Summer Universities of Fair Trade, September 13th, Paris

This event organized by Commerce Equitable France, the collective of fair trade actors in France, has become over time an annual event that is essential for the sector. This year, more than a hundred participants came to the event, representatives of producer organisations, companies and distributors - either from the fair trade or the organic sector -, NGOs, representing labels, public authorities and donors. The whole ecosystem of actors, supporters of fair trade and responsible economy was present. After an exciting introduction on market trends, its development and current events in France, a major conference was held, followed by a debate on the role of Fair Trade labels.

In a context of diversification of labels, multiplication of claims on guarantees, experiments on consumer involvement in controls, it is increasingly difficult to find oneself in the jungle of labels between Fair Trade labels, ethical labels and others. In a context where the prospect of public recognition of fair trade labels in France is slow to materialise, the role of fair trade labels has been reaffirmed while stressing the importance of moving towards greater transparency for consumers, better consideration of the opinions of stakeholders in the sectors through more open governance, and finally towards more impact measures to report and communicate on the positive changes made by fair trade.

In the early afternoon, the Agence Française de Développement officially signed the financing agreement for phase 2 of the EQUITE programme for an amount of 11.5 million euros for the development of fair trade in West Africa. This programme is a continuation of the previous one and will be implemented for a period of 4 years to strengthen producer organisations in West Africa, develop market opportunities, and support the professionalization of national fair trade platforms in Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Mali.

Through programme funding, public authorities recognise the usefulness of fair trade, its levers, and strengthen the credibility of actors and labels in addressing ecological and social transition issues in fair trade sectors. Then, in order to concretely illustrate the impacts of fair trade, two simultaneous workshops were held, one on the dynamics of the coffee, milk and legume fair trade sectors where the struggles for more economic justice and climate resilience converge. The other concerns the results of phase 1 of the EQUITE programme and in particular the achievements and tools developed for producers: market price information system, innovative financing solutions, etc.

The day ended with an inspiring speech by Marc Dufumier, President of Commerce Equitable France.

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