

## **Promoting the rights of agricultural workers: how Fairtrade Africa makes the difference**

Fairtrade supports workers' rights by addressing issues relating to workplace health and safety and ensuring collective bargaining on decent working conditions, living wage and social protection. Fairtrade also advocates for living income for producer organisations, especially for women as well as persons living with disability. To do this, the organisation works with different levels of stakeholders across small-scale producer organizations on a membership basis, and Hired Labour Organizations (HLOs) which include producing companies, farms and plantations among others. In these HLOs, unionised staff is the main workforce and Fairtrade partners with industry associations within the agricultural sectors to advocate for rights of these workers.

On the occasion of Labour Day on the 1<sup>st</sup> May, Fairtrade Africa sheds more light on how it supports farmers and workers who are at the front line of ensuring food security.

### **Celebrating our heroes**

Farmers and workers are the unsung heroes whose dedication makes it possible to ensure viable food supply chains. For Fairtrade, this toil must not go unrewarded and that is why as an organisation, Fairtrade Africa continues to celebrate these heroes and advocate for a better life and livelihood for them, their families and communities.

For farmers, a typical day starts with waking up very early in the morning around 6 am, taking a long walk to the farm, spending 5 to 6 hours pruning or planting or harvesting till around 4pm, when they take another long walk back home carrying food crops for the family diner.

For the hands that have known the laborious rhythm of the hoe and cutlass, or the plantation worker that has hand-picked fruits or manned the mechanised harvesting machines, this daily melody of farming and cultivation to earn a livelihood may not be recognised as a great achievement, but it is the consistent commitment and drive of these farmers to produce despite weather conditions, that ensures there is food supply in the local markets or in the grocery stores. It is this daily cultivation that ensures food manufacturing companies can delight their consumers and ensure a ready supply of a wide variety of foods during this time of the pandemic.

Meet one such hero! Ettien N'Guessan is a cocoa farmer in Cote d'Ivoire. He has been working on his farm for the past 40 years. He is able to be a hero for his family, through the proceeds from his cocoa farming and also invest in other farming inputs such as fertilizer: "Through earnings from my cocoa farming, I can take care of my children's needs. This makes me happy".

### **Promoting workers' rights**

Training workers and their organisations on Fairtrade Standards, through capacity building, seminars and workshops, promotes healthy business practices that ensure the rights of workers in plantations and members farms are protected. Such polices include Occupational Health and Safety, as well as ensuring workers Benefits and Compensations polices protect the vulnerable. This driving force is at the heart of Fairtrade Africa's work in promoting living wages for workers by ensuring they have a right to collective bargaining for better wages and decent working conditions through their local trade unions.

Fairtrade is pioneering a new approach to labour relations within the agricultural sector where Trade unions, Employers and Workers sit together to plan a future which is financially sustainable and gender inclusive. It's not just about better pays - though of course that's important - it's about having a decent work and a better home life, and that includes equal pay and conditions for women, as well as a safe and healthy workplace.

The banana sector is one such industry where Fairtrade is collaborating the efforts of Fairtrade certified organizations. Fairtrade Africa partnered with Fairtrade Finland to undertake "Rights protection for enhanced livelihoods of workers in Fairtrade certified banana value chain project" dubbed "Dignity for All (D4A) Banana project", with funding from the Finnish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The project, which runs from 2018- 2021, seeks to promote and protect the rights of workers within the banana value chain with the axiom that an empowered worker is a productive worker. The project has three thematic areas namely workers' rights, gender equity and living wage.

Mr. Collins Odame, is an official of the Department of Factory Inspectorate (DFI) of the Ministry of Employment and Labour Relations in Ghana, which collaborates with Fairtrade on the D4A banana project. He affirms the positive role of the project on agricultural workers in HLOs: "Through this project, the DFI has reached many more organizations in the agricultural sector to do inspections of welfare, health and safety standards and to engage their workers and managements on various corrective measures. I am convinced this investment has improved occupational safety and health awareness and working conditions at these organisations. The DFI, and the republic of Ghana for that matter, is therefore grateful to the sponsors of the project."

In addition, within the context of the covid-19 pandemic, many Fairtrade producer organisations across West Africa have introduced workplace safety measures to protect their farmers and workers. These include providing hygiene equipment, introducing shift systems, providing educational materials, as well as providing PPEs and infra-red thermometers at on-site clinics. Companies like HPW Fresh and Dry Limited have also introduced, in addition to other health care provision, a tele-medicine platform with physicians to help their staff readily access health care.

### **Protecting vulnerable groups of workers**

Through the *D4A* project, vulnerable groups of workers such as women and persons living with disability are given a voice and a prominent place to ensure they contribute significantly in their workplaces. Fairtrade works with these organisations to develop gender policies, policies against sexual harassment and discrimination as well as social inclusion for persons living with disability. Through the *D4A* project, workers and officers of these organisations also receive trainings and workshops on violence and harassment in the world of work.

Every workers deserves a right to earn their livelihood with respect and dignity, and we must all protect that right. Fairtrade's work supports UN SDGs, including SDG 8, which promotes full, productive and decent work for all. In times of unprecedented crisis such as covid-19, organisations and workers can work hand in hand in a balancing act, to ensure economic growth, while protecting the fundamentals of human rights devoid of the violation of workers.