlocked regions, far from world markets or lacking access to international trade routes. The inability to obtain foreign products at competitive prices, and the impossibility for their businesses to access quality foreign inputs or export to other countries, have a disproportionate impact on the well-being of these populations, often in situations of extreme poverty. In developing countries where trade costs are higher, as measured by the number of days needed to export in 2005, the proportion of the population living on less than US\$2 a day is generally higher (OECD, WTO 2016, p38-39).

3.3.3. The environmental effects of international trade.

The World Trade Organization (WTO) World Trade Report 2022 explores the links between climate change and international trade, and how global trade and trade rules can help mitigate climate change.

The development of international trade has had major repercussions on the environment. It has led to significant air, water and soil pollution, due in particular to incessant transport and production activities. Production and the fragmentation of the value chain have led to major trade flows before reaching end consumers, multiplying carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions and energy consumption for product transport. According to the Banque de France bulletin (2020)(5), the production and marketing of traded goods and services accounted for 25% of harmful emissions in 2015, or 8 billion tonnes, corresponding to a quarter of total global emissions (32.3 billion tonnes; International Energy Agency - IEA, 2015). The distribution of the main CO₂ emitting and absorbing countries (import and export) in these flows in 2015 is illustrated in the graphs below.

Graph 2: Geographical breakdown of CO₂ emissions in international trade (in millions of tonnes)



Source: Organisation de coopération et de développement économiques (OCDE), bases de données inter-country input-output (ICIO) édition 2018 et trade in embodied CO₂ (TECO₂).

We note that the main CO₂ importing and exporting countries correspond to the world's major economies. China stands out as the main CO₂ exporter, accounting for almost 24% of emissions, followed by the USA with 7%, then India and Russia with 5% and 4% respectively, and finally Germany. As for CO₂ importers, the United States is the leading market, absorbing 15% of emissions, followed by China with 10%. Japan and Germany each account for 5%, while India absorbs 4%. At national level, the quest for competitiveness in terms of both price and external factors is intensifying international competition. Each state seeks to attract and retain activities on its territory, which sometimes leads them to resort to unfair practices such as social, fiscal and/or environmental dumping.

However, while trade can generate emissions from production and transport, it also offers the opportunity to rapidly disseminate cutting-edge technologies, while strengthening incentives to further innovate to meet the climate change challenge (WTO Report, 2022).

In a world based on the logic of profit between often very disparate economic territories, international competition is exacerbated, accelerating environmentally-unfriendly industrial and agricultural transformations as well as production conditions.

Competition varies in intensity and impact depending on the type of activity. Thus, the internationalization of trade and production poses a particular threat to companies operating in less productive sectors, and to less competitive countries, particularly developing ones. Some companies do not have the development resources needed to face up to the international competition imposed

by large companies and multinationals, which benefit fully from their resources and economies of scale. What's more, product diversification for an international market has often led to standardization of production to meet the expectations of a greater number of consumers worldwide. As a result, artisanal and specific productions find themselves unable to compete with less expensive international products, putting them at risk of extinction.

In this context, the fair trade system appears to be a solution for promoting more equitable integration and thus helping developing countries to overcome the constraints associated with growth within the framework of world trade. However, the initiative does not imply a break with the post-Cold War world economic order; rather, it is a means of facilitating the integration of agricultural players marginalized from markets or by markets (Salliou, N. 2018. p140). It is an action that offers the possibility of reconciling the economic and the social, of moralizing and regulating the practices of world trade, so that the general interest is taken more into account in the individual strategies of the players dominating the market (multinationals in particular) (De Cenival Solagral. L, Odile. A, 1998, p.5).

4. Fair trade as a response to socio-economic disparities

The mobilization of Western consumers gave rise to a far-reaching social solidarity movement, seeking to promote the idea of fairer trade in favor of small producers in the South, who are often marginalized due to their lack of means. Initiated at the first UNCTAD Conference in 1964, the concept of fair trade was born. Its roots lie in the fundamental principle of “Trade, not aid”, which advocates that rather than providing financial aid to developing countries, it is preferable to give them the means to develop on their own (De Cenival Solagral. L, Odile. A, 1998). In response to this desire to promote a fairer, more sustainable international dimension to trade, a number of fair trade organizations have emerged. Founded on the principle of a North/South commercial partnership and oriented towards assistance, these organizations open up outlets for small producers in the South in order to combat precariousness and improve the situation of the most disadvantaged in the long term. In the context of market globalization, fair trade is based on organized initiatives that aim to provide tangible solutions to the difficult conditions of producers in the South, while helping to change mentalities on issues such as development, business ethics, environmental protection and the need for solidarity.

