

# Sustainable International Coffee and Cacao Supply

## Insights from a Stakeholder Roundtable Discussion

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Sustainable Food Economy Lab

**ASU** School of  
**Sustainability**  
Arizona State University

# Sustainable Food Economy Lab

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## Background, Objectives, and Participants of the Roundtable Discussion

International coffee and cacao supply is continuously increasing around the world.<sup>1</sup> Despite improvements along the supply chain (Eakin et al., 2017), which are often limited to specific aspects (Defries, 2017), current practices continue to cause negative externalities. These include: imbalance in the economic value chain favoring trade over production and processing; significant transport-related greenhouse gas emissions and packaging waste; negative impacts on the farming ecosystems; as well as poor working conditions in the regions where coffee and cacao is being produced or processed (Caswell et al., 2012; Weaver et al., 2012; Millard, 2017). However, several pioneering companies and partnerships have started to demonstrate how coffee and cacao could be produced, processed, and distributed in ways that align with *strong* sustainability principles along the *entire* supply chain, including provision of livelihoods, environmental integrity, social well-being, and justice (Cagliano et al., 2016; Weber et al., 2019).

Our research team has supported a collaborative pilot project between *Considerate Coffee* in Phoenix, Arizona and *Catando Ando* in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico with the objective to create and demonstrate a sustainable international coffee supply and value chain (Weber & Wiek, 2019). After four months of intensive work, we invited a number of interested stakeholders to share with them initial insights and stimulate an early conversation about transfer and scaling of results to advance sustainable international coffee and cacao supply across Arizona and beyond. The specific objectives were:

- (i) familiarize participants with initial findings from the *Considerate Coffee* and *Catando Ando* partnership;
- (ii) discuss sustainable principles for (re-)designing international coffee/cacao supply chains;
- (iii) share good practices and ideas on how to infuse sustainability into local coffee/cacao businesses.

The roundtable discussion took place on December 12, 2018, at the School of Sustainability on the Arizona State University campus in Tempe, Arizona. The workshop was hosted and organized by Hanna Weber and Prof. Arnim Wiek from the Sustainable Food Economy Lab at the School of Sustainability.

The participants in the roundtable discussion were: the *Catando Ando Coffee Roasters* team with Alejandro Chazaro, Leopoldo Chazaro, Luis Murillo Mercado, Leila Gil Martinez; the *Considerate Coffee Company* team with Dustin Clapp and Nicholas Shivka; Dr. Braden Kay, Sustainability Director of the City of Tempe; local coffee business owners Burc Maruflu and Sena Maruflu from *Savaya Coffee Market* in Tucson, as well as Stephanie Vasquez from the *Fair Trade Cafe* in Phoenix; Jake Swanson and Helene Tack from *Local First Arizona*; as well as Natalie Morris, the Program Coordinator of ASU's *Prepped* Program, an accelerator program for small food businesses.

## Importance of Pilot Projects

During the opening remarks, Dr. Braden Kay, Sustainability Director of the City of Tempe and member of the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), highlighted the importance of pilot projects for the transition of cities into a sustainable future. In partnership with Arizona State University and *Local*

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<sup>1</sup> While there are differences between international *coffee* supply vs. international *cacao* supply (see Potts et al., 2014, Chapter 7 vs. Chapter 8), for the purpose of this report, we focus on the similarities of these two major global commodities.

*First Arizona*, the City of Tempe supports incubation and transformation of sustainable local food businesses to drive this change. Honoring the “real passion project” between *Catando Ando* and *Considerate Coffee*, Dr. Kay confirmed the commitment of the local Governmental to collaborate with other government entities, non-profit organization, small coffee businesses, and research institutions to advance and learn from projects like this one.

## **Development of International Coffee Supply since the 1980ies**

To contextualize our pilot study and the roundtable discussion, we are providing here a brief overview of major developments in international coffee supply since the 1980ies, citing from and briefly discussing Eakin et al.’s (2017) study [all following citations are from this study, if not indicated otherwise].

“Coffee is one of the most heavily traded commodities in the world. About 60 million people, mainly in tropical regions, are involved in the production of more than 8.5 million tons of green coffee every year. Brazil, Vietnam, and Colombia are the main producers of coffee, Brazil and Colombia being the largest producers of mild Arabica coffee, considered of higher quality than the Robusta variety. North America, Europe, and Japan are the largest consumers, although the more dynamic markets are in the emerging economies of Eastern Europe, Brazil, and even China and India.”

