



Five steps to better sustainability communications



We are witnessing a paradigm shift in corporate sustainability:

Investors, consumers and governments increasingly expect companies to manage their human rights and environmental impacts and communicate about their work accurately and transparently. Stricter legislation and increased scrutiny mean that companies face a real danger of legal action for misleading marketing or perceived “greenwashing”.

By partnering with Fairtrade your business is already making steps towards a fairer and more sustainable planet. And consumers are motivated by the ethical and environmental impact of the products they buy. Top motivators for buying Fairtrade are mitigation of child labour, reduced use of artificial pesticides and Genetically Modified Organisms and improving living standards for farmers and workers.

How can you communicate your Fairtrade commitment credibly and transparently? This simple guide aims to support you on your journey.



There is a global consensus, enshrined in the United Nations Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGP, 2011), that companies have a responsibility to undertake due diligence on human rights and the environment (HREDD).

These principles have informed several due diligence and reporting laws around the world. For example, from 2023 onwards all large German companies will have to perform HREDD and publish an annual HREDD report.

It is becoming increasingly mandatory for companies to manage the adverse impacts their business may have on people or the environment.

Talking about Fairtrade and sustainability

Human rights and environmental challenges are widespread in global supply chains. One in every five people in employment live in poverty.² Child labour has risen to 160 million, the first increase in two decades.³ And every year we use more natural resources than the planet is able to produce.⁴

In this context, not many products can credibly claim to be 100% sustainable. And no partnership or certification scheme can absolve a company from the responsibility of performing due diligence on their human rights and environmental impacts.

What you can gain from Fairtrade, is support at each step of the due diligence process. We offer expertise and guidance on the most important human rights risks, as well as training, programmes, standards, and auditing to address those issues. We work to strengthen the voice of producers and workers, and foster dialogue among supply chain partners.



STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION ON SUSTAINABILITY

- 1** Sustainability is a journey
- 2** Avoid overselling
- 3** Be respectful and inclusive
- 4** Communicate about challenges
- 5** Measure and communicate your progress

2 [wcms_696387.pdf \(ilo.org\)](#)

3 <https://www.unicef.org/press-releases/child-labour-rises-160-million-first-increase-two-decades>

4 <https://www.worldwildlife.org/pages/overshoot-day>

1. Sustainability is a journey

Try to refer to your Fairtrade commitment as a journey, not a complete 'fix' or solution. Together, we are working towards fair pay, decent working conditions, the end of child labour, climate resilience and other goals.

Suggested language

- Our business has been sourcing Fairtrade cocoa since xxxx. For us, choosing Fairtrade means standing with farmers for fairness, equality, and sustainability.
- 100% of our coffee is Fairtrade certified.
- We take continuous action to address human rights and environmental challenges in our supply chains.
- We perform ongoing HREDD, supported by partners like Fairtrade.

Language to avoid

- As a sustainable business, we use Fairtrade to guarantee fair pay, decent working conditions, no child labour and climate resilience.
- Our product is 100% sustainable/sustainably sourced.
- We respect human rights in all our supply chains.
- Fairtrade performs HREDD in coffee for us.



2. Avoid overselling

It is important to remember that no certification system can guarantee sustainability: Most human rights and environmental challenges in supply chains are rooted in poverty, inequality, and systemic issues that no single scheme or organisation can change alone.

Let's celebrate achievements but be mindful that much more remains to be done.

Suggested language

- Fairtrade is about fairer purchasing practices and more decent working conditions. It's about working towards the living income that farmers deserve for their hard work.
- Fairtrade Minimum Prices aim to cover the average cost of sustainable production and act as a safety net for producers when market prices drop.
- Fairtrade tackles the root causes of biodiversity loss in many ways – from training farmers to setting standards for sustainable supply chains, and lobbying governments and corporations.

Language to avoid

- Fairtrade guarantees a living income and living wage for farmers and workers.
- The Fairtrade Minimum Price will cover all the farmers' costs for producing their crop.
- The FAIRTRADE Mark is your guarantee that strict environmental standards, were met.



3. Be respectful and inclusive

Global food chains can only become sustainable if they are built on an equal partnership with the people who grow and make the food we know and love.

At Fairtrade we describe our work and the people who we work with in a way that does not undermine their own agency or capability. Certain terms, such as “developing countries” or “poor” do not reflect this partnership and can come across as derogatory. The same for terms such as “give”, “help” or “aid”. Instead, be specific about the country or region you work in and talk more in terms of partnership than aid.

Suggested language	Language to avoid
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By buying Fairtrade, you support farmers and workers, who work to build a better future for themselves, their families, and their societies. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • By buying Fairtrade, you can give farmers and workers a better future.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our bananas come from Fairtrade certified farms in Ecuador/Latin America/name of region or country. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairtrade helps farmers and workers in developing countries to get a better deal.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairtrade works with farmers and workers in more than 70 countries worldwide. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We empower farmers and workers.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairtrade is about partnerships. It brings supply chain actors together and change business through long-lasting collaboration. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairtrade guarantees a better future for farmers and workers in poor countries.

4. Communicate about challenges

As investors, customers and governments are increasingly aware of sustainability challenges in global supply chains. Recognising and communicating about these challenges builds your credibility. Be as precise and transparent as you can. Explain the challenges, and what your company is doing to address them.

Suggested language

- We are committed to fighting the root causes of child labour and preventing any abuse and exploitation of children.
- Deforestation cannot be addressed adequately unless farmers earn a living income.
- We take continuous action to address human rights and environmental challenges in our supply chains.

Language to avoid

- Fairtrade means child labour free products.
- Fairtrade products are deforestation-free.
- Fairtrade certification means there is no exploitation and abuse in our supply chain.



5. Measure and communicate your progress

Communicate about your key activities and outcomes. Buying Fairtrade certified cocoa? Tell your clients if it is 5% or 100% of your total purchase. Working towards carbon neutrality or living wages? Make a concrete plan with a timeline and let the stakeholders follow your progress.

As you identify salient human rights risks in your supply chains, communicate transparently about how you are addressing them and list the steps your company follows. Do not delay communication "until the problem is under control".

Suggested language

- We partner with Fairtrade to create positive impact for farmers and workers.
- 70 percent of all our cocoa is Fairtrade certified.
- By working with Fairtrade, we are making efforts to address human rights risks in our coffee supply chain.

Language to avoid

- By buying Fairtrade certified, we are reducing human rights risks and attaining our social and environment goals.
- We use sustainable cocoa.
- By setting a strict code of conduct, signed by all suppliers, we make sure our human rights standards are being followed.





Fair is working together

Fairtrade offers multiple ways that companies and brands can put their values into action. Work with us as you move towards a more sustainable supply chain.

For further information and support about human and environmental due diligence, visit <https://www.fairtrade.net/act/fairtrade-for-business> or contact your local National Fairtrade Organization.



FAIRTRADE