
MODULE 4: GLOBALISATION & GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

INTRODUCTION

The primary aim of this module is to examine issues of a global nature including the meaning of globalisation, environmental awareness, effects of trade, ethical trade and workers' rights. It also attempts to assess and determine the impact of developments on workers, the environment and other aspects of life and society.

AIMS:

This module aims to:

- ↘ examine the effects of globalisation on people and society;
- ↘ explore ways in which our actions impact on other people around the world;
- ↘ outline the role of international institutions; and
- ↘ encourage students to explore more deeply topics of interest, drawing their own conclusions and developing their own well-informed opinion.

MODULE LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

At the end of this module students will be able to:

- ↘ Form and articulate their own opinion on associated topics.
- ↘ Develop effective counter arguments.
- ↘ Respond, in an effective manner, to different views.
- ↘ Identify steps to be taken to support the work of trade unions and NGOs.
- ↘ Cite facts to support the need to eradicate all negative aspects of globalisation.
- ↘ Learn by experiencing different scenarios through activity based exercises.

GLOBALISATION

An introduction

There are as many definitions and explanations of globalisation as there are perspectives and opinions as to whether it is a positive or negative development. The basis of these definitions is usually derived from the sentiments and beliefs of the individual or organisation describing it. Suffice to say that globalisation will continue to be debated for some time to come.

Globalisation is often described as a process of interdependence between people and states worldwide and conveys the ease at which organisations and countries interact with each other. This interaction of economies around the world is constantly increasing through the expansion of international trade, investment and the flow of capital. The speed of change and interaction has greatly increased and been facilitated by the advance and sharing of communications, information technology and knowledge.

It is also about globalising economics, politics and culture and removing territorial boundaries, national economies, states and culture. Recent developments have included removing restrictions on the flow and movement of money, advances in IT and financial transactions moving money instantly, inside and outside national borders. Corporations are now multinational (MNCs) and transnational (TNCs) rather than national in ownership, location and workforce.

Globalisation has often been credited with opening up the world and being more inclusive. Again there is constant debate between whether this is a positive or negative thing. Is the aim of globalisation to equalise conditions and standards or drive them down? There is evidence to suggest the latter.

Globalisation is not a new phenomenon – people have always travelled the globe to buy and sell from each other, albeit not in the same volumes. Remember Marco Polo and Christopher Columbus, who aimed to discover new worlds with new products and new customers? Globalisation has been around for a long time with many commentators suggesting that the current wave of globalisation, experienced since the 1970s, is the third wave, the first being experienced in the time of the first industrial revolution of the 1800s.

Through globalisation the world has effectively become a smaller place. It has changed the face of capitalism and the speed at which it covers the globe. It has become more flexible and given to flight if certain conditions are not met, such as a flexible and non-assertive workforce. Nations and their workers live under the constant threat of companies moving to countries where workers have less options and often take the conditions which are offered to them rather than demand decent working conditions.

The effects and benefits of globalisation, however, tend to be uneven or disproportionate. The industrialised nations benefited from what is known in economic terms as “first mover advantage”. Already industrialised they were in a position to reap the benefits of early industrialisation. One example is the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) in 1995. WTO is supposed to facilitate world trade and development, in reality many decisions in WTO has strengthened the position of the industrialized countries. In the difficult negotiations on a new trade agreement in 2008 the International Trade Union Confederation called on the developed countries to end agricultural trade practices such as export subsidies that undermine production in developing countries, without making extreme demands on developing countries into giving up industrial potential. The trade union movement would like to see a focus on the development dimension of world trade. Both United States and the European Union have agreed on several bilateral trade agreements with countries in the global south. Many of these agreements favours the interests of US and the EU, who can negotiate from a “strong players” position. To date the developing world are paying through global warming and climate change. Although not responsible they, and following generations, will have to pay in financial, economic and environmental terms.

Be they positive or negative, issues surrounding globalisation include:

- Advances in communications and information technology.
- Improvements in business processes and workplace procedures.
- Corporate expansion.
- New technologies.

- ↳ Lowering employment standards and a race to the bottom.
- ↳ Faster and more extensive travel.
- ↳ Increased trade and the ability to move goods quickly around the globe.
- ↳ Larger divide between rich and poor.
- ↳ Environmental issues especially climate change and global warming..
- ↳ Trade issues and ethical trading.
- ↳ Broader range of goods and brands in more and more countries of the world.

Effect on workers

Globalisation impacts significantly on many aspects of our lives, in both a positive and negative way. For many globalisation means the benefit of increased communications, quicker travel and flexible money markets. For ordinary workers globalisation can mean something a lot starker, such as job insecurity, a race to the bottom of the wage pile and an erosion of minimum labour standards. Whilst workers in the developing world welcome new industries and opportunities for work, they rarely enjoy the same working conditions as their fellow workers in more industrialised nations.

