

## Il-Faqar Meta Jaqgħu l-Prezzijiet

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It-te, il-kafè, il-kawkaw, iz-zokkor, il-vanilla, il-frott tropikali, il-ħwawar, il-lewż, ir-ross u ċ-ċereali huma fost il-prodotti tal-ikel li joriġinaw minn pajjiżi fqar u li nikkonsmawhom ta' kuljum. Dawn il-prodotti jagħtuna dieta bilanċjata u jservu bħala ingredjent għal xi deżerta tajba. Imma l-istess benefiċċji illi ngawdu minnhom f'it li jejn jitgawdew mill-ħaddiema fil-pajjiżi l-fqar fejn jagħmluhom.

L-esperti jikkalkulaw illi hemm 450 miljun familja dipendenti mill-agrikultura f'pajjiżi fqar illi jikkultivaw żewġ tomni raba' jew inqas. Dawn il-familji jipprovdu kenn għal 2 biljun ruħ (medja ta 4.44 persuni f'kull familja) u flimkien jirrapprezentaw madwar terz tal-umanità. Hu stmat li nofs in-nies bil-ġuħ li hawn fid-dinja llum jgħixu f'dawn il-familji.

Naturalment kull pajjiż jew komunità fqira trid tiġi studjata għaliha. Imma hu x'inhu żgur li ma jistax jingħad li l-fqar jeżistu sempliċement minħabba li n-nies fil-pajjiżi l-fqar huma għażżiena jew ma jixtix jaħdmu.

Waħda mir-raġunijiet għaliex in-nies fil-pajjiżi mhux żviluppatti jibqgħu jgħumu fil-fqar hi li ma jaqilgħux biżżejjed flus mix-xogħol tagħhom meta l-prezz tal-prodotti li jipproduċu jaqgħu minħabba l-prinċipju ta' kemm hemm prodotti fis-suq u kemm hemm domanda għalihom. Fost industrijiet oħra, il-produtturi tal-kafè huma magħrufa ħafna f'dan ir-rigward. Hemm diversi fatturi li jwasslu biex jittkabbar wisq aktar kafè milli jiflaħ is-suq, fosthom il-kundizzjonijiet favorevoli tat-temp li jgħinu l-produzzjoni, is-sussidji li jingħataw mill-gvernijiet biex tiżdied il-produzzjoni tal-kafè (avolja l-gvernijiet jkunu jafu li s-suq hu diġà mifqugħ), u l-fatt li l-industrija tal-kafè fil-Vjetnam splodiet mix-xejn u issa laħqet produzzjoni ta' 10 miljun xkora kafè f'anqas minn 10 snin. Kif jiġri f'diversi industrijiet, dawn il-fatturi jwaqqgħu l-prezzijiet tal-prodotti komuni.

Skont l-Organizzazzjoni Internazzjonali tal-Kafè, il-prezz tal-kafè waqa' minn \$2.50 għal \$0.47 għal kull nofs kilo bejn l-1976 u l-2001. Għalkemm fl-2001 il-prezz reġa' beda jogħla u laħaq id-\$0.89 fl-2005, Grodnik u Conry jsostnu fil-kitba tagħhom fil-ktieb *Fair Trade coffee in the United States* li l-problema tal-produzzjoni żejda u prezzijiet baxxi ħa tibqa' magħna fis-snin li ġejjin.

L-impatt fuq il-produtturi meta jaqa' l-prezz huwa devastanti. Dawn ma jirnexx ilhomx jifdu l-ispejjeż u għalhekk ma jistgħux jgħixu ħajja kif inhu xieraq. Fost l-affarijiet li jistgħu jiġru meta jaqa' l-prezz fis-suq hi li dawn in-nies ma jdaħħlux biżżejjed flus sabiex jibagħtu t-tfal l-iskola jew ikollhom inaqqsu l-infiq



tagħhom fuq is-saħħa u l-ikel. Ġieli jgħri wkoll illi dawn in-nies jkollhom jbigħu l-ftit affarjiet li jkollhom jew inkella jaqgħu f'ċirku vizzjuż u perikoluż ta' dejn.

Il-Kummerċ Ġust jipprovdi xibka ta' protezzjoni kontra l-faqar. Dawn it-tliet mizuri li għejjin kienu addottati mill-moviment tal-Kummerċ Ġust u jintużaw biex jipproteġu lill-ħaddiema meta jaqgħu l-prezzijiet tal-prodotti ewlenin li jipproduċu:

