

# Cotton: an unfair trade

A guide to teaching resources  
For secondary & primary schools



English students meet Indian cotton workers.

Channel 4's documentary, *Our Big Fairtrade Adventure*, makes trade issues directly relevant to students, because it follows three 15 year olds from Oxfordshire as they visit India to buy ethically sourced shirts for their school. In the cotton fields they are shocked to meet girls as young as nine missing school to work twelve hours a day, seven days a week, for just 60p a day. To the year 10's surprise pollinating cotton plants is only done by girls as traditionally it is felt that males cannot bend down for as long.

The film covers many issues first hand: the harmful effects of pesticides; fair trade and organic farming; sweat shops and ethical garment factories. The DVD is available for £15.50 from Century Films. (020 7378 6106).

## US & EU subsidies cost African farmers \$250m



Benin, Burkina Faso, Chad and Mali, (the Cotton-4, C-4), are among the world's least developed countries. Despite producing the cheapest cotton, they are prevented from trading their way out of poverty by huge subsidies paid by the EU and the USA to their cotton farmers, which cut world prices and result in lost export earnings of \$250m every year, increasing Africa's reliance on aid.

In a Fairtrade co-operative in Mali farmers earn 50% more than the distorted market price and 95% of children attend school compared to a national average of 43%. Other problems with cotton are illustrated in the resources below, such as threats to water supplies.

### Free short videos

[www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources/films/default.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources/films/default.aspx)

Sir Steve Redgrave visits Mali, (5 mins), wmv download. Excellent example of the social premium funding new schools and a health centre to reduce appalling infant and maternal mortality rates.

Other cotton videos can be streamed from this page.

### Geography & Citizenship lessons from the Fairtrade Foundation

[www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/cotton.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/cotton.aspx)

Lesson plans and resources for all ages. A powerpoint details the supply chain .

### Oxfam ([www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/clothes\\_line/?30](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/clothes_line/?30))

The Clothes Line – 12 lesson scheme of work for primary schools, explores fair trade and the cotton supply chain. Free downloads include a powerpoint.

### People & Planet's Wear Fair Campaign (<http://peopleandplanet.org/wearfair>)

Full of activity ideas to raise awareness of cotton, fashion shows etc.

### Fairtrade Wales ([www.fairtradewales.com/schools/resources/493](http://www.fairtradewales.com/schools/resources/493))

A wide range of resources, categorised for primary & secondary schools.

## Fairtrade school uniforms

Schools can use Fairtrade cotton in uniform polo shirts or sweat shirts, as well as T-shirts or hoodies for events. Students in John Roan school's 'Make A Difference' club in Greenwich got support from teachers and parents to make all their polo shirts and sweat shirts from Fairtrade cotton/polyester.

Britain's 25,000 schools could improve so many cotton farmers lives. Switching to Fairtrade is easy. See the Schools Product guide. Investigating whether your uniform is ethically sourced is a valuable citizenship project. Key questions to ask: is child labour involved? What wages/prices are paid? Can workers join unions? Do communities receive other benefits like pre-financing?



The John Roan school decided to make their uniform Fairtrade.

# Banana price wars: trade unionists murdered

## Teaching resources Bananas

Between 2002-08 supermarket price wars slashed the UK retail price of bananas by up to 41%, causing a devastating decline in living standards for plantation workers. Many now earn less than \$1 a day. Just five multinational corporations control over 90% of internationally traded bananas with massive mono-crop plantations, principally in South and Central America. Cost cutting imperatives have led to the ruthless suppression of trade unions by local vested interests. In Guatemala five union leaders representing banana plantation workers have been murdered since 2007. No arrests have been made.

### Free Video – Fairtrade bananas in the Dominican Republic (3 mins)

[www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources/films/default.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/resources/films/default.aspx)

A free wmv file to download shows the banana production process and the benefits of fair trade for small scale farmers, including facilities provided by the social premium.