The loss of jobs is often associated with globalisation. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the main arguments that the impact of globalisation is negative include the following:

- ↳ Multi-National Corporations (MNCs) have moved jobs from developed to developing countries through foreign investment and production in special economic zones, in some cases, free trade zones.
- ↳ Due to trade liberalisation, governments have encouraged the replacement of domestically produced goods with those produced abroad.
- ↳ The application of new technologies, especially for companies operating the global market, can reduce the use and dependence on labour.

However, not all institutions and commentators view globalisation as having a negative effect on workers. The International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World

Trade Organisation (WTO) would suggest that:

- ↳ globalisation contributes to growth, which is a key factor in increasing employment; and
- ↳ unemployment is created by the failure of governments to adopt sound macro-economic and labour policies.

As mentioned previously, how globalisation is perceived is generally derived from the ethos and principles of the particular organisation or the individual describing it.

Labour markets of industrialised nations have had to become more flexible to accommodate globalisation with new forms of work increasing, which are not always favourable to workers. Part-time and fixed-term working are now more common than ever, the former amongst women whilst more young people are found with fixed-term contracts than workers of previous generations.

Globalisation has had a significantly negative effect on wages. A report by the ILO in 2008 entitled “World of Work Report 2008: Income inequalities in the age of financial globalisation” indicates that income inequality is growing in many regions around the world with it expected to increase due to the recent financial crisis.

It also notes that:

“a major share of the cost of the financial and economic crisis will be borne by hundreds of millions of people who haven’t shared in the benefits of recent growth”.

For example, many of the garment workers in Bangladesh, India and China have extremely low salaries, sometimes only some cents per hour. The most common problem among garment workers in some factories in Bangladesh is malnutrition. The late Neil Kearney from Donegal, who was the General Secretary of International Textile Garment and Leather Workers Federation (ITGLWF) 1988-2009, said: “We need to be clear. No one working in garment export industry should be paid so little that they can’t afford to feed themselves.

Globalisation continues to gather pace and has significantly increased its scope in the last 30 years. Workers are told more and more that there is no alternative to globalisation and a more closely connected world is unavoidable. Workers are more closely linked than ever before in terms of welfare and consumerism

and those who don't embrace it lose out. The actions and choices taken in Ireland will have repercussions and consequences for workers elsewhere.

At times it appears that globalisation advocates "survival of the fittest". The world bank would suggest that globalisation and economic integration hold positive aspects for workers and their countries who have the capacity to respond to its demands.

But what about those who don't have the capacity to respond? What about those who are most vulnerable in our society? Will globalisation just leave them behind? Are we expected to leave them behind? What can be done? What **should** be done?

Globalisation is also creating what some call a global labour market where countries offer the services of their workers at "knockdown prices". When competitiveness is the problem, cutting the working wage is the solution. Countries are also put under pressure to privatise public services such as healthcare, water treatment and education.

Global solidarity

But what can be done to combat these problems? What mechanisms can be put in place to address the problems for workers at a global level?

Global solidarity is crucial in supporting the struggle to achieve better working conditions and ensuring workers' rights are adhered to. There are a number of institutions which operate at international level dealing with labour and workers' issues. These institutions range from the International Labour Organisation (ILO), a tripartite body which is responsible for setting international labour standards, to international trade unions and Global Union Federations.

Congress has developed its own Global Solidarity programme with support and funding of Irish Aid. The goal of Irish Aid is to contribute towards the achievement of the international development targets to halve the proportion of the world's population living in abject poverty by 2015. Irish Aid has also demonstrated through the development of the relationship with Congress that partnerships with

trade unions can strengthen poverty reduction efforts, while simultaneously strengthening union organisation in developing countries.

The aim of the ICTU Global Solidarity programme is to equip the Trade Union movement with the knowledge and skills:

- to raise awareness of the causes of exploitation, inequality, poverty and climate change amongst our members, by creating our own Trade Union development education in Ireland; and
- to strengthen Congress' and the affiliated unions' international solidarity work.

In these times of worldwide recession international trade union solidarity is more important than ever. It is the key to progressive change for equality and justice in our world.

One of the main objectives of the international labour movement is to establish common labour standards to ensure that workers' rights and wages are not bargained with to gain competitive advantage. International competition in business and finance consistently fails to respect labour standards. Workers around the world have been put into competition with each other, which undermines the benefits won by the labour movement in the past. At the moment it is a challenge to put national protections, which some workers enjoy, into the international arena.

