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Fair Trade cannabis: a road map for meeting the socio-economic needs and interests of small and traditional growers

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Abstract

Policy changes over the past five years have dramatically reshaped the global cannabis market, opening up legal markets for medical cannabis and, increasingly, also for adult, non-medical use. Despite the fact that these shifts look set to bring a clear range of benefits in terms of health and human rights, there is concern over the many for-profit cannabis companies from the Global North that are aggressively competing to capture the licit spaces, squeezing out small and traditional cannabis farmers from the Global South. If the construction of the global cannabis prohibition regime was an historic mistake, then a transition towards a legally regulated market that concentrates profits in a handful of Big Pharma, Ag, Tobacco and Cannabis companies, while locking out small-scale farmers in the Global South, only serves to further this damaging legacy. The focus of Fair Trade cannabis must be to empower small and traditional producers in the cannabis trade, based on a number of first order principles, market strategies and public policies. Crucially, growers must be enabled to organise amongst themselves and forge coalitions with other actors in order to advocate for appropriate frameworks and interventions.

Keywords: cannabis; sustainable development; human rights; market strategy; co-operatives; war on drugs; drug policy; Fair Trade

Cannabis is the most widely consumed drug in the world, with 188 million people reportedly having used cannabis at least once in the year leading up to 2017.² This reflects also its widespread cultivation. While even

¹ The authors are grateful to the comments provided by two anonymous reviewers whose careful reading of the draft greatly improved the argumentation and detail. Any remaining errors are our own.

² United Nations (2019). *World Drug Report 2019*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (p. 11).

rough cannabis production figures are notoriously difficult to obtain, extrapolations from various sources show that cannabis represents a lifeline for many millions of people, particularly those living in marginalised, rural areas across the Global South.³ Despite such widespread use and cultivation, cannabis remains officially scheduled under the three international conventions that underpin the international drug control regime as a **narcotic or 'dangerous drug'** without any medical benefit or use value. The motivation behind classifying a plant – whose cultivation and use in agriculture, traditional medicine, and religious and cultural practices goes back many centuries – in this way reflected competing corporate and geopolitical interests prevalent in the early twentieth century.⁴ These became further entrenched over the course of the twentieth century as moral panics around drug use were whipped up in support of a general prohibitionist stance towards drugs.

The **harms caused by the global control regime** based on the 1961 UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs have been severe. They include millions incarcerated for even low-level drug offences, the escalation and prolongation of conflict through the 'war on drugs' and the boon that criminalisation represents for organised crime, and the social profiling of certain racial, ethnic and low-income groups. They must also include the opportunity costs of prohibition in terms of diverted man power and resources that could have been more worthwhile spent elsewhere, as well as the loss of patient access to medical cannabis in palliative care and to treat a range of conditions.

However, **policy changes** over the past five years or so have dramatically reshaped the global cannabis market. Not only has there been an unprecedented boom in medical markets, but, following policy shifts in several jurisdictions, a growing number of countries have also engaged with, or are preparing for, legal regulation of non-medical use. Such moves are triggered by a recognition that decades of repressive policies have proved ineffective and have had grave negative consequences, and this looks set to bring a clear range of benefits in terms of health and human rights.

Nonetheless, there are also growing reservations regarding unfolding market dynamics. Among these is concern over the many **for-profit cannabis companies from the Global North that are aggressively competing to capture the licit spaces** now rapidly opening in what may be a multi-billion-dollar global market. This threatens to push small-scale and marginalised traditional farmers from countries like Colombia, Mexico, Jamaica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Morocco, South Africa, Afghanistan, Lebanon, India, Nepal or Thailand out of the emerging market. This is despite the fact that they have supplied the illicit market for decades, often under extremely precarious and conflict-prone conditions, in which cannabis forms part of a broader survival economy.⁵