“In terms of producers, there are more than 30 countries in tropical areas growing and trading coffee. Coffee is usually grown by smallholders, i.e. “suppliers.” Manufacturing has been historically dominated by a few companies that roast, pack, label, and sell coffee through retailers. These companies are located predominantly in North America, Europe, and Japan. The governance system for the coffee value chain was, between 1962 and up to 1989, the International Coffee Agreement (ICA). The agreement was reached between the largest producing and consuming countries and determined a fixed quota of production to be allocated to each country. Producing countries, in turn, developed [national] institutions to stabilize domestic prices, known as coffee boards, that taxed exports in times of high prices to subsidize the price when they were low. The coffee agreement ended, under the pressure of the U.S. government, and national boards were dismantled [...]. The fall of the agreement was followed by substantial increases in production from Brazil and Vietnam that flooded the market, further reducing the price and contributing to the collapse of most national boards [...].”

“When the ICA broke, producing countries, especially those offering mild coffee such as Mexico and Colombia, failed to restrain their supply. The national boards had collapsed across the developing world, with a few notable exceptions, and thus coffee growers were left to the ups and downs of international trade. Free market conditions, support from local governments, and multilateral funding for coffee expansion, particularly in Brazil and Vietnam [...], further depressed the price of coffee. Prices reached a historical minimum in 2001, falling from an annual average of US\$1.17/lb in 1989 to US\$0.71 in 2001, adjusted by inflation [...]. As a result of the disruption to the international market, smallholders around the world, the backbone of the coffee industry, suffered a dramatic decrease in their standards of living, spawning a humanitarian crisis”.

“[I]nternational efforts were organized to specifically address market issues and social equity through institutional innovations, such as the Max Havelaar label, created under the auspices of the Dutch ecumenical development agency Solidaridad, to mainstream coffee as a fair-trade product [...].

Certification schemes in coffee had existed prior to the collapse of the ICA, but it was the market shock of 1989 that is widely interpreted as catalyzing these initiatives into new forms of coffee system governance [...]. Other initiatives gained ground in the 1990s, such as the Fairtrade Foundation (Germany), Transfair (USA), the UTZ Kapeh Foundation (also from the Netherlands), the Rainforest Alliance (UK-USA), and the organic movement, under the umbrella of IFOAM”.

“The humanitarian organizations created a space in international coffee markets, generating and responding to a demand for ethical products; larger coffee traders realized the market benefits of these grass roots institutional innovations. The result was the emergence of private governance mechanisms for sustainability, mainly certification programs that delivered technical assistance, created codes of conduct, and allowed compliant products to use a label to differentiate the product in the market”.

“The aggregated result of these initiatives is remarkably high: according to a recent report (Potts et al. 2014) over 40% of the total amount of coffee produced around the world is done following a sustainability certification or verification program. Nevertheless, impacts on livelihoods remain a matter of discussion with abundant research showing small or negligible impacts whereas others present a more positive picture”.

“The demand for sustainable coffee continues to grow. The surge in demand has also translated in higher international prices [...] that reached their highest level in 2010, but have since stabilized at about three times the value of 2001, when the crisis hit bottom.”

While these citations from Eakin et al.’s (2017) study provide valuable context information, they might, in part, paint a more positive picture than is reality for many actors in the international supply chains. The authors acknowledge “abundant research showing small or negligible impacts” but refer to Potts et al.’s (2014) study stating that “over 40% of the total amount of coffee produced around the world is done following a sustainability certification or verification program”. Potts et al. (2014) provide more nuanced insights about major remaining challenges including oversupply of sustainably produced coffee and lack of rigorous evaluation of sustainability certification programs, in particular voluntary ones. There remains a lot to be done to ensure comprehensive sustainability as illustrated with persisting issues along the international cacao supply chains: “In 2012, 4.1 million metric tons of cocoa beans were produced in more than 50 countries on 0.2 per cent of the world’s agricultural land, for a total export value of US\$8.4 billion [...]. This is a small fraction of the total value of the chocolate market, estimated at more than US\$83 billion. [...] Due to the concentration of large cocoa buyers and in some cases taxation and fixed low payments to farmers by national cocoa marketing bodies or other intermediaries, farmers may receive as little as 40 per cent of the world market price [...]. In addition to poverty, however, child and forced labour, deforestation, pesticide use and biodiversity maintenance are all important sustainability issues facing the sector.” (p. 131)

### **Sustainable International Coffee Supply – A Pilot Project between *Catando Ando* and *Considerate Coffee***

While partial improvements along the international supply chains of coffee and cacao have been achieved (see previous section), there are still significant gaps and deficits when confronting current practices with a holistic approach to sustainability, i.e., a comprehensive set of sustainability principles.