The global labour movement is attempting to deal with these issues and more. Global solidarity is about helping workers in crisis situations, providing mutual support, assistance, sharing information about employers with trade unions from abroad, and ensuring that economic wealth is distributed more fairly whilst not compromising workers' basic rights and entitlements.

In 1998, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) adopted the Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work. This says that certain rights are so fundamental that they apply to all workers, irrespective of whether or not their governments have signed up to the relevant Conventions, and no matter how rich or poor their country is. They are called the 'core labour

standards'. They are:

- the right to form trade unions ('freedom of association');
- the right to effective collective bargaining between workers and management;
- freedom from forced or compulsory labour;
- an end to child labour; and
- freedom from discrimination in the workplace.

All ILO member states are obliged to promote and realise these fundamental rights. It is clear, however, that many governments are ignoring their duties. They are instead undermining workers' fundamental rights in the interests of attracting investors in the global economy.

Core labour standards are basic human rights that help people break out of the poverty trap. They are the building blocks of democracy, and crucial to the empowerment of working people, especially the poor and marginalised. The ILO examines how governments are putting the standards into practice through legislation and activities. It can shame governments in the eyes of the international community. In the end, though, the ILO can only persuade governments; it cannot force them.

Countries, like Colombia, have ratified many of ILO's Conventions, including freedom of association, yet it is the most dangerous country on earth for trade unionists.

The International Trade Union Confederation's Annual Survey of Trade Union Rights has documented a dramatic increase in the number of trade unionists murdered in 2009, with 101 killings throughout the world – an increase of 30 per cent over the previous year. Of 101 murdered, 48 were killed in Colombia. Twenty-two of the Colombian trade unionists who were killed were senior trade union leaders and five were women, as the onslaught of previous years continued. Colombia was yet again the country where standing up for fundamental rights of workers is more likely than anywhere else to mean a death sentence, despite the Colombian government's public relations campaign to the contrary. Solidarity with the trade union movement in Colombia is high up on ICTU Global Solidarity's agenda. In 2008 Global Solidarity took the initiative to establish

an Irish branch of the trade union network Justice For Colombia, which has developed several concrete solidarity activities since then.

It has long been established by the trade union movement that productive employment and decent work are crucial elements in the fight against poverty. In 1999 the ILO established the Decent Work Agenda. In September 2005 in the final outcome statement of the UN World Summit, 150 leaders agreed to place productive employment and decent work as a central objective of their policies. In order to ensure they live up to that statement the "Decent Work Decent Life" campaign was born. If the Decent Work principles were respected all over the world, it would also ensure that United Nations' Millenium Development Goals would be reached.

This Decent Work campaign is led by the International Trade Union Confederation, Solidar, the Global Progressive Forum, Social Alert International and the European Trade Union Confederation.

Decent work is about ensuring that workers have the right:

- to work;
- to good working conditions; and
- to sufficient income to meet their basic economic, social and family needs.

These should be enforced through the provision of adequate wages.

It is also about securing the rights of workers, which we all come to expect, such as the right to form and join trade unions, to bargain collectively with an employer and for workers to have their human rights respected.

Access to social protection is a significant element of a decent wage and ensuring all workers have access to unemployment benefits, pensions, social security and maternity benefits is crucial to ensuring they can meet their basic needs in times of crisis.

For more information on this campaign and the World Day of Decent Work, log onto www.wddw.org, www.decentwork.org or www.decentworkcheck.org

Other useful links include:

- ICTU Global Solidarity: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity
- Irish Aid: www.irishaid.gov.ie
- UNDP's Millenium Development Goals (monitor): www.mdgmonitor.org
- International Labour Organisation (ILO): www.ilo.org
- International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC): www.ituc-csi.org
- Global Unions: www.global-unions.org
- International Textile Garment & Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF): www.itglwf.org
- Justice For Colombia: www.justiceforcolombia.org
- Solidar: www.solidar.org
- "Labour Start" website for International Trade Union Solidarity: www.labourstart.org
- New Internationalist – magazine for global justice: www.newint.org
- Realizing rights – the Ethical Globalization initiative (Mary Robinson): www.realizingrights.org

CHILD LABOUR

An introduction

Protecting children is an essential part of achieving social justice and it is important for the future of each individual child that their health, education and lives are not put at risk.

Child labour is unacceptable to any progressive society but unfortunately it still exists and remains a scourge in many parts of the world.

Even today in many countries of the world children are forced to work, sometimes in harsh and even dangerous conditions. Those who are forced to work don't attend school or participate in recreational activities such as football, swimming, music lessons etc. There are many reasons why children are forced to work but they are mainly for economic gain.