For example, in South Africa, cannabis, or dagga as it is known locally, has formed part of a subsistence economy for more than 200 years, with many small-scale farmers reliant upon cannabis for their livelihood. Much of this production is located in the Pondoland region of the Eastern Cape, one of South Africa's least developed regions where public services are scant and cannabis is grown, primarily by women, as the only cash crop. Despite South Africa having legalised cannabis for medical use in 2018, there is little hope among farmers – to the extent that they are even made aware of these changes – that the policy will benefit them. Instead, they see the playing

3 The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) has, for example, avoided issuing global production estimates since 2009 given the extreme difficulties in obtaining any kind of reliable data. Country reporting provides some insight. For example, in Kazakhstan it is estimated that 140,000 hectares of cannabis (both wild and cultivated) are to be found in the Chui valley, with up to two-thirds of the valley's inhabitants involved in the harvesting of cannabis herb or resin. In Morocco, estimates of the number of people involved in cannabis cultivation vary between 90,000 and 140,000 households. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines it has been reported that up to 40% of the population live off cannabis. For Afghanistan, UNODC's latest cannabis survey estimated the number of cannabis-growing households as around 65,000. For further discussion of some of these figures see: Jelsma, M., Kay, S. and Bewley-Taylor, D. (2019). *Fair(er) Trade Options for the Cannabis Market*. Policy Report 1, March 2019, Cannabis Innovate (pp. 11–13).

4 Buxton, J. (2020). Drug control and development: The purposive blind spot. *International Development Policy*, Geneva: The Graduate Institute (forthcoming).

5 These survival economies are driven by many complex dynamics. However, amongst them must be included the perverse effects of highly unequal trade and investment agreements that are underpinned by an extractivist logic and centred around the interests of transnational (mostly Northern) capital. These have directly contributed to significant increases in illicit cultivation. For example, the arrival of multinational bauxite companies in Jamaica led to the displacement of small farmers from their lands, triggering an upsurge in cannabis cultivation as well as large-scale out-migration. Meanwhile, the dismantling of the EU–Caribbean preferential trade agreement for bananas in the 1990s essentially wiped out the banana economies of many of the Windward Islands of the Eastern Caribbean. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines alone, the dismantling of this regime led to an 85% decline in the number of banana farmers between 1992 and 2007. Some, if not the majority, were to then find their way into illegal cannabis cultivation as a source of income. In this way, the special burden that the international drug control regime has placed on traditional producing countries in the Global South is replicated in more ways than one.

field tilted towards big companies and foreign investors who have the capital and political connections to apply for medical licenses. As one farmer states: *'Our people feel betrayed, because all of the licenses are being issued to companies from elsewhere, while we who have been growing this plant here for generations, who have the skills, who have the knowledge, who have the land, are still being criminalised.'*⁶

The construction of the UN-based global cannabis prohibition regime was an historic mistake with severe consequences, but if the transitioning towards a legally regulated market results in a corporate takeover that concentrates profits into a handful of Big Pharma, Ag, Tobacco and Cannabis companies, and pushes small-scale farmers in the Global South out of business, **another historical mistake is already in the making.**

From the 'War on Drugs' to a development, human rights and public health-based approach

The aim of Fair Trade, or fair(er) trade,⁷ is thus to shift the global debate and practice on cannabis out of the exclusive realm of law enforcement and international drug control agencies towards one that is firmly anchored in a **development, human rights and public health-based approach**. As noted above, this is not based on any altruistic or moralising imperative but rather the scientific evidence base around the medical benefits of responsible cannabis use and the best way to treat problematic use and reduce harm. Furthermore, it would **unlock opportunities** that are only now just beginning to emerge as countries and states are moving towards regulating cannabis for medical and/or adult non-medical use. This is based on the understanding that with the right policies in place, cannabis can deliver jobs, income and food security, reduce the health bill, and free up otherwise precious budgetary resources currently spent on interdiction that can then be allocated to other vital public services and development outcomes. Such an approach would align with states' obligations to end poverty, hunger, and the causes of structural inequality and discrimination in the context of the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.