Since its emergence in the aftermath of the Second World War, fair trade has gone through several phases and undergone constant transformation, whether in terms of its models, principles, practices or players. Over the last few decades, it has experienced remarkable growth. In 2017, fair trade sales reached around 8.5 billion euros, thanks to international supply chains. Today, fair trade brings together 1.72 million farmers and workers in over 1,600 producer organizations in 74 countries around the world. Their products are marketed in over 125 countries through a variety of distribution channels(6).

4.1. Fair trade marketing criteria :

The international fair trade federations agree to define fair trade as “a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, whose aim is to achieve greater equity in world trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions and guaranteeing the rights of marginalized producers and workers, particularly in the southern hemisphere. Fair trade organizations (supported by consumers) are actively committed to supporting producers, and work to raise awareness and advocate for change in the rules and practices of conventional international trade” (7). A definition that has become universally accepted. Formalized as a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, its aim is to achieve greater equity in world trade. It

contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions and guaranteeing the rights of marginalized producers and workers, particularly in the global South. Fair Trade organizations (supported by consumers) are actively engaged in supporting producers, raising awareness and campaigning for changes in the rules and practices of conventional international trade(8).

Despite the widening range of food and craft products, fair trade goes beyond its purely commercial aspect. It is also an educational and political approach based on the consumer's willingness to drive change. Its goal is to influence the evolution of mindsets, particularly regarding perceptions of development, the importance of increased solidarity, the establishment and enforcement of ethical standards, and the role of women (Schümperli Younossian, C., 1998). Organizations, supported by committed consumers, are fully engaged in supporting producers, raising public awareness, and promoting changes in global trade rules and practices. To this end, various awareness campaigns on working conditions in the Global South have been launched in Western countries (Schümperli Younossian, C., 1998). In essence, fair trade follows three key principles:

- Ensuring producers a decent livelihood ;
- Establishing sustainable trade partnerships ;
- Providing pre-financing to support producers.

4.2. Motivation and Growth of the Fair Trade Movement

The fair trade movement has been experiencing significant growth, as shown by various studies. A 1995 study by the Centre de Recherche pour l'Étude et l'Observation des Conditions de Vie (Crédoc) in France revealed that responsible consumption was increasing, with 54% of respondents willing to buy products from manufacturers supporting humanitarian causes. Similar trends have been observed across Europe: 25% of Austrians, 15% of Italians and Dutch, 12% of Spaniards, and 68% of Britons expressed willingness to pay higher prices for ethically produced goods (Laure de Cenival S, Odile A, 1998).

This evolution reflects a shift in attitudes and practices across social, economic, and political spheres. The movement is driven by opposition to an uncontrolled globalization that benefits only the most powerful, leaving large segments of the population marginalized, both in the Global North and South (de Cenival Solagral, L & Albert.O, 1998). Resisting this model of overconsumption and profit-driven growth, which primarily benefits the wealthy, is seen as an essential civic act (Dacheux, J. 2014). The movement seeks to connect wealthy and disadvantaged regions through a unique transnational network of solidarity and support.

The perception of ethical consumers has shifted beyond simply differentiating themselves from traditional consumption patterns. Today, fair trade purchasing is primarily seen as a civic act, meaning that consumption serves as a way to engage with both local and global communities (Lasida, E., 2011). This commitment extends to advocating for political, social, and collective rights (Parazelli, M., 2008). Many Western consumers are now aware of global wealth inequalities and recognize that low product prices often come at the expense of fair wages for producers in developing countries (Max Havelaar/Transfair). By considering production conditions and fair compensation, consumers take on the role of "consum'actors", actively shaping a more just economic system.

4.3. Fair Trade in Numbers

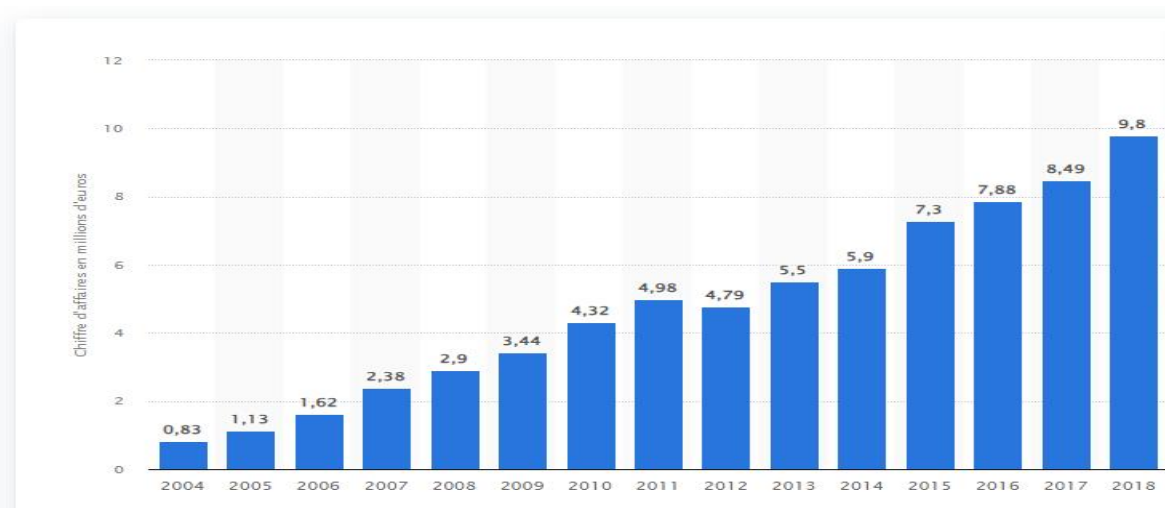
Over the past few decades, fair trade has grown significantly, reaching a trade volume of nearly \$8 billion in 2017 (Salliou, N. 2018, p. 136). Around 75% of fair trade sales involve food products, though other sectors such as textiles and cosmetics are also expanding.