Child labour has many faces. It is the faces of:

- Children as young as eight who are sent underground to dig in mines.
- Children sold into bonded labour to help pay off family debts.
- Boys and girls sent by their poor families to do back-breaking agricultural work.
- Girls toiling long hours as domestic workers.
- Sexually exploited children who are so traumatised that they may never return to a normal way of life.

Figures on child labour are very difficult to ascertain but they are estimated as the following by the ILO:

- Of the 250 million children between the ages of five and 14 working around the world, 120 million of them work full-time.
- In 2004 the number in hazardous work, which accounts for the bulk of the worst forms of child labour, is stated to be 126 million.
- In sub-Saharan Africa 41 per cent of all children work.
- In Asia and Latin America approximately 21 per cent of all children work.

- Asia has the largest number, in absolute terms, of child labourers, which accounts for 61 per cent of the world's total.
- Thirty-two per cent of child labourers are in Africa.
- Seven per cent of child labourers are in Latin America.
- Between 14 and 17 per cent of children around the world who don't attend school are working 49 hours per week or more.
- Between 11 and 13 per cent are working 56 hours or more per week.
- In some areas, up to 20 per cent of economically active children are under the age of 10.
- Sixty-nine per cent of working children are involved in agriculture compared with only nine per cent in industry.

(Adapted from ITUC Child Labour Action Guide)

Since this report, figures are said to have decreased. Find out more by checking out the up-to-date figures on the following websites www.ilo.org/global/themes/child_labour or www.un.org

What is child labour?

Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child defines a child as anyone below the age of 18. "Child labour" is often defined as work that deprives children of their childhood, their potential and their dignity, and that is harmful to physical and mental development.

It refers to work that:

- is mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous and harmful to children; and/or
- interferes with their schooling by: depriving them of the opportunity to attend school, obliging them to leave school prematurely or requiring them to attempt to combine school attendance with excessively long and heavy work.

Whether or not particular forms of "work" can be called "child labour" depends on the child's age, the type and hours of work performed, the conditions under which the work is performed and the objectives pursued by the individual. The answer varies from country to country, as well as among sectors within countries.

Forms of child labour

Child labour exists in many forms. Sometimes it can be easily observed and sometimes it is hidden from your view. Here is a list of different forms of child labour that includes some of the most widespread and worst forms.

Domestic work: Very common and sometimes seen as acceptable, it happens in or outside the family home. When domestic work is outside the home, children, almost always girls, work very long hours, have no chance to go to school and are isolated from their family and friends.

Agricultural work: A lot of working children are found in agriculture. They often work on the family farm or with the whole family, as a unit, for an employer.

Work in industries: This work can be regular or casual, legal or illegal, as part of the family or by the child on his own for an employer. It includes carpet weaving, gemstone polishing, making garments, chemicals, glassware, fireworks, matches or a range of other products. These tasks expose the children to hazardous chemicals that can lead to poisoning, respiratory and skin diseases, radiant heat, fire and explosions, eyesight and hearing damage, cuts, burns and even death.

Work in mines and quarries: Child labour is used in small-scale mines in many countries. They work long hours without adequate protection and training. Child miners suffer from physical strain, fatigue and disorders of the muscular and skeletal systems.

Slavery and forced labour: It is most commonly found in rural areas. It is also frequently linked to the oppression of ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples. Children are often also drawn into armed conflict, forced to be soldiers or to work for armed forces.

Prostitution and child trafficking: It is one of the worst forms of child labour. The dangers faced by children are extreme and range from moral corruption to sexually transmitted diseases to death.

Work in the informal economy: This includes a whole range of activities such as shoe cleaning, begging, pulling rickshaws, selling newspapers

or collecting rubbish. Some forms are very easily observed while others are hidden from public view. Activities often take place on the streets but also include domestic work.

All around the world, trade unions and NGOs have mobilised people to protest against child labour. The Global March Against Child Labour is probably the most important movement on this issue. It began with a worldwide march when thousands of people marched together to jointly put forth the message against child labour. The march, which started on January 17, 1998, touched every corner of the globe, built immense awareness and led to high levels of participation. This march finally culminated at the ILO Conference in Geneva. The voice of the marchers was heard and reflected in the draft of the ILO Convention against the worst forms of child labour. The following year, the Convention was unanimously adopted at the ILO Conference in Geneva. Today, with 171 countries having ratified so far, it has become the fastest ratified convention in the history of ILO.

The International Trade Union Confederation is closely linking its work in the Global March Against Child Labour and the newly-emerging Global Trade Union Alliance to Combat Forced Labour and Trafficking. ICTU Global Solidarity is a member of the Irish Task Force against Child Labour, also including many important development NGOs.