Following this, it is vital that those who endured supplying the illicit cannabis market, those who were most affected by the 'war on drugs' and those who, in many ways, paved the way for recent policy changes, should be first in line to benefit from the emergence of licit spaces in the market. From a Fair Trade perspective, this would centre on the **socio-economic needs and interests of small and traditional growers from producing countries in the Global South**. And, while not our focus here, the same holds true for black and Latino communities in the U.S. or for ethnic minorities elsewhere that have been disproportionately affected by drug law enforcement.

The motivation for prioritising small and traditional cultivators is not only based on concerns for social and racial justice but also care for the environment. Much of the industrial-scale growing of cannabis, for example, takes place indoors, in highly controlled greenhouse conditions using intensive monocultures. When translated to outdoor systems, this approach will undoubtedly have impacts on biodiversity and soil health. Although important not to romanticise the practices of small farmers and the very real challenges they face when growing in sometimes extremely fragile ecological zones, small-scale, organic, outdoor production uses much less energy, using natural sun light rather than electricity to provide indoor lighting and heating systems. In small-scale production, cannabis is also much more likely to be intercropped with other food, fiber and/or medicinal species that are of direct benefit to producers, providing agrobiodiversity as part of well-understood risk mitigation and ecological management strategies. These benefits are, however, not automatically accrued and any system – indoor, outdoor, small-scale or industrial – will require careful monitoring and evaluation.

⁶ Clark, C. (2019, 14 October). People feel betrayed: Small-scale dagga growers fear exclusion from legal trade. *GroundUp*. Retrieved from: <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/people-feel-betrayed-small-scale-dagga-growers-fear-exclusion-legal-trade/>

⁷ We use the term 'fair(er) trade' here in recognition of the definitional complexities and contested meanings associated with the terms 'Fairtrade', 'Fair Trade', 'Fairly Traded' and other derivations. Without entering into this debate, we make use of more expansive notions of fair trade, understanding this to signify models that are built around a rights-based, inclusive and environmentally sustainable approach to market engagement, drawing on the high-order principles developed by what might be called the 'Fair Trade Movement'.

The below is an attempt to define several first order principles outlining what a Fair Trade cannabis market could look like:

First order principles of Fair Trade cannabis⁸

1. Demonstrate a **commitment to upholding human rights and strengthening social and economic justice** by integrating them as core values within any initiative.
2. Centre on **producer empowerment and community benefit sharing** through more equitable terms of trade. In this model, producers are not just seen as providers of raw materials but as value creators. Baselines prices can be agreed within cannabis cooperatives with social premiums invested in training and skill development in order to ensure that a greater share of the added value is retained and returned to growers and local and regional economies.
3. Use production methods that adhere to **strong environmental sustainability standards** in relation to land, soil and forestry management and the use of energy, water and agricultural inputs. Producers are supported in developing environmentally sound techniques.
4. Put in place proper **labour protections** to ensure worker safety, health and satisfaction. A zero-tolerance approach is taken with regards to labour or sexual exploitation. Workers are paid a fair price for their labour in accordance with the local living wage.
5. Encourage more **democratic control, participation and decision-making processes** through inclusive business models and systems of worker-driven social responsibility. Particular attention is paid to the role of women and **gender sensitive** governance processes.
6. Generate **transparency and traceability** in the operation of the cannabis market and supply chain through mandatory disclosure of investors and the putting in place of appropriate and producer-friendly licensing, quality control and standard-setting systems.
7. Focus on **longer-term strategies**, with special attention placed on marginalised communities and rural areas in (traditional) producing countries. This includes opening up a path to compliance for good faith cannabis producers who are transitioning out of illegality. Restorative justice should be considered for those previously excluded or criminalised.
8. Resonate with the **social history** of a particular place, foregrounding traditional growing communities and the role of cannabis in their cultural and religious identities and practices.

While these first order principles may appear aspirational at present, there is no reason why they cannot be put into practice through concrete strategies for implementation. This requires political will and vision, and an understanding that markets do not arise spontaneously but require active creation, regulation and guidance. This is not within the gift of any one actor or investor alone. Rather, it will require a **strategic compact** between enlightened public policy makers, responsible investors and organised growers' communities to develop **country and/or regionally owned visions** for how cannabis can be part of a broader developmental success story. This stands in contrast to how much of the global cannabis industry has unfolded thus far, which has seen a glut of new investors enter the market in a very short time frame, resulting in speculative bubbles, booms and busts, market saturation, and allegations of fraud. The danger of an approach that thus seeks to 'attract investment first, ask questions later' is that development opportunities figure a distant second.

