

CRS Faculty Learning Commons

Discussion Guide

Spring 2016 Session 2: "Fair Trade Impact: Coffee as a Case Study"

Discussion #1: Fair Trade Coffee and Sustainability from the Perspective of Smallholder Coffee Growers and Coffee Farmworkers

Small holder farmers provide over 80% percent of the world's coffee produced and over 100 million people in coffee producing countries get their livelihood from coffee (Fairtrade Foundation, 2011). CRS's vision of profitable smallholder coffee growers, empowered coffee farmworkers, and sustainable coffee-growing landscapes depends on negotiating the complex challenges and dynamic forces of public policy and private-sector practices.

Part 1: The Movement and its Impact on Smallholder Coffee Growers and Coffee Farmworkers

Readings:

- a) Interview with Michael Sheridan
- b) "What Difference Does Policy Make?" by Michael Sheridan (Blogpost February 26, 2015)
- c) "It's the Market Stupid" by Michael Sheridan (Blogpost April 7, 2014)
- d) "Coffee Cooperatives Strengthen Farm Families" by Michael Stulman (Blogpost August 12, 2015)
- e) "Rescuing Colombia's 'Golden' Coffee Beans" by Robyn Fieser (Blogpost September 11, 2015)
- f) "Restoring Coffee Farms in Guatemala" by Robyn Fieser (Blogpost August 6, 2015)
- g) "10 Reasons Fair-Trade Coffee Doesn't Work" by Bruce Wydick (Blogpost on Huff Post Food, August 7, 2014)

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What stood out to you in Michael Sheridan's video interview? What did you agree with or disagree with? Why?
- 2) What is your understanding of Catholic social teaching and the mission of CRS as it relates to CRS' work in fair trade domestically and overseas?

- 3) Do you think smallholder coffee growers and farmworkers are benefiting from the fair trade movement? Considering the fair trade coffee movement and the emergence of other competing business models, what seems to be working and what needs to be improved?
- 4) What are your reflections on Michael Sheridan's statement that coffee is a 'hero crop' and that coffee farming is a laboratory for sustainability?

Part 2: Case Study of Fair Trade Coffee Farmers

Readings:

- a) "Nicaraguan Coffee Farmers: a Case Study" (pdf, 10 pages) by Kelly Miller, July 31, 2009
- b) "Assessing the Impact of Fairtrade on Poverty Reduction through Rural Development: Fair Trade Impact Study," a study commissioned by TransFair Germany and Max Havelaar Foundation Switzerland, July 15, 2012, 95 pages

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What surprised you about CRS' work with CECOSEMAC in Matagalpa and El Tuma?
- 2) Compare these two studies with regard to evaluating the goals of providing fair trade and reducing poverty. How is their evaluative approach different? How does this reflect itself in the way the 'impact' is measured?

Discussion #2: What is the Impact of the Fair Trade Coffee Movement on the Global Supply Chain and the Reduction of Poverty?

Readings:

- a) Interview with Michael Sheridan
- b) "From Crop to Cup: The Supply Chain" (pdf, 2 pages) by CRS Fair Trade
- c) "Where Coffee is Produced with Forced Labor" by Verité (website, link to "Research on Indicators of Forced Labor in the Supply Chain of Coffee in Guatemala," 124 pages)
- d) "Six Lenses on Gender" by Michael Sheridan (Blogpost February 10, 2015)
- e) "Slavery and Commodity Chains: Fighting the Globalization of Indifference" by Vincent Miller, *America Magazine*, January 3, 2014

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) What have been the successes of the fair trade movement, particularly in the coffee sector on the reduction of global poverty? What changes should be made to the coffee supply chain in order to have a more significant reduction in poverty?

- 2) Considering the history of fair trade coffee and its efforts as a movement for social justice, what has been its impact? In addressing hunger and global poverty, is fair trade coffee passé, cutting edge, or somewhere in between? How can fair trade coffee be made more relevant?
- 3) Consider the connection between the profitability of coffee farming, climate change, and sustainability of farmers and their communities. Should the *message* of fair trade coffee stress hunger or fair labor more or should it be more about sustainability of the environment? How would changes in the messaging for fair trade coffee impact the larger fair trade movement?

Discussion #3: The Policy Side of the Fair Trade Coffee

Readings:

- a) "The Problem with Fair Trade Coffee" by Nicki Lisa Cole and Keith Brown, *Contexts*, Winter 2014, pp. 50-55
- b) "Sustainability in Practice" by Michael Sheridan (Blogpost April 28, 2015)
- c) "What Difference Does Policy Make?" By Michael Sheridan (Blogpost February 26, 2015)
- d) "A Conversation with Ric Rhinehart on the Future of Coffee in Mesoamerica" by Michael Sheridan (Blogpost October, 16, 2014)

Questions for Discussion:

- 1) Imagine that YOU are the U.S. Secretary of State and that that you have made fair trade a priority in your agenda.
 - a. What do you see as barriers to meeting the goals sought by the interfaith leaders? (Think feasibility, transparency, accountability, political will...) What can you try to do to make these goals a reality?
 - b. How will you work with your foreign counterparts to foster fair labor policies while also supporting sustainable development in their countries?
- 2) Imagine that YOU are
 - the Chief Executive Officer of a multinational public company selling coffee and that your company's mission is to be more socially responsible
 - OR
 - the newly hired Chief Sustainability Officer of a multinational public corporation selling coffee and that your mandate is to make the organization more socially responsible.

You wonder how fair trade can be made more of a priority in your agenda. What do you see as barriers to meeting the often competing goals sought by the interfaith leaders and shareholders? (Think feasibility, cost/benefit, ROI, political will ...) What can you try to do to make these goals a reality? How will you measure success?