Our pilot project set out to demonstrate how to design a comprehensively sustainable international coffee supply chain, delivering on a broad set of sustainability principles.

*Catando Ando Coffee Roasters* is a local coffee business with roastery and coffee shop in Xalapa, Veracruz, Mexico. The small business with seven employees purchases green coffee directly from local coffee farmers to be processed in their roastery. Together, they work on improving the production and processing techniques in order to increase the quality of the roasted coffee. *Catando Ando* is committed to ensuring fair payment for all people involved in the coffee supply, including the coffee pickers, which are chronically underpaid and struggle with their livelihood.

*Considerate Coffee Company* is a cold brew coffee company in Phoenix, Arizona. When starting the project, the two-person company processed coffee from Ethiopia, which was roasted in Phoenix by a different company. *Considerate Coffee* was primarily focused on waste management by producing coffee bio-char from coffee grounds and to use recycled material for their equipment.

Due to both parties strong interest in sustainability, they were willing to enter a pilot project to learn and experiment with sustainability practices in international coffee supply. The initiation of the project was facilitated by Hanna Weber and Arnim Wiek from the Sustainable Food Economy Lab at the School of Sustainability. All parties collaborating on the project are driven by the guiding vision of coffee supply “with human sense”. Through field visits and several working session in Fall 2018, the project developed a collaborative vision of a sustainable coffee supply chain between *Catando Ando* (and its suppliers) and *Considerate Coffee* (and its customers) as well as a strategy to achieve this vision.

The design principles of the envisioned international coffee supply chain are compiled in the following table.

<b>Design Principle</b>	<b>Description and Justification</b>
Investing in organic production	<p><i>Invest in conversion from conventional to organic agricultural practices, i.e., complement farmers’ income due to lower yields during the conversion phase.</i></p> <p>Organic agriculture builds and maintains healthy soils by applying compost or other biologic substances instead of using synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or herbicides. Integrated farming practices, e.g. shade-grown coffee, can complement organic practices and also contributes to healthy ecosystems. The use of old coffee varieties as part of biological pest control contributes to biodiversity. All of these practices strive to maintain healthy plants and soils for future generations to come.</p>
Reducing food miles	<p><i>Reduce food miles along the entire supply chain through selecting partners located in countries that are as close as possible to each other.</i></p> <p>Apart from lowering GHG emissions due to less transportation, reducing food miles makes it easier to connect and even meet (trust building) across the supply chain.</p>
Offsetting greenhouse gas emissions	<p><i>Offset the remaining GHG emissions caused by transportation and energy imports through different measures, e.g. applying coffee bio-char or reforestation projects.</i></p> <p>Offsetting GHG emissions can have a positive effect on climate change, even if does not mitigate emissions completely.</p>
Adding value in the country of origin	<p><i>Shift value-added production steps from importing countries to the country of origin, e.g. coffee is roasted in Mexico and then exported for cold brewing to Arizona.</i></p> <p>Adding value in the country of origin provides more livelihood opportunities for partners in need.</p>

<p>Paying fair prices along the entire supply chain</p>	<p><i>Pay every person working in the coffee supply chain, including coffee pickers, a price that sufficiently acknowledges contributions and needs (= fair prices).</i></p> <p>Paying fair prices along the entire supply chain contributes to equity and justice between individuals and countries. It allows for building sufficient livelihoods everywhere, instead of gradients from minimum to maximum gains. If coffee production is economically beneficial to everyone, the young generation is more likely to continue this line of work.</p>
<p>Shortening supply chains</p>	<p><i>Remove intermediaries, e.g. larger importers, importers, exporters, fair trade associations, especially those, who do not add value to the product.</i></p> <p>Short supply chains offer more benefits to the real contributors and allow all supply chain partners to participate in decision-making.</p>
<p>Gender equality (women empowerment)</p>	<p><i>Invest in qualification of women to support them on their ways to become entrepreneurs, e.g., by financing trainings to obtain an official barista certificate by the Specialty Coffee Association (SCA). This could also help women to become more independent and self-determined in life.</i></p> <p>Empowering women contributes to equity between men and women and creates livelihood opportunities for them, independent from their family.</p>
<p>Caring about each other (across the entire supply chain)</p>	<p><i>Get to know the partners, communicate (frequently) with them, appreciate their products/services, and recognize their needs.</i></p> <p>In caring relationships, all partners, including the consumers, look out for each other and are willing to pay a fair price (at each stage of the supply chain). Farmers are motivated to do the hard farm work of growing coffee (compared to the “simple” act of drinking coffee) because they know that the consumers appreciate their work. Consumer appreciation allows farmers to integrate vegetable and fruit production on the coffee farms instead of maximizing coffee production. In terms of health and food safety, producers care for their consumers and do not apply chemicals, which could affect the consumer’s health. Caring relationships include building knowledge: consumers learn about coffee production and producers learn about the communities of consumers.</p>