### Banana Link

[\(www.bananalink.org.uk/content/view/121/70/lang,en/\)](http://www.bananalink.org.uk/content/view/121/70/lang,en/)

Lots of information on the banana trade and resources. Banana Link are part of an international campaign to 'Make Fruit Fair.'

### The Banana Game from Traidcraft

[www.traidcraftschools.co.uk/teaching\\_learning\\_resources/activities\\_games](http://www.traidcraftschools.co.uk/teaching_learning_resources/activities_games)

Groups represent stages in the supply chain from farmer to supermarket and guess which gets what proportion of a banana's end price, stimulating key thinking skills through advocacy and discussion.

### Make Fruit Fair ([www.makefruitfair.org.uk](http://www.makefruitfair.org.uk))

MFF aims to stop the exploitation of plantation workers. Links to 3 free, accessible videos on You Tube.

1. Make Fruit Fair the movie (2 mins) - simple cartoon introduction to issues, accessible for all age groups.
2. Hard Labour (4min) - anti union plantations in Costa Rica.
3. Poisoned paradise (4 min) - health impacts of pesticides.

### Oxfam : Go bananas

[www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/go\\_bananas/?30](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/resources/go_bananas/?30)

Follows a banana's journey from the Caribbean to the UK. 6 lesson scheme of work for ages 7-11, with a powerpoint and free downloads.



## Teaching resources Sports balls

60% of the world's stitched sports balls are made in the Sialkot district of Pakistan, where wages are very low and child labour is common – a vivid illustration of issues for geography of sport units or Citizenship lessons on globalisation. Fairtrade Wales has an informative powerpoint. Some councils have organised Fairtrade football and netball competitions to raise awareness with the help of local PE teachers.



## How can schools support fair trade?

### Petitions for Fairtrade products in school canteens

Fairtrade councils like Islington and Camden supply Fairtrade bananas and other products to all their school canteens. Schools that want their council's catering contractors to do the same have given petitions to local councillors, to prove that they support fair trade.



All bananas in Camden's schools are Fairtrade

# How can we become a Fairtrade school?

There are 5 steps. Using Fairtrade products puts you well on the way to achieving goals 3 and 5...

1) A Steering Group, including students, meets at least once a term.

*Student councils can be involved, or a joint Eco School/Fairtrade group.*

2) A Fairtrade Policy is supported by governors and the Head Teacher.

*To save time the model policy overleaf can be used as a base .*

3) The school uses Fairtrade products and promotes awareness.

*Use in staff rooms and for events is expected. Our Product Guide has more ideas.*

4) Pupils learn about Fairtrade in at least 3 subjects. (It's on the national curriculum for geography and citizenship)

*Some Fairtrade towns can send ideas from Fairtrade schools for: maths, English, Food Tech recipes, etc.*

5) Action to support Fairtrade once a term in school, and once a year in the wider community.

*Examples: school canteen petitions; stalls at parents evenings or fates; surveys of parents or local cafes; publicity events; assemblies; Fairtrade fashion shows; non-uniform days for students who bring in Fairtrade products.*



Further details from the Fairtrade Foundation - [www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/default.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/schools/default.aspx)

## Sources of support

Only a minority of schools have achieved Fairtrade school status, so far, although many more have registered. If teachers want to collaborate to share work your Fairtrade Town Steering Group might be able to put you in contact with other local schools, or provide a speaker. Other organisations can offer support too, local Humanities Education Centres funded by councils and schools, or youth projects that support students in organising campaigns and activities. All can save teachers a lot of time.

## Fairtrade cotton companies

If your school would like to consider how to make uniform items ethically some Fairtrade cotton companies visit schools, to explain the benefits they provide to farmers and factory workers in their supply chain. Such visits put schools under no obligation to buy products. They can be arranged to individual requirements, to raise awareness of the many issues involved in the farming of cotton and the production of clothing, from spinning to the end product. They also give students and teachers opportunities to ask detailed questions. For contact details see the enclosed Product Guide for Schools.



