Connecting Scotland: how Scottish organisations engage internationally

Scottish Fair Trade Forum

The Scottish Fair Trade Forum was established in January 2007 by a group of Fair Trade campaigners, Scotland-based non-governmental organisations and the Scottish Government, to promote the cause of Fair Trade in Scotland and, in particular, to help secure Fair Trade Nation status for Scotland. We support a network of organisations in Scotland committed to Fair Trade values, and have developed this network’s access to like-minded organisations and Fair Trade producers around the world.

We regularly host guests from all around the world for our annual celebration of Fairtrade Fortnight and at other times of the year to draw attention to the work of Fair Trade producers and promote dialogue between producers in the developing world and consumers here in Scotland.

Over the last five years, we have hosted or supported visits from Fair Trade producers, farmers and workers from Kenya, Malawi, St Lucia, Chile, Palestine, Tanzania, Uganda, Thailand, Ghana, India, Nicaragua, Nepal, Colombia, Indonesia, Mauritius and the Dominican Republic. Many of these have been arranged in partnership with other Fair Trade organisations and businesses and some have been as part of wider visits to the UK and Europe. We have worked in partnership with Equal Exchange, Imani Development, the Fairtrade Foundation, JTS, the Edinburgh Fairtrade City Group, Divine Chocolate, Zaytoun, Get Paper Industry Nepal, Y Development, KoolSkools and Craft Aid (Mauritius).

Our guests have included small holder farmers, factory workers, representatives of co-operatives and Fair Trade businesses from Asia, Africa and Latin America. The visitors have met with Fairtrade campaigners, public and third sector organisations, businesses and farmers, government Ministers and officials, parliamentarians, local councillors and local government officials. They have attended events in nurseries, schools, colleges, universities, workplaces and places of worship.

These meetings have served to foster understanding both among the Scottish people for the challenges and opportunities that are faced by Fair Trade producers, but also for these producers who can assist and target the drive for growing Fair Trade among consumers and supporters. This exchange of information is vital in giving both sides a holistic appreciation of the Fair Trade movement. While the information that is presented by these visitors aims to influence politicians and business people, it also raises public awareness and creates an enduring appreciation of the economic and social situation that people around the world continue to face today. In illustrating these problems
these visitors are also able to illustrate solutions, and convey the hope and promise that we as a society must support to make the sustained changes that are needed to build a fairer world.

The greatest challenges to arranging such visits are the ability of potential visitors to have the time to undertake a visit; supporting the visitor during the time with us in what can be a very different social and cultural environment to their own; the cost of international travel; and visa arrangements.

In addition to our producer networks, we have developed synergies with Fair Trade campaigners around the world; including in Canada and the Basque Country. We are also working on developing our international links with other Fair Trade campaigners. We maintain close ties with the Fairtrade Foundation and Fair Trade Wales.

As an organisation, it is our purpose to further support this type of engagement in other groups and enterprises in Scotland in the public, private and third sector. One of the key underlying principles of Fair Trade is transparency in trading relations. The producer tours that we support are aimed at creating transparency and understanding between consumers and producers.

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