

AFRICAN FAIR TRADE SYMPOSIUM

Cotonou, April 6th – 9th 2006

Statement

From the 6th to the 9th of April 2006 the first African Fair Trade Symposium took place in Cotonou, Benin. It was organised by the Workshop on a Solidarity Socio-Economy (WSSE) and the Groupe de Recherche et d'Action pour l'Agriculture et le Développement (GRAPAD), with the financial support of VECO (Belgium), ICCO (the Netherlands) and the FPH (Charles Léopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind). The central topic was "Rethinking Fair Trade in Africa- For an African Voice in International Trade".

Over sixty participants from 16 countries of West, Central, East and Southern Africa as well as Europe and Canada took part. The group was composed of producers, fair trade partners, representatives of civil society organisations and networks as well as producer support organisations and the Chamber of Commerce of Benin. The goal of the symposium was to articulate fair trade in Africa with the requirements of sustainable local development and the reform of international trade.

The excellent presentations on the various aspects and themes of fair trade allowed the participants to analyse the current state of play in both Africa and the rest of the world, and thereby contemplate the perspectives for Africa in the current context of profound economic, social and political change.

With a view to rethinking Fair Trade in Africa, the participants defined a working basis for developing a vision of fair trade that takes African realities into account. On the basis of this vision, and as a result of the presentations and exchange and debate in both plenary and workshop sessions, certain observations and recommendations were made. An action plan was proposed with a view to reinforcing fair trade in Africa.

A steering committee was proposed and adopted with the following brief:

"The steering committee is not an umbrella organisation. It is light in nature, a network made up of volunteer organisations from the different regions of Africa"

The mandate is defined in 6 points:

1. Organise the dissemination of the results of the Fair Trade Symposium
2. Ensure the implementation of the action plan
3. Enable communication between stakeholders, using the electronic list and existing Web site
4. Organise advocacy and campaigns on fair trade in Africa
5. Propose all suitable follow-up events to the Symposium
6. Raise funds to guarantee holding of meetings, attendance of which will be unpaid

Criteria for membership of the steering committee are as follows: existing links with stakeholder networks, balanced participation of various sub-regions, and language diversity. The follow-up committee will meet at approximately 6-monthly intervals, alternating between the various sub-regions of Africa.

The following events might provide opportunities for holding meetings: International Crafts Fair in Ougadougou, Burkina Faso, November 2006, World Social Forum, Kenya, late January 2007.

The Workgroup on Solidarity Socio-Economy (WSSE) will provide back-up for the steering committee in terms of information-sharing tools and communication and by enabling communication with partners on other continents.

The sub-regions elected the following members:

Peter ABONG (Prescraft-Cameroon) - prescraftbda@yahoo.com

Benjamin CHIKAN (Alternative Trade Network of Nigeria) - benjaminchikan@yahoo.co.uk

Towera JALAKASI (Business Consult Africa Ltd. - Malawi) - towera@bcamalawi.com

Joan KARANJA (COFTA-Kenya) - jkaranja@cofta.org

Jacob KOTCHO (ACDIC-Cameroon) - acdic@acdlic.net

Fred MAUMBE (Butumfa-Ouganda) - butumfa@yahoo.co.uk

Mamadou TRAORE (Association Wouol-Burkina Faso) - assowouol@yahoo.fr

Cotonou, 9th April 2006.