## Speakers and products for staff rooms, stalls, breakfast clubs



Traidcraft fund development schemes and provide speakers to explain how fair trade improves lives. More details on their website for schools, which includes teaching resources, ([www.traidcraftschools.co.uk](http://www.traidcraftschools.co.uk)), or phone 0191 491 0591.

They also supply products to student groups for resale on stalls at parents' evenings or tuck shops, useful experience in running an ethical business and a way of raising funds for the school.

## Faith schools

Christian Aid and CAFOD can offer presentations on fair trade and the wider fight against poverty. contact your diocese for advice or national offices: Christian Aid - 020 7620 4444 . CAFOD - 020 7733 7900

Traidcraft, Britain's leading wholesaler of Fairtrade products, delivers to schools - tea, coffee, sugar, fruit juices, smoothies, cereal bars, nuts, dried fruit, biscuits, cakes, chocolate, yoghurt etc. Breakfast clubs can order muesli, jam, marmalade and honey. (See [www.traidcraft.co.uk](http://www.traidcraft.co.uk))



## Model Fairtrade uniform policy

Our school resolves to ensure that cotton farmers and workers involved in the production of our uniform items are paid a fair wage and enjoy decent working conditions. To put this into practice a group involving teachers, students and parents will ask our existing supplier and any future potential suppliers to provide evidence of the working conditions in their supply chain.

Where designated uniform items include the school logo we will investigate the possibility of specifying that all garments have to include Fairtrade certified cotton, seeking the agreement of governors, the head teacher, and parents. We will also encourage parents to choose fairly traded garments when buying general uniform items in high street retailers, by publicising our support through methods such as school newsletters and our website.

We will raise awareness of Fairtrade cotton by including the topic in lessons, research projects, and events such as assemblies or by displaying products on stalls.

### Fairtrade certification & ethical criteria



The Fairtrade Labelling Organisation, (FLO), independently verifies that farmers or producers are paid a published, stable, 'living wage' price, and that communities also receive 'social premium' payments to invest in development schemes of their choice, such as safe drinking water, new schools or sustainable farming methods. FLO also prohibits child labour that prevents minors from attending school, upholds trade union rights, and facilitates part pre-financing to enable increased production and cash flow. All of these measures are designed to build long term, mutually beneficial relationships, in contrast to the traditional business model where clothing companies use their market power to force prices down.

Because the clothing supply chain is long and complicated FLO cannot certify all the companies in the manufacturing process. Clothing companies ethically vet factories themselves, so it is advisable to ask all suppliers, existing or potential, Fairtrade certified or not, for specific evidence of the working conditions in their supply chain.

Can garments without Fairtrade certification be ethically sourced? Yes. But as policies vary dramatically it is strongly recommended that specific details are asked for to check that claims are more than insubstantial PR or simply misleading. In general if a company is not aware of working conditions in their supply chain it is a bad sign. Criteria should also be compared to those independently verified by FLO. (See [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)) All companies are free to get their products certified. Fairtrade companies prove that administration fees are not prohibitive. Everything depends on customer demand. Increased volumes reduce price differentials significantly.

### Model Fairtrade school policy



Our school is committed to supporting Fairtrade wherever possible. To do this we will take the following steps:

- \* Ensure that the subject is taught in at least three (named) subjects in two or more year groups.
- \* Support a Steering Group involving students by holding meetings at least once a term, which are minuted, publicised and open to staff and students.
- \* Include Fairtrade in the School Development Plan.
- \* Promote Fairtrade in school at least once a term and in the wider community once a year, by organising events and publicity, such as: assemblies, stalls, newsletters etc, including during Fairtrade fortnight.
- \* Use Fairtrade products where possible: sports balls; staff drinks; refreshments and confectionary at meetings, parents evenings or other events; Food Tech lessons.
- \* Ensure that our school uniform is ethically sourced and use Fairtrade cotton items where possible, either through our existing supplier or a new one.
- \* Ask our catering manager and/or our council to supply as many Fairtrade products to our canteens as possible, eg, bananas and other fruit, fruit juices, bulk sugar, rice.