In the first phase of the pilot project, both teams from *Catando Ando* and *Considerate Coffee* jointly developed an ideal supply chain and a transparent (“vitreous”) value chain considering fair payment for each person involved in the supply chain. All participants recognized and appreciated the shared values across the groups, in particular transparency, honesty, and solidarity, which were crucial for price negotiations.

In the second phase, both teams worked on detailing the vision further. For example, *Considerate Coffee* started to gather information about how to become an importer, e.g., if contracting a customs broker is necessary or not; *Catando Ando* already started the process of becoming an exporter, identified a transportation company as well as a reforestation project to compensate the greenhouse gas emissions



caused by the transportation of the coffee from Mexico to the U.S. In June 2019, *Catando Ando* is expected to be certified as an exporter and will ship their roasted coffee to *Considerate Coffee* in Phoenix. As an initial trial, in December 2019, *Catando Ando* shipped 20 kg of their roasted coffee to Phoenix with the help of an external exporter for *Considerate Coffee* to process first samples of cold

brewed coffee from *Catando Ando*. The cold brew from this shipment of coffee tasted very promising and *Considerate Coffee* is committed to order regularly and with increasing volume over the coming months.

For more details on the pilot projects, please review the first report (Weber & Wiek, 2019).

### **Insights from the Roundtable Discussion**

Building on the insights presented from the pilot project, roundtable discussants brought up and discussed the following aspects related to sustainable international coffee supply.

#### ***Vale Chain Transparency and Consumer Education***

Telling the story behind a sustainably designed supply chain to customers is important for building broader buy-in and the willingness to pay higher prices. This might even include reforming established, often somewhat secretive reporting practices. In conventional coffee supply chains, there is little information provided on the low wages coffee pickers and farmers receive, and those supply chain actors who profit most are reluctant to disclose information on their sales prices and profits. Full honesty and transparency not only about the supply chain but also about the *value chain*, that means, disclosing all sales prices and profits, is very uncommon. This level of transparency requires adding information about different living standards and costs to contextualize sales prices and profits. At the same time, full disclosure seems to be key for creating fair prices and wages across the value chain. All relevant information about the supply and value chain could be published on the company's website, or directly on the product label, maybe through a QR code. A controversial conversation ensued over the question whether or not consumers are interested in the backstory of the product they consume. Some market research on consumer preferences is needed to "tell the story" in an appealing and engaging way. The ultimate goal is to educate consumers in order to empower them to be a trusted partner in sustainable international coffee production, distribution, and consumption.



#### ***Making Impacts Tangible***

The information about sustainable coffee supply and value chains should focus on the positive features and on tangible impacts. This is most relevant in the context of paying fair prices for coffee. The knowledge what differences a higher price actually makes should be explained in real world cases. For example, if a coffee picker in the Veracruz region of Mexico receives X\$ instead of \$Y per pound coffee, this allows her/him to send her/his children to school, see a doctor when needed, and buy healthy food. This translates higher prices and wages from abstract dollar-figures into real positive changes that are associated with them.

#### ***Fair Prices***

In many coffee-producing regions around the world, fair trade pricing is still too low for a decent life, at least for the coffee/cacao pickers, as evidenced in the pilot project and confirmed by roundtable discussants. Full transparency regarding coffee value chains, as discussed above, would show this evidence and make customers and other stakeholders aware of this fact. The price-per-pound for

coffee pickers envisioned in the pilot project would improve the current living conditions of coffee pickers in the short-term, as indicated above. However, in the long-term, prices would need to be further increased to ensure decent livelihoods for all players along the supply chain.