A strategic compact for Fair Trade cannabis

Unlocking the potential for Fair Trade cannabis thus means making use of all the tools that are available in the **public policy toolbox**, as well as leveraging a broader **community of practice** – including, first and foremost,

⁸ These first order principles first appeared in Jelsma, M., Kay, S. et al (2019).

small and traditional cannabis growers but also others engaged in, for example, the legal and medical fields – to help shape emerging cannabis markets. There are many possibilities here. For example, a strategic compact for Fair Trade cannabis could involve:

- **Quotas** that stipulate that a certain percentage of cannabis product must be sourced from small growers (for example in Colombia, Law 1787 of July 2016, which opened up the medical cannabis market, stipulates that companies must obtain at least 10% of their raw material from small growers).
- **Minimum pricing** for delivery of cannabis so that producers are guaranteed a specified income stream.
- **Affirmative licensing laws** that prioritise, in the first instance, frontline communities and small and traditional cultivators before opening up to larger players, in order to give them a head start in the market (for example San Francisco, Los Angeles, Oakland and Sacramento are pioneering social equity programmes that prioritise licenses for people with low incomes who have lived in an area ravaged by the 'drug war', while a tiered licensing system for small farmers has been introduced by the Cannabis Licensing Authority (CLA) of Jamaica).
- Setting up a **development fund** from the fees collected from the issuing of licenses and/or other revenue collected from, for example, export customs and duties, to be re-invested in cannabis-growing communities and regions.
- **Lessening barriers to entry** for small- and medium-sized producers who can be squeezed out of the market due to prohibitive administration, compliance and security costs. This can involve targeted training sessions in meeting Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) and Good Manufacturing Practices (GMP)⁹ standards, and exchanges with specialised liaison officers (for example from medical cannabis authorities) on how to navigate the relevant bureaucracy. It could also include recognition of more producer-friendly quality assurance systems, such as participatory guarantee systems, that rely on peer review mechanisms as a complement to more official, top-down regulatory frameworks.
- Enabling a legal medicinal market to develop for cannabis-based '**alternative health products**', such as in nutraceuticals or psychotherapeutic products with potential for export.¹⁰
- Making use of **cooperative laws** and amending them where necessary to allow cannabis growers to register themselves as collective bodies, taking advantage of the benefits (in terms of, for example, pooling resources and risks) that this can confer.
- Enacting **land reform programmes** where cannabis growers currently find themselves without access to land or security of tenure (for example 200 hectares of land is to be distributed to traditional cultivators in St. Vincent and the Grenadines).
- Adopting an **Amnesty Law** that would allow cannabis growers to transition out of illegality and open up a path to compliance (as, for example, put forward in the Cannabis Cultivation Amnesty Bill 2018 of St. Vincent and the Grenadines).¹¹ Such an amnesty could also include an element of restorative justice through, for example, the expungement of criminal records for prior cannabis-related convictions, as is being proposed by the Marijuana Opportunity Reinvestment and Expungement (MORE) Act in the United States.¹²
- Setting up **public cannabis seed banks, research stations and centres of excellence** to collect information and further scientific knowledge on seeds, landraces, growing conditions and medical

9 Good Agricultural Practices involve standards around the use of energy, water and agricultural inputs, and good land management, while Good Manufacturing Practices involve regulations to ensure consistent product quality, avoidance of contamination, traceability and diligent record keeping.

10 These include cannabis products (in the form of herbal medicines and food supplements) that are used in traditional healing and, more recently, in holistic remedies and complementary treatments. As of yet, they are not recognised under the definition of 'medical cannabis', reflecting the preference of international control bodies for 'pharmaceutical' preparations over more natural, plant-based medicines, creating additional barriers for export from countries in the South.