In 2012, global fair trade sales ranged between €5.5 and €6 billion, up from €1 billion in 2003. Fair trade products are consumed in 70 countries, benefiting over 2 million producers and workers across Africa, Asia, and Latin America, organized into 1,400 cooperatives and associations in 75 countries. In total, around 10 million people worldwide directly benefit from fair trade. Fair trade products are consumed in over 70 countries, benefiting more than 80 million families. The most popular products including coffee (+12%), cocoa (+14%), bananas (+9%), sugar (+9%), tea (+8%), and flowers (+11%) carry fair trade labels. While over 2 million producers benefit from this system, it still represents only a small share of global trade.

Europe accounts for nearly 65% of the global fair trade market, with €3.18 billion in revenue in 2011. Switzerland and the UK lead in fair trade consumption. Fair trade products are available in over 55,000 supermarkets and 2,800 specialty stores across Europe. In 2021, fair trade purchases in France exceeded €2 billion for the first time, showing an 11% growth despite the economic crisis (Observatoire du Commerce Équitable France, 2021) (9).

In 2020, global fair trade sales reached approximately \$9.8 billion, marking a 6% growth from 2019. Around 1.76 million producers in over 75 countries benefited from the fair trade system (Fairtrade International).

Graph 3: Revenue of Fair Trade Products Worldwide from 2004 to 2018 (in Billion Euros)



Source: <https://fr.statista.com/statistiques/570830/chiffre-affaires-produits-commerce-equitable-monde/>

Although fair trade remains a small part of global trade, its significance is increasing, along with the variety of products meeting its standards. Some product categories now hold 5% to 10% market share (Max Havelaar). In Europe, fair trade generates 400 million francs in revenue, providing income to 5 million people working in cooperatives across Africa, Latin America, and Asia. These figures highlight fair trade's positive impact on producers, communities, and the environment, as well as the growing consumer demand for fairer products.

5. Research Findings: Challenges and Issues of Fair Trade

Fair trade supports several UN Sustainable Development Goals by ensuring better trading conditions and protecting the rights of marginalized producers and workers, particularly in the Global South. It contributes to poverty reduction, social justice, environmental protection, and the fight against climate change.

5.1. Issues

This article explores the many benefits of choosing fair trade products for businesses, producers, and the environment.

5.1.1. Issues for Artisan Producers

Fair trade provides access to international markets and better income opportunities for producers. By ensuring fair prices and stable revenues, it improves working conditions and promotes economic sustainability in developing countries. It also helps preserve traditional craftsmanship, recognizing and valuing artisans' unique cultural and artistic skills. Additionally, fair trade encourages continuous training and skill development, enhancing product quality. Ultimately, fair trade expands market reach, increases economic stability, and strengthens local economies, ensuring artisans' livelihoods and long-term sustainability.

5.1.2. Issues for Businesses

Businesses are the foundation of economic life, creating wealth and employment. However, they face rapid technological progress, shorter production cycles, and global competition. Modern businesses now pursue economic (profit/growth), social (employee well-being), and societal (social responsibility) goals. These include job creation, consumer satisfaction, environmental protection, and collective well-being.

Regional inequalities and competitive pressures shape business decisions, influencing the redistribution of economic activities. Fair trade plays a key role in supporting disadvantaged regions, promoting economic convergence, and enhancing local sustainability. Beyond trade, it helps shape territories by fostering economic resilience and fairer market dynamics.

- **Enhancing Corporate Image**

Engaging in fair trade is more than a business decision; it reflects a commitment to social and environmental responsibility. By promoting sustainable production, including eco-friendly materials, waste reduction, and ethical sourcing, businesses strengthen their brand image while protecting natural resources.