Additional information on this and related topics can be found at www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity, www.youth-connect.ie or www.ilo.org

Global March against Child Labour: www.globalmarch.org

Global Campaign For Education: www.campaignforeducation.ie

Anti Slavery International: www.antislavery.org

UNICEF: www.unicef.org

ICTU Global Solidarity: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC): www.ituc-csi.org

JUST TRADE & BUSINESS

Ethical Trading

Globalisation has made it easier for companies to use different suppliers from around the world and move their manufacturing plants to countries which are often described as a “low cost base”. In reality however they are under-developed and their citizens experience severe poverty. Modern supply chains are huge, span the globe and are difficult to track.

Workers around the world who produce articles for our consumption, such as clothes, toys and sports goods, are often subjected to systematic abuses in the workplace. They often endure horrific conditions such as:

- ↳ forced to work for their employer (bonded or slave labour);
- ↳ children forced into employment as young as five years old (child labour);
- ↳ loss of life due to hazardous work and lack of safe work practices;
- ↳ losing their jobs for trying to improve their working conditions;
- ↳ meagre wages (many live on less than \$2 per day), which reinforces poverty as parents are forced to send their children to work (lack of a living wage);
- ↳ excessive working hours (12 to 14 hour shifts);
- ↳ job insecurity; and
- ↳ little or no protection against physical or sexual abuse.

Unfortunately many companies, familiar to us in Ireland, are associated with such suppliers and when we purchase those products we are unknowingly complicit in this abuse.

When companies source their products globally, it is important that they take responsibility and ensure that their suppliers are not only cost-effective but observe international best practice and afford workers the conditions to which they are entitled.

Many global trade unions, international labour organisations and NGOs seek companies to adopt the principles of an ethical company.

What exactly does it mean to be ethical?

Ethics are defined as a system of principles, rules or standards dealing with values relating to our conduct, with respect to whether actions are right or wrong. Ethical means to act in a way pertaining to certain principles and the standards of which are considered good practice.

The elements of ethical trading are based on the principles of decent work, a living wage and ensuring workers' rights are not breached.

Ethical trade is about organisations, retailers or brands making a decision to take responsibility for their products or services. This responsibility entails becoming more environmentally aware and ensuring materials are from sustainable resources but also significantly commits to improving the working conditions of people who make these products.

The supply chain is an important element of business, particularly in an increasingly globalised world. An organisation sits between the supplier and the customer and it is important that organisations can trust their supplier on a number of levels, such as efficiency, timeliness and cost. Supply chains have significant impacts at different levels, both globally, but more importantly locally, in the source country.

In the world of MNCs, global supply chains and outsourcing, companies look for efficient suppliers who support their vision, policies and values. For example, in the case of an organisation who pride themselves on their corporate social responsibility and ethics (perhaps also as a way of attracting customers), it is important that their suppliers are ethically responsible, eco-friendly and observe labour standards.

It is up to us as consumers to demand good labour standards.

Where our consumables come from, the conditions under which they are made and whether workers earn a decent and living wage should be as important as ensuring that the materials are from sustainable sources and are eco-friendly. What we buy has a

direct impact on those who produce it. There are a number of actions that companies should and must take to improve the conditions of workers.

Companies should be encouraged to:

- Adopt an "Ethical Code of Conduct".
- The code should be based on rights contained in:
 - ILO Declaration of Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
 - ILO conventions and recommendations; and
 - UN Declaration of Human Rights.
- Ensure suppliers operate within international best practice, observe international labour standards, fundamental rights and core conventions laid out by the International Labour Organisation (ILO).
- Consult with stakeholders, such as trade unions, the workers, NGOs and business organisations in the supplying country, to improve working standards and conditions.
- Provide a list of standards that all their suppliers should be persuaded to comply with.
- Outline the complaints procedure including how problems are identified and how they will be resolved.
- Develop monitoring and review procedures to ensure the code and procedures are being adhered to.

Clean Clothes Campaign

The Clean Clothes Campaign exists in 15 European countries. An Irish branch of the Clean Clothes Campaign (CCC) was launched in October 2010. The Irish branch was established by ICTU Global Solidarity, the retail workers' union Mandate, the Ethical Fashion group Re-Dress and the two development NGOs: Trócaire and Comhlámh. Many individual members have also joined the activities of CCC.

The CCC is dedicated to improve working conditions and supporting the empowerment of workers in the garment and sportswear industry in the global south. CCC is focused on educating and mobilising consumers. When consumers demand that their clothes and sportswear is produced under decent work conditions,

things can start to change. The role of consumers is crucial; the public has a right to know where and how their garments and sports shoes are produced.

