

# Can Chains trigger Sustainable Change?

*Survey Results Max Havelaar Lecture 2009*

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## **Introduction**

During the 2009 Max Havelaar lecture, 187 participants (representing approximately 40% of the whole population) filled out a survey on various aspects of the role of supply chains in sustainable development. This account of that survey interprets their answers according to some demographic characteristics. The survey was in particular aimed at understanding which actors in society would bear the prime responsibility for making supply chains fair: customers, companies, governments, NGOs? In addition, the survey shows what the impact of labels is or could be on making supply chains fair.

## **Demographic characteristics**

The attendants to the lecture that participated in the survey offered a diverse sample that varied across occupation, sex and age. 46% of the participants fell within the age bracket of 18-30 (46%) and 34% within 30-50 years. Slightly more men (50%) than women (43%) filled out the questionnaire, but slightly more non-students (at least 53%) than students (40%). In general, the answers of men and women were comparable (with some notable exceptions). A substantial number of participants (38%) note that their attitude towards the need for sustainable supply chains did change positively, none note a negative effect of the lecture. Most participants (84%) agreed that sustainable supply chains offer a realistic alternative to the conventional global trade system. There is an age effect in this finding: within the age bracket of 30-40 we could find a stronger and more outspoken preference for sustainable supply chains, with older and younger generations slightly running behind and less outspoken. In case firms want to address 'agents of change' in supply chain management, they should target the 30-40 generation (generation Y, also known as the 'Millennial Generation' or 'Generation Next' or 'Net Generation') more than any other generation.

## **The active responsibility of companies**

Nearly all participants were of the opinion that companies have a responsibility to actively pursue sustainable conduct and decent working conditions (97% agreed or completely agreed). It is noticeable that non-students (59%) answered completely agreed more often, than the students (45%) did. Student (48%) agreed more than non-students (39%) did. Next to that, most respondents also believe companies to have the responsibility to provide a fair distribution of income (84% agreed or completely agreed) throughout the supply chain. None of the respondents answered completely disagree on this question, more students (12%) answered disagree than non-students (6%), and among the age group 40 and older more respondents answered completely agree (48%), then agree (38%). The majority (65%) of respondents

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believes companies who are able to create a fair distribution amongst the chain they are active in to have a more sophisticated business model. Out of the respondents who answered disagree to this statement 85% belongs to the age group 18-30. Men were more outspoken in their judgement that a fair distribution of income throughout the value chain, can really be considered a more sophisticated business model.

### **The dual responsibility of governments**

There is a slightly ambiguous attitude towards the responsibilities of governments as regards free trade, which also might be read as an invitation to look at the trade-off between fair and free trade in a more nuanced manner than is the case at present. Most respondents expect the government to play an important role in the development of sustainable supply chains. For example, 87% of the participants think that governments have the responsibility to make supply chains fair at a macro level. None of the respondents completely disagree with this proposition. Men were more outspoken in their opinion that governments even have a 'moral duty' to remove trade barriers in order to facilitate free trade. Next, however, the question whether governments should remove trade barriers to facilitate free trade also was agreed by a majority of total respondents (58%). Students less than non-students (58% against 65%) see a role for governments to make trade free. The urge for a more sophisticated role of governments becomes clear here, because governments are seen by majorities to be responsible for making trade fair and free at the same time. One finding further illustrates possible directions for a solution to this dilemma: 69% of the respondents agree that the World Trade Organization (WTO) mandate for 'free' trade should be changed into a mandate for 'fair' trade. The WTO itself is strongly against this redirection of its mandate, which in practice therefore implies the search for new institutions at a global scale to effectively deal with the trade-off between free and fair trade.

### **A mixed position for consumers**

There was no consensus among participants on the role of consumers in the realization of sustainable supply chains. While 51% of the respondents holds the opinion that consumers are ultimately responsible for sustainability and fairness in chains, 43% explicitly does not agree. However, students and the age group 18 to 30 agreed relatively more (57%) that they were themselves ultimately responsible. Non-students disagreed relatively more (48%) than students

### **Important role for NGOs and labels**

Most participants (68%) see an important role for Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in the realization of sustainable supply chains. Almost 2/3 of the participants expressed their concern that the abundance of fair trade labels is a threat for their effectiveness; which was further reinforced by the opinion of 55% of the respondents that there should not be a larger variety of quality marks and labels available to choose from. On a more specific question on existing fair trade labels, 72% of the respondents showed their confidence in Fairtrade as the prime label to achieve poverty alleviation. Students and the 18-30 age group were the most sceptical in their opinion: many of them (62-69%) had the opinion that none of the fair trade labels works best in achieving poverty alleviation.

### Annex: The survey results

Question	male	female			
Gender	50%	43%	7% unknown		
Question	student	non student			
Occupation	40%	53%	7% unknown		
Question	18-30	30-40	40-50	50-60	>60
Age (7% unspecified)	46%	21%	13%	10%	3%
Question	negatively changed	not changed	positively changed	Don't know	
This lecture has ..... my attitude about the need for sustainable supply chains.	0%	59%	38%	3%	

Question:	completely disagree	disagree	I don't know	agree	completely agree
Sustainable supply chains are a realistic alternative to the conventional global trade system.	2%	5%	8%	46%	38%
The abundance of fair trade labels is a threat for their effectiveness, because it confuses consumers.	3%	23%	11%	52%	11%
Consumers are ultimately responsible for sustainability and fairness in the supply chain; they pay for the product and articulate the demand.	4%	39%	5%	41%	10%
Firms should take an active approach to assure sustainable conduct and decent working conditions in the entire supply chain in which they are active.	1%	2%	0%	44%	53%
Company's have the responsibility to provide a fair distribution of income throughout their value chain	0%	8%	8%	47%	37%
Companies that are able to create a fair distribution of income throughout their value chain have a more sophisticated business model	1%	7%	27%	48%	17%

Question:	completely disagree	disagree	I don't know	agree	completely agree
Supervision of and cooperation with Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) is necessary for sustainable supply chains to succeed.	1%	17%	14%	52%	16%
In order to facilitate responsible consumer behavior, a larger variety of quality marks and labels should be available to chose from.	9%	46%	16%	21%	8%
The WTO (World Trade Organisation) mandate for 'free' trade must be changed into a mandate for 'fair' trade.	2%	9%	19%	44%	25%
National governments have the moral duty to remove trade barriers to facilitate free trade.	2%	19%	21%	40%	18%
Governments have the responsibility to make trade fair at a macro level.	0%	7%	7%	61%	26%
Question:	Fairtrade	Utz Kapeh	Rainforest Alliance	Other	None
Which fair trade label works best in achieving poverty alleviation?	66%	3%	2%	7%	14%

**Note:** The table contains a distribution of the participant responses. Not all percentages add up to a hundred percent since some questions were not answered by all respondents. Responses with the highest frequency are accentuated with a shade of dark grey. When another answer is within a range of 10% from the answer with the highest frequency, it is accentuated with a lighter shade of grey.