***New Culture of Doing Business***

Another issue that was discussed is balancing social ambition and economic feasibility in sustainable international coffee supply. The pilot project demonstrates a new culture of doing business, it is a “passion project” about care, compassion, and solidarity. At the same time, it is undertaken by two companies, in association with other actors, that intend to continue running economically viable businesses. The roundtable discussion addressed the often undefined phrase of “economic viability”. Economic viability is often associated with excess profits for few (concertation of capital gains on individuals). However, in sustainable business practices, economic gain is equally distributed across the network of actors who add value to the product or service. This is the main difference to all large coffee companies (Starbucks, Nestlé, etc.) showcasing “sustainability” in their practices. While there are achievements, the main source of injustices and inequity is not touched. In contrast, there was agreement that coffee supply chains should be designed with the intention to redistribute profits within (!) the supply chain to everyone’s benefits and responding to everyone’s needs (which are different, but definitely higher than “minimum wage”). A sustainable international supply chain does not need to generate excess profits to be economically viable, but it internalizes gains and negotiates benefits using care, compassion, and solidarity.

***Collaboration***

Instead of competition, collaboration between coffee businesses was discussed as a key process to work towards a sustainable future in the coffee sector. As big coffee businesses (Starbucks, Nestlé, etc.) are getting bigger and bigger, there is a need to unite the strengths and forces of the smaller and sustainability-oriented coffee businesses to make their voice heard. Bonding across these businesses might benefit from other sectors such as craft breweries that have successfully collaborated as opposed to competing against each other.

***Willingness to Experiment and Learn***

The sustainable coffee sector seems to be willing to conduct pilot projects and learn in all areas of the coffee supply. Burc Maruflu from *Savaya Coffee Market* and Luis Murillo Mercado from *Catando Ando* reported about pilot projects on coffee production and processing techniques. Associated farmers experiment with different varieties, production methods, and wet processing practices and technologies in order to improve the quality of the coffee beans, generate a variety of tastes, and/or manage pests, e.g. the coffee roast. Burc Maruflu also mentioned that it is crucial to carefully document these pilot projects and its results to demonstrate tangible result, for instance, higher cupping score, to customers and business partners. Dustin Clapp and Nicholas Shivka from *Considerate Coffee* conduct experiments with the production and application of coffee bio-char, obtained from their coffee grounds. Based on the promising results of these first



experiments, Luis Murillo Mercado is interested in applying the practice with farmers in the Veracruz region and document the effects on the taste of the roasted coffee.

## **Next Steps**

Based on the positive experience from this initial roundtable discussion, there are several future networking activities planned.

Dustin Clapp and Nicholas Shivka from *Considerate Coffee* plan to visit *Catando Ando* in Mexico this year. In return the *Catando Ando* plans to visit Arizona.

Burc Maruflu from *Savaya Coffee Market* has previously enabled farmers from Brazil to visit Tucson and he is willing to share experiences and best practices of these visits and exchanges.

Stephanie Vasquez from the *Fair Trade Cafe* would be interested in selling *Catando Ando* coffee and support a visit of *Catando Ando* to Arizona.

Sena Maruflu from *Savaya Coffee Market* is willing to explore how to support *Catando Ando* through marketing and other activities.

Jake Swanson and Helene Tack from *Local First Arizona* are willing to use the results from the pilot project to inform coffee shops and roasters in Arizona, e.g., by teaching about sustainable practices and supporting the SMEs in changing their business practices.

Natalie Morris, the Program Coordinator of ASU's *Prepped Program*, is willing to facilitate an alumni training session on sustainable practices in international coffee supply for the coffee micro-businesses who have participated in the *Prepped* program over the past years.

There is a general interest in further exchanging sustainable practices across different stakeholder groups, for instance, through regular meetings, a newsletter or joint events.

## **Workshop Feedback**

The research team received feedback on the workshop. We share here two of them articulating excitement about and commitment to the pilot project, in particular, and the efforts in the emerging network, in general.

*"Thank you very much everyone! We, the Catando Ando Coffee Roasters, are honored and happy to collaborate in this great project. We will make sure to share ideas to further enrich it. [...]"*

*„[...] excellent work bringing this project together! I was truly impressed by the connections [...] made between these local companies and the thoughtfulness [...] given to each individual and yet important component in the system. I'm honored to be a part of the group [...] allowed to participate, and look forward to the rest of the progress. Best of luck and great to meet (or see!) the rest of you. [...]"*

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