CCC is lobbying companies and governments, asking them to respect workers' rights. Direct solidarity with garment workers and their trade unions is also a part of CCC's important activities. All garment workers, regardless of sex, age, country of origin, legal status, employment status or location, have a right to good and safe working conditions and earn a living wage, which allows them to live in dignity. CCC takes action to see that workers' rights are respected. However, the CCC does not generally endorse boycotts as a tool for action.

The existence of CCC emphasises the positive results that can be achieved by working together with other progressive organisations. All organisations have their own identity which enriches the process when building a network organisation like the Clean Clothes Campaign.

ICTU Global Solidarity: www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity

Clean Clothes Campaign: www.cleanclothes.org

Ethical Trading Initiative: www.ethicaltrade.org

International Textile Garment & Leather Workers' Federation (ITGLWF): www.itglwf.org

RESPONSIBILITY IN BUSINESS

In this globalised world, companies and organisations are taking advantage and going global as Multinational or Transnational Corporations (MNCs and TNCs respectively). Unfortunately what is to their advantage can spell disaster for workers. The numbers of working poor around the world has increased rather than decreased.

The scale of these corporate operations gives unequalled competitive power with some companies growing larger than national economies. Many have abused their position by driving down or offering less than world market prices to small producers and exploiting local working populations. Well known brands such as Disney, Nike, Coca-Cola, GAP and Starbucks have all been guilty of such behaviour and have come in for criticism from trade unions and consumers. Many corporations act as if they are above the law and consistently flout international labour standards, denying all knowledge and blaming local manufacturers or suppliers when caught.

Globalisation has opened our economy and market place to products from countries where workers are consistently abused, exploited, denied their rights and forced to live in primitive conditions. We, as consumers, must communicate with these organisations, through our purchasing power, that we will not tolerate these sort of practices. Corporations need to take responsibility for their actions and not just their profits. Governments need to ensure that businesses are held to account.

According to the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), "the demand that business do more is not as important as the demand that governments make business more accountable". This in no way indicates that businesses have no social responsibilities. In their publication "A Trade Union Guide to Globalisation" the roles and responsibilities of both government and business are outlined, some of which is contained in the following sections.

Social responsibilities of business

The social responsibilities of business outlines what society wants business to do and contain principles outlining organisational behaviour. It recognises their responsibility for the impact of their decisions on workers, the environment, the community, wider society and other countries. It is about concern for and recognition of the public interest and eliminating harmful practices.

Social responsibilities can be enforced by law or non-binding agreements, the former of which are formally set out in the laws and regulations of states. It is important that there are binding rules concerning business behaviour as “there is not always a business case for responsible behaviour”.

In the international arena, non-binding but universally applicable instruments setting out the expectations with regard to business and its responsibilities are “OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises”, “ILO Tripartite Declaration of Principles concerning Multinational Enterprises and Social Policy”. More information on this and related topics can be found at www.ilo.org and www.oecd.org

Corporate Governance

Business needs to be accountable but governments also need to ensure that organisations can't escape into the mists of the international arena. With no global or world government, it is important that national governments live up to their obligations and regulatory role and ensure contracts are honoured, labour standards are upheld, the environment is protected and both worker and human rights are enforced.

The ways in which governments can ensure business is held to account is through direct regulation obliging business to behave in a particular way and establishing a legal framework within which business activity takes place. The most important of these is the corporate governance framework. This includes ensuring

corporations are internally managed correctly, external interests are protected, their activities are consistent with the laws under which it is established or permitted to operate and disclosure of information. The disclosure element calls for the public reporting of financial information and ensuring a balance of power exists between executive and non-executive directors.

In 2004, the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation & Development) and the World Bank agreed the Principles of Corporate Governance, which are seen as the international benchmark for policy makers, investors and corporations worldwide. For more information on these guidelines go to www.oecd.org

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

CSR is defined as “a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.

A voluntary concept, it is concerned with what business does and what it wants to do. This should not be confused with the social responsibilities of business which may be legally binding, nor substituted for government regulation of business.

As a form of governance in business there are a number of international standards set by the OECD and the ILO. While CSR may have some admirable qualities it is often criticised for its motivation. Businesses tend to get involved, not because it may benefit society or workers but if a hard business case can be made. Adopting CSR is credited with improving the public image of companies and increasing its customer base.

For many it has become a public relations exercise and for the international trade union movement there is scepticism that CSR may reinterpret or redefine existing obligations and responsibilities. For example, the responsibility to have good industrial relations or the benefits to society of collective bargaining are rarely, if ever, mentioned.