Growing awareness of environmental issues limits raw material choices and localization strategies. Under pressure from NGOs, consumer groups, and shifting market trends, companies are re-evaluating their supplier relationships in the Global South, embracing greater social and ecological responsibility. With rising concerns about climate change, more consumers are making conscious purchasing decisions, driving businesses toward responsible and transparent trade practices.

- **Encouraging Social Innovation**

By adopting sustainable and environmentally responsible business strategies, companies drive positive societal change. Eco-friendly economic models inspire entrepreneurs and start-ups to develop innovative solutions that reduce the ecological footprint of trade. In this context, fair trade fosters innovation, supporting sustainable economic growth while addressing key environmental concerns.

5.1.3. Environmental Challenges: Towards Agroecological Practices

Environmental protection is a key aspect of fair trade, driving the transition towards sustainable production. This involves:

- **Reducing emissions and waste:** Fair trade distribution channels optimize delivery routes and logistics, lowering fuel consumption.
- **Eco-friendly packaging:** Companies adopt minimalist packaging, refillable options, bulk sales, and sustainable materials to reduce plastic waste and ease pressure on natural resources.

These initiatives promote a sustainable economy while minimizing environmental impact.

- **Promoting Ecological Transitions :** Fair trade serves as a catalyst for ecological transitions by securing economic commitments through fair contracts, which support farmers' investments in agroecological practices. The dual certification (fair trade & organic) enhances market value by linking balanced trade relations with environmentally friendly farming practices.
- **Driving Social Transformation :** Although fair trade remains marginal in global trade flows, consumer interest in ethical exchanges is steadily growing. Committed businesses can raise awareness by highlighting the social and environmental benefits of their initiatives.

By reducing the environmental impact of traditional trade, fostering social innovation, and educating consumers on ecological issues, fair trade acts as a powerful driver of positive change at both local and global levels.

5.2. The Persistent Challenges of Fair Trade

However, fair trade still faces numerous and diverse challenges, including:

5.2.1. Raising Consumer Awareness

Increasing consumer awareness of fair trade means recognizing that this commitment is often seen as an act of solidarity by Western consumers, who must bear additional costs. Fair trade products are generally more expensive than conventional ones due to higher production costs linked to fair wages for producers, sustainable farming practices, certification fees, and the need for a transparent supply chain. Additionally, part of the price is often reinvested in community development in producer regions, reinforcing sustainability and equity.

5.2.2. Challenges of Certification and Traceability

Fair trade certifications impose strict and varied criteria regarding labor conditions, agricultural practices, and environmental impact, which differ across certification bodies. The costs of certification, including audit fees and periodic renewals, can be prohibitive for small producers and cooperatives. Limited access to information, especially for remote producers, adds to the challenge. Bureaucratic complexity, with lengthy procedures and frequent renewals, represents an ongoing burden. Ensuring supply chain transparency is difficult, as compliance throughout the chain is complex and prone to fraud risks. The fragmented certification market, with multiple labels and standards, creates confusion and complicates consumer trust. Infrastructure issues, such as a lack of advanced traceability technologies and logistical challenges, further hinder effective monitoring. Lastly, the quality and objectivity of independent evaluations vary, sometimes undermining the credibility of certifications.

5.2.3. Competition with Conventional Products

Fair trade products face several challenges when competing with conventional products. First, they are often perceived as more expensive due to additional costs related to certification and ethical practices. This price difference can lead consumers to prefer cheaper conventional alternatives, especially during periods of financial constraint. Additionally, the limited availability of fair trade products in certain markets makes them less accessible, reducing consumer convenience. Market demand fluctuations and economic pressures also influence distributors, who may favor more profitable conventional products.

Aligning fair trade practices could help shift international trade conditions toward greater fairness and potentially improve trade terms. However, the goal is not merely to capture market share but to mainstream the principles of fair trade in global commerce.

6. Conclusion

The study has highlighted that fair trade, as a response to the imbalances of globalization, serves as a lever for economic, social, and environmental transformation aligned with the goals of sustainable development. By promoting fairer trade practices, it embodies a shared responsibility among producers, consumers, and institutions, aiming to reduce social inequalities, poverty, and environmental pressures.

On a theoretical level, these findings support the relevance of critical approaches to conventional economics that incorporate ethical and sustainable dimensions into trade analysis. Practically, they underscore the importance of inclusive governance in fair trade, capable of linking local production logics with global market expectations, while avoiding unintended consequences such as economic dependency or the exclusion of certain producers.

Finally, this research opens several avenues for future studies: comparative assessments of fair trade's impact across world regions, analysis of responsible consumption dynamics in the Global South, and exploration of hybrid models that reconcile social economy principles with international trade. A systemic and integrated approach will be essential to positioning fair trade as a viable and sustainable alternative in a rapidly changing world.

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