# Creating and Fixing Quality Relationships in the Organic Producer to Consumer Chain: From Madagascar to Germany

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## Abstract

How can quality relationships with the world be conceptualised, created and captured? This is the question the author is in the process of exploring. The field of analysis is producer-consumer relationships in organic agriculture. It is argued in this paper that the human observer is <u>free to create meaning in their world</u> rather than have to search for purpose. This is fundamental. We are in the position to establish our own relationship to phenomena and, consequent upon this, to establish our ethical behaviour in the real world. This relationship is not restricted to the merely necessary, it goes much further. Human beings can determine their <u>personal responsibility</u> for the quality of that relationship. This is surely astonishing, for it endows us with huge power and creative potential.

The producer-consumer relationship in organic agriculture is impoverished. Although producers and consumers are linked by a physical organic product, potatoes for example, the broken-up nature of the production chain means that consumers and producers tend to inhabit different 'realities' with little knowledge of each others' lives and aspirations. This is all the more so when the material commodity chain spans continents. People in the chain lack physical presence for one another: they exist in the realm of ideas.

This paper presents research with organic smallholders and plantation workers in Madagascar, and with organic consumers in Germany. The aim is to see how rich pictures created through use of a quality of life toolkit with farmers can inform both social certification initiatives in organic agriculture, and social labels attached to organic produce.

How can quality relationships with the world be conceptualised, created and captured? This is the question the author is in the process of exploring. The field of analysis is producer-consumer relationships in organic agriculture. In part one of this paper the concept of a quality relationship with 'the world' is presented. In part two an overview of the study domains is given. These are (1) social certification in organic agriculture, (2) the development of a quality of life toolkit to capture well-being among smallholders and plantation workers, and (3) the development of a social label for organic produce. In part three some theoretical considerations pertaining to quality of life toolkits are introduced. The methods used to acquire data in Madagascar are outlined. Part four follows the same pattern for discussing social labels and the fiedlwork in Germany. In part five selected research findings from both study sites are presented. The conclusion brings these strands together .[1]

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[1] The arguments presented here are discussed in greater depth in the author's doctoral thesis and other papers. Please contact Ms Farnworth if you would like more details.

**Part One: The Concept of a Quality Relationship to the World**

Human beings exist in an ever-creating world. Like our fellow creatures human beings are not simply made. They participate in a process of co-creation, in a perpetual interaction which makes the world different to what it was yesterday. It is increasingly accepted that non-human animals shape the world through building physical structures, through behaviour derived from instinct and also – for some species, a degree of formal reasoning and goal-orientated behaviour (see Gould and Gould, 1999, for evidence of this). However this paper proposes that human beings create in a specific and unique way, namely through actively seeking to develop and fix a <u>qualitative relationship</u> to the world.

It has been suggested that the *'Copernican revolution led to a denial of the view that the universe had been created for humans; humans no longer had unique status in the cosmos'* (Wye College/Open University, 1997).  That is to say, they were disempowered. This is a rather disingenuous comment. When humans were dislodged from a pre-ordained place in the 'great chain of being' they were set free to make their world. This is very empowering. The 'sun-centred theory' (ibid.) not only enabled scientists from Galileo onwards to scramble free of religious stricture; it also led to the slow end of the idea of trying to decipher pre-determined purpose in the world[2].

When Descartes said, 'I think