There are a diverse range of topics covered by CSR such as environmental concerns regarding emissions and pollution or discrimination. Of primary concern to trade unions is to achieve good quality industrial relations and ensure organisations uphold collective agreements and contracts of employment. Those who don't shouldn't be considered socially responsible.

ICTU has engaged with Irish Business on Ethical Trading. Delegations from Congress have, for example, met with the board of Penneys and discussed Ethical Trading and trade union rights. Global Solidarity has been represented at Ethical Trading Initiatives and has also published the booklet "Corporate Social Responsibility – a guide for trade unionists".

For more information on CSR and trade unions go to www.youth-connect.ie

ICTU Global Solidarity : www.ictu.ie/globalsolidarity (click on "publications")

Fair trade

Not all trade is fair and often farmers and small producers at grassroots level don't get a fair benefit of trade exchanges. As mentioned in previous sections, the power of the global corporation has enabled it to squeeze local sources and suppliers to reduce costs and standards below what we, in the developed world, expect.

Fair trade is about addressing the imbalance of power and the disproportionate trade benefits which larger corporations and brands receive. It is about creating a relationship between consumers and producers, where producers earn more to enhance their lives and consumers use their purchasing power and shopping choices to raise awareness along with standards and prices.

Fair trade organisations

Fair trade organisations seek greater equity and balance in international trade which doesn't give small producers from the developing world a fair deal. There are many organisations which promote and support such small producers like World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) which has a global reach, operating in more than 70 countries of the world.

The aim of fair trade and in particular the WFTO is to:

- enable producers to receive better payment for their produce thereby improving their livelihoods;
- eliminate poverty through sustainable economic development;
- pioneering social and environmental policy; and
- reinvestment in marginal artisans, farmers and producers in some of the most vulnerable areas of the world.

In order to be certified as a fair trade organisation, there are standards which must be upheld throughout the organisations' day-to-day work. The WFTO has developed both a code of practice and 10 principles of fair trade which are listed below:

- creating opportunities for economically disadvantaged producers;
- transparency and accountability;
- fair trading practices;
- payment of a fair price;
- no child labour and forced labour;
- decent working conditions;
- non-discrimination, gender equality and freedom of association;
- capacity building;
- promotion of fair trade; and
- environmental considerations.

Fair trade labelling

FLO or Fairtrade Labelling Organisations International (FLO) is responsible for labelling fair trade products at international level and is part of a worldwide network of fair trade organisations. This organisation:

- sets fair trade standards;
- supports fair trade producers around the world;
- develops a global fair trade strategy; and
- promotes trade justice internationally.

Fairtrade Mark Ireland is a member of FLO.

According to Fairtrade Mark Ireland, fair trade is about better prices, decent working conditions, local sustainability and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. The aim of the fair trade movement is to eliminate, or at least significantly reduce, the injustices of conventional trade, which tends to discriminate against poor, marginalised and weak producers.

When a product carries the Fairtrade mark it means producers and traders have met the standards set by the international fair trade movement. The standards which are set aim to address:

- the imbalance of power in trading relationships;
- unstable markets; and
- injustices of conventional trade.

In practical terms, fair trade means:

- prices for producers that cover the costs of sustainable production;
- an additional fair trade premium;
- advance credit;
- longer term trade relationships; and
- decent working conditions for labour.

ICTU Global Solidarity is also engaged in the Fair Trade issues and has mobilised the trade union movement in support of the Fair Trade annual campaign fortnights in February/March. Global Solidarity published in 2009 the booklet “Ethical Consumerism – a guide for trade unions”, which gives an analysis and overview of important Ethical Consumer issues (www.ictu.ie/download/pdf/ethical_consumer_guide_ictu.pdf)

Fairtrade Mark Ireland: www.fairtrade.ie

Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO): www.fairtrade.net

Banana Link – working towards a fair and sustainable banana trade: www.bananalink.org.uk

THE ENVIRONMENT

The environment is a significant part of all our lives. We live in it, breathe it, work with it, use its resources to survive and to shelter us. However, throughout the development of humanity and society, we have damaged it, not irreparable at present, but significantly enough to create climate change, such as higher temperatures, resulting in drought, bushfires, failing harvests and increased rainfall resulting in flooding homes and farmland, mudslides and crops being washed away.

In the past century the earth has warmed up by, some suggest, as much as 1°F. This is due to our behaviour, burning fossil fuels, greenhouse gas emissions and generally mishandling of the world’s resources.

Mary Robinson said that “climate change is the greatest challenge of our time”. The historic responsibility for climate change lies with richer industrialised nations. All countries have to contribute, but some countries are more to blame than others. For example, the USA’s greenhouse gas emissions reaches 24 tonnes carbon per person per year, Ireland 17.5 tonnes, Sweden 7.4 tonnes, China 3.9 tonnes, and Malawi 0.7 tonnes.