11 See: http://www.gov.vc/images/PoliciesActsAndBills/Cannabis_Cultivation_Amnesty_Bill_2018.pdf

12 The bill – which passed in the House Judiciary Committee in November 2020 – calls for the expungement of certain federal cannabis convictions with expenses being covered by a small excise tax imposed on the legal cannabis industry, as well as the creation of a Cannabis Justice Office focused on reinvesting resources into communities most affected by prohibition. See: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/javierhasse/2019/11/20/marijuana-legalization-judiciary-committee/#329f325d2c35>

technologies. Focus should be on safeguarding indigenous strains and native seeds to protect against contamination and cross-pollination. This knowledge should be made accessible to cannabis growers rather than leaving this in private hands, which can result in growers having to pay for access or even being excluded completely due to patented technologies.¹³

A Fair Trade market that has small and traditional growers at its heart would not just seek to lessen the barriers to entry for these groups but also increase them for others, particularly foreign investors, in order to **protect market spaces and guard against predatory behaviour**. This can include the following measures:

- Restrictions on foreign acquisitions of local licensed companies.
- Regulations on the maximum size of grow sites (for example, in California cultivation sites are not to exceed one acre until 2023).
- Caps regarding majority ownership by foreign persons and companies for access to licenses (as, for example, undertaken in Jamaica and as appears in the draft law to regulate cannabis in Mexico).
- Other restrictive regulations on foreign investment (for example in Thailand where the intention, at least, was to not allow any foreign investment in the first year to facilitate development of local industry).

Of course, in a highly unequal, unpredictable and ever-evolving global market, not all these measures will necessarily have the desired effects, particularly if there is a lack of strong follow through, due diligence and on-the-ground monitoring of impacts. Quotas to involve small growers can become tokenistic or end up turning them into day labourers on cannabis plantations, as has been observed in Colombia.¹⁴ Many loopholes still exist. Even in the case of California, it is estimated that as of February 2018 only 0.78% of the existing 68,150 small growers in the state had been able to obtain a license, despite the fact that the cannabis legalisation act explicitly stated that the industry will be built around small- and medium-sized enterprises, with strict anti-monopoly provisions in place.¹⁵ Much is thus to be learned from both good and bad practices in different countries across the world.

Growing consumer demand for sustainable cannabis

Investing in market strategies for Fair Trade cannabis is based on the premise that there already is, or will be, a **growing demand for more environmentally friendly and sustainably sourced cannabis products**. But what evidence is there to suggest this is true?

While market research on consumer demand for fair(er) trade cannabis is still very limited, there are signs that point in a positive direction. A 2016 study of cannabis dispensaries in the city of Portland, Oregon – where the growth, possession, sale and use of medical cannabis has been legalised since 1998 and the licensed sale of cannabis for personal use since 2015 – shows promise.¹⁶ Of the 64 cannabis dispensaries (roughly half the total number of dispensaries in the city at the time of the fieldwork) interviewed, 28% reported that customers frequently request 'organic or socially responsible' cannabis, while another 53% say they experience this request occasionally.

Other experiences centre on the medical cannabis market. In countries such as the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, the Netherlands, Colombia and Chile, patient advocacy groups are leading the way with a

¹³ Research on local varieties and traditional breeding techniques would also protect against biopiracy and aggressive patenting under the Convention on Biological Diversity's access and benefit sharing provision, and as further outlined in the Nagoya Protocol. This is particularly relevant as 'strainhunters' the world over are continuing to seek out unique, indigenous cannabis varieties for lucrative Western markets, sometimes with little regard to equitable benefit sharing of these and other plant genetic resources. Stronger scientific research, combined with education and awareness raising workshops for farmers, can also help to conserve local cannabis landraces that are disappearing due to the introduction of exogenous varieties that are being pushed due to the higher THC levels. This is the case, for example, in Morocco where local landraces, such as Beldia and Khardala, are vanishing as they are being replaced by more recently introduced European varieties, despite the fact that Moroccan landraces are more eco-friendly to cultivate and are known to have interesting cannabinoid profiles, which make them potentially useful for both medicinal and industrial purposes.