1. Prezz minimu li jibqa' dejjem stabbli. Għalkemm il-prezzijiet jaqgħu, il-ħaddiema fil-Kummerċ Ġust għandhom prezz minimu bażiku li jkopri l-ispejjeż tal-infiq u dawk neċessarji biex jgħixu ħajja diċenti. Sabiex iserrħu rashom, il-ħaddiema fil-Kummerċ Ġust jithallsu qabel ma jlesti l-prodott u jgħadduh lil min għamel l-ordni, ħalli ma jkollhomx għalfejn jissellfu biex ikopru l-ispejjeż tal-produzzjoni. Ngħidu aħna, fis-sistema tal-Kummerċ Ġust, il-ħaddiema illi jkabbru l-kafè jithallsu \$1.26 għal kull nofs kilo kafè bħala prezz minimu. Il-bdiewa l-oħrajn li jithallsu inqas minn hekk jispiċċaw joħorġu bit-telf, u għalhekk ix-xogħol tagħhom, minflok jerfagħhom, jispiċċa jgħarraqhom aktar fil-faqar.
2. Kontribuzzjoni tal-Kummerċ Ġust. Il-ħaddiema tal-kafè jingħataw \$0.05 aktar għal kull nofs kilo kafè mibjugħ. Dawn il-flus il-ħaddiema jinvestuhom fil-bżonnijiet li jkollha l-komunità li jgħixu fiha, f'oqsma bħas-saħħa, l-edukazzjoni u servizzi bażiċi bħall-provvista ta' ilma nadif. Din il-kontribuzzjoni tista' tintuża sabiex il-ħaddiema jkunu jistgħu jiddiversifikaw il-produzzjoni tagħhom u b'hekk jkollhom aktar sigurtà fil-każ li jiffaċċjaw problemi ekonomiċi.
3. Appoġġ għall-koperattivi. Peress li l-Kummerċ Ġust jgħin lill-ħaddiema biex jiffurmaw koperattivi jkun qed jgħinhom ukoll sabiex jieħdu azzjoni b'mod kollektiv, speċjalment kontra n-negozjanti li jabbużaw mill-poter tagħhom billi jixtru bi prezzijiet baxxi u jbigħu bi prezzijiet għoljin. Meta jkunu organizzati u jaħdmu flimkien il-ħaddiema jistgħu jieħdu sehem akbar mill-profitti u jinvolvu ruħhom fit-teħid tad-deċiżjonijiet.

Dawn it-tliet prinċipji li joffru protezzjoni lill-ħaddiema jassiguraw illi meta l-prezzijiet tas-suq jaqgħu l-ħaddiema ma jispiċċawx fil-faqar. Sfortunatament, minbarra l-prezzijiet baxxi il-ħaddiema fil-pajjizi l-fqar iridu jħabbtu wiċċhom ukoll ma' problemi serji oħrajn, bħan-nuqqas ta' standards tas-sigurtà fuq il-post tax-xogħol, sfruttament fuq il-lant tax-xogħol, u tfal li jggegħluhom jaħdmu bilfors. Bit-tikketta tal-Kummerċ Ġust fuq il-prodott, il-konsumaturi jserrħu rashom li għandhom f'idejhom xogħol u materjal ta' kwalità u li l-ħaddiema jkunu ħadu dak li jisthoqqilhom tax-xogħol li jkunu għamlu.

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# Food Matters

## Poverty when price fall

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"Tea, Coffee, Cocoa, Sugar, Vanilla, Fruits, Spices, Nuts, Rice and Cereals" are amongst the list of food items originating from poor countries consumed by us on a daily basis. These foods afford us a well balanced diet and satisfy our cravings for a tasty desert yet their benefits are rarely enjoyed by their producers in the developing world.

There are 450 million smallholder farming households in the south who cultivate two hectares of land or less. These households are home to 2 billion people, an average of 4.44 persons per household, which sums up to a third of humanity. It is estimated that half of the world's undernourished and hungry people live in these homes.

There are a variety of reasons behind these grim figures and each poor country or community has to be taken on a case by case basis. Yet it cannot be said this poverty exists because all people in the developing countries are lazy.

One of the culprits for poverty in the south is that poor people's work is fruitless when market prices fall due to oversupply, bearing in mind the basic rule of supply and demand. The coffee industry, amongst other industries, is notorious in this regard. Overproduction of coffee beans is attributable to various factors such as favorable weather conditions, introduction of more efficient machinery, fiscal incentives for farmer to increase supplies (despite signs of overproduction) and Vietnam's booming coffee industry (from zero to 10 million 60kg bags between 1991 and 2001). Similar to other industries, such factors cause the market price of raw commodities to plummet.

According to the International Coffee Organization coffee prices steadily fell from nearly 2.50\$ per pound in 1976 to an all time low of 0.47\$ per pound in 2001. Although prices have rose in subsequent year (0.89\$ in 2005) Grodnik and Conroy argue in their essay "Fair Trade coffee in the United States: why companies join the movement" that there are concerns over low and highly variable world market prices persist.

Falling market prices imply that producers fail to reap the costs incurred of their investment. When this happens the results are devastating. At best they may force producers to cut spending on their children's education, expenditure on food, health costs, or sell their plantation. At worst producers are pushed into vicious circles of debt.

The Fair Trade model of doing business provides various safeguards against poverty. The following are three safeguards against low market prices that render producer's work fruitless:

- a. A stable minimum fair price. Despite the fact that the prices fall, producers are still assured a minimum price that covers all costs incurred in production. In order to ensure producers that their investment will not turn sour pre-payments are made to cover for the producers initial investments. For example Fair Trade coffee growers are guaranteed a minimum "fair trade price" of 1.26\$ per pound (Freight on Board) for their coffee. Without a stable minimum fair price growers might be forced out of business altogether and lose their main source of cash income.
- b. Fair Trade Premium. Coffee producers are paid an extra premium of 0.05\$ per pound produced. This premium is used for investing in the producers' business or community improvements. Farmers are able to use the premium to mitigate the effects of other production prices or diversify into other income-generating activities when the economic environment is harsh.
- c. Support to cooperatives. Structuring producers into cooperatives helps them organize and take collective action, especially against middlemen who take advantage of buying low and selling high. Farmers will be able to take a larger share of the profits when organized and working together.

These three safeguards ensure that producers will not be impoverished when market prices fall. Unfortunately volatile market prices are the not only perils producers in the south face. Others include lack of health and safety regulations exposing producers to severe harm, gender discrimination at the work place, exploitable working conditions, child labour and others. Fair Trade provides a safeguard against all these abuses.

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