The poorest people are the least responsible for the problem but they have to pay the highest price. Already 250 million people are directly affected by the climate change in the global south. Droughts are increasing especially in Africa. Already now 150,000 people die every year due to climate change effects. It can very soon become much worse. The climate change issue is therefore also human rights, a development and a social justice issue.

The UN process to combat climate change started in Rio 1992. It was followed by the Kyoto protocol which binds industrial countries to reduce greenhouse gas emissions until 2012. USA (President Bush) did not sign the Kyoto protocol. President Obama does recognise the climate change issue but has to fight a strong anti climate change lobby in the USA. It is absolutely vital to reach a new binding agreement which is fair and adequate. There is a critical role for trade unions to play in this area.

The International Trade Union movement has deepened their understanding and commitment on climate change in the last few years.

At the International Trade Union Confederation's Congress in 2010, the trade unions of the world agreed on a resolution that establishes policies on the need for ambitious emission reductions in developed countries, for sufficient funding to be allocated to help the poorest of the world to adapt to climate change, and for developing countries not to repeat the mistakes of the past but to engage instead in a different development path, so as to help build the low carbon, climate resilient and socially-fair world we need.

A fundamental role of trade unions is to be aware of all of the issues which affect workers, their lives, their livelihoods and their families. Important for trade unions is poverty reduction, environmental protection and decent work, and the links between all three must be strengthened. Trade unions also suggest that failing to recognise environmental threats, damage and developing eco-solutions will have massive social costs creating further inequalities.

Each citizen's ecological footprint says a lot about our society. All research on this highlights class differences in society. High income owners and wealthy people have a much bigger ecological footprint than people on low incomes. A discussion on these issues will clarify the need of a 'fairer deal'. Efficient measures to reduce the green house gas emissions will contribute to a more just and socially fair economy.

The environment is an issue of utmost importance to every human being on the planet. Trade unions can help to start dialogue on the social aspects of sustainable development whilst contributing to economic and environmental decisions.

Workplaces are at the centre of production and consumption and for certain industries are very heavy consumers of energy and producers of waste. The workplace is as good a place as any to start raising environmental issues, changing production methods and consumption patterns.

Many trade unions have responded to the threat of global warming and climate change by actively promoting sustainable policies in the workplace and advocating the creation of 'green jobs'. By creating greener jobs, becoming more energy efficient, securing energy savings and recycling employers can save money and therefore sustain their businesses thus providing stable employment opportunities in difficult economic climates.

According to the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) there is evidence that environmental protection creates jobs in Europe. Estimates by the European Commission suggest that 4.4 million people are employed in eco-industries and industries dependent on a good quality environment – this equates to three per cent of total employment. However, it is also a concern that the jobs which are created in eco-industry or "green jobs" are good quality jobs, with a decent wage and adhere to labour standards.

More information on this and related issues can be found at www.youth-connect.ie

Additional resources:

A number of organisations provide up-to-date information, resources and how to get involved in their campaigns. The following links may be useful when exploring these areas further:

The clean clothes campaign fights to improve working conditions in the global garment industry. www.cleanclothes.org

Fashioning an ethical industry is an education programme which works with teachers and students of fashion to provide an overview of how the fashion industry positively and negatively impacts on working conditions in garment manufacture and to help raise standards for garment workers in the future. www.fashioninganethicalindustry.org

Re-dress is a website containing information on the fashion industry and how it can become more ethical and sustainable. www.re-dress.ie

Fairtrade Advocacy Office co-ordinates advocacy activities of the four main fair trade networks (FLO, WFTO, NEWS and EFTA). It also monitors trade development policies and encourages dialogue between the fair trade movement and policy makers.
www.fairtrade-advocacy.org

World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) is a global authority on fair trade made up of members who have demonstrated a 100 per cent commitment to fair trade.
www.wfto.com

Fairtrade Labelling Organisation International (FLO) sets international fair trade standards and supports fair trade producers. **www.fair-trade.net**

Network of European World Shops (NEWS) aims to influence policy at European level to develop a common position on fair trade issues. **www.worldshops.org**

SustainLabour, the international labour foundation for sustainable development, wishes to involve trade unions in environmental discussions and integrate labour into the environmental agenda.
www.sustainlabour.org

For further information on these and related topics go to www.youth-connect.ie

International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC):
www.ituc-csi.org

Stop Climate Chaos Coalition:
www.stopclimatechaos.ie

Environmental Protection Agency (EPA):
www.epa.ie

Climate Change Ireland: **www.climatechange.ie**