¹⁴ Martínez Rivera, N. (2019). *The challenges of medicinal cannabis in Colombia. A look at small – and medium – scale growers*. Drug Policy Briefing No.52, Amsterdam: Transnational Institute.

¹⁵ California Growers Association (2018, February 15). *An emerging crisis: Barriers to entry in California cannabis*. Retrieved from <https://www.calgrowersassociation.org/crisisreport>

¹⁶ Bennett, E.A. (2018). Extending ethical consumerism theory to semi-legal sectors: Insights from recreational cannabis. *Agriculture and Human Values*, 35(2), 295–317.

call for legal access to cannabis products for medical and therapeutic use. While the primary concern amongst these patient rights groups is access to high quality and safe cannabis for medical use, concerns about the role played by 'big pharma' have also entered the debate.

This shows the **scope for growing the market for Fair Trade cannabis**, both for medical and for personal use, particularly as high profile cases around individual patients or around the exploitative conditions to be found in illegal cannabis farms play out in the media.¹⁷

However, making the consumer case for Fair Trade cannabis will present challenges even in countries that have moved towards regulation, not least due to the large amount of mis-information surrounding cannabis that continues to circulate as a result of the continued stigma and legacy of prohibition. It will thus, perhaps to a greater degree than other more conventional Fair Trade products, require **a level of advocacy to raise awareness and lift consumer consciousness** around the prospects for Fair Trade in the cannabis market. It will also rely heavily on **market differentiation strategies** by which consumers can identify the provenance of distinct cannabis products. As the legal market for cannabis expands, a more discerning set of consumers may be primed to ask questions about origin and who are interested in the idea of craft, sun-grown, organic product using unique, heritage strains and for community benefit. The opportunities, particularly for countries that have a long history of cannabis cultivation and indigenous culture around its use, such as ganja in Jamaica or kif in Morocco, could be significant. Developing appropriate and credible sustainable labeling systems and making use of tools such as geographic indications would help to strengthen these competitive advantages.

Future challenges and opportunities for Fair Trade cannabis

While cannabis is no longer 'politically untouchable' and states have forged ahead towards regulating cannabis in their jurisdictions, one cannot escape the unavoidable UN **treaty tensions** that arise from these moves. This closes down export channels and restricts participation in the market. These tensions are not necessarily insurmountable and creative proposals have been put forward for how to navigate these – such as through countries signing *inter se* agreements amongst themselves.¹⁸

Nevertheless, even leaving aside the strictures of the international drug control regime, the **regulatory challenges** remain considerable. Banking regulations, for example, must be brought in line with cannabis markets in order for accounts not to be frozen due to proceeds of crime legislation and to allow for the issuance of loans and grants to cannabis-related businesses. Meanwhile, one should not underestimate the considerable up-front investments and administrative hoops one must jump through to be considered a legitimate actor in the cannabis market. It is a situation that privileges early movers and those who can afford to make high-capital, high-tech investments.

Clearly, there is a world of difference between corporate cannabis and the realities of a small cannabis grower, which cannot easily be bridged. It will **require states to exercise regulatory and discretionary power** in order to set the rules of the game, attract responsible investors, and line up suitable buyers and market outlets. The potential pay-off for countries that have the foresight to develop these kinds of markets can be significant. A 2018 report by the CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana notes the potential game-changing impact cannabis could bring to the Caribbean region if a properly defined regional policy framework is developed:

In addition, the region's already established and developing tourism economy can be leveraged further by a cannabis industry located in safe and secure environments. Cannabis can be produced for export as well as for local healing and

¹⁷ See, for example, the case of human trafficking and illegal cannabis farms in the U.K. in Kelly, A. (2019, July 26). Enslaved on a British cannabis farm: 'The plants were more valuable than my life'. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/news/2019/jul/26/vietnamese-cannabis-farms-children-enslaved>.

¹⁸ Under an *inter se* agreement, a group of like-minded countries could collectively create a new sub-treaty framework just for cannabis, allowing them to reconcile their domestic legislation with their commitments under the UN drug control treaties. This could open the possibility of international trade between regulated licit markets, enabling small-scale farmers in traditional cannabis-producing countries in the Global South to participate in transnational commerce at both global and regional levels. See: <https://www.tni.org/en/article/the-elegant-way-to-end-global-cannabis-prohibition-inter-se-modification>

can be the foundation for a new and vibrant wellness tourism industry.... The development of an industrial hemp industry is also envisaged. Cannabis, produced organically and outdoors can also provide for the already lucrative recreational market.¹⁹

Such a multi-faceted territorial framework, in which forward and backward linkages are fostered across sectors such as agriculture, health and wellness, medicine, tourism, science and manufacturing, will also help to develop economies of scale around cannabis, reducing dependency on foreign direct investment and allowing for greater economic returns. This can ensure that growers do not just become the providers of raw material but can step up into more diversified and value-adding activities.

It is, however, not clear that all countries or regions will have the political vision and will to push for such a framework. Even among those that are willing to spend the political capital in doing so, it is not a given that this will produce positive results. Shaping market structures is not the same as determining market outcomes, as any market-driven social justice initiative – such as that embodied by the Fair Trade movement – will attest to.

This is why **facilitating and supporting organisation amongst growers** is essential. It is only by growers coming together, forming networks, forging alliances, articulating demands and mobilising the call for them to be implemented, that real change can come about. Steps to do so are already afoot at local, national, regional – even international – levels.²⁰ Cannabis producer co-operatives are rapidly being formed, with some already entering into licensing agreements with the authorities and investors.²¹ A few are also actively engaged in political lobbying and advocacy work, organising consultations, working with the media, and building support among the wider public for law reform and producer empowerment. These kinds of ‘scaling up’ (in terms of parlaying grassroots demands into policy proposals) and ‘scaling out’ strategies (in terms of forging alliances and building South–South horizontal connections) are not dissimilar to how movements have grown in other sectors.²² The starting point for this kind of work is, of course, different with respect to the international legal framework regulating cannabis and will thus depend to a greater degree than usual on national- and state-level context. As the legal market for cannabis expands, the key will be to form coalitions between growers, consumers, patients, doctors, lawyers, scientists, drug policy activists, development practitioners and enlightened public policymakers across the Global North and South, to be ready to make the case for Fair Trade cannabis.

The opportunity is there. It now needs to be grasped.

19 CARICOM Regional Commission on Marijuana (2018, August). *Report to the Caribbean Community Heads of Government: Waiting to Exhale – Safeguarding our Future through Responsible Socio-Legal Policy on Marijuana* (p. 5).

20 At international level, TNI convened the first ever Global Forum for the Producers of Prohibited Plants in January 2016, bringing together over 60 farmers and farmers’ representatives involved in the cultivation of the cannabis plant, opium poppy and coca leaf. This led to a political declaration – the ‘Heemskerk Declaration’. See: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/the-global-forum-of-producers-of-prohibited-plants-gfppp>

21 An example includes that of the signing, in November 2019, of an agreement between two traditional cannabis cultivator groups in St. Vincent and the Grenadines – Greggs Rastafarian Progressive Multipurpose Cooperative Society Ltd and the Farmers’ Solution Group (FSS) Limited – with a cannabis company Green Lava, for export of medical cannabis products. Per the requirements of the government of SVG, Green Lava are obligated to purchase at least 10% of their cannabis from the two groups, who between them represent 39 traditional cultivators. See: <https://mca.vc/green-lava-signs-agreement-with-traditional-cannabis-cultivators/>

22 Agroecology, for example, has grown into a global movement thanks to these strategies, with a particularly strong focus on scaling out strategies based on peer-to-peer learning taking place in peasant agroecology schools that make use of popular pedagogies and social process methodologies. For an introduction, see: Rosset, P.M., Machin Sosa, B. et al (2011). The Campesino to-Campesino Agroecology Movement of ANAP in Cuba: Social process methodology in the construction of sustainable peasant agriculture and food sovereignty. *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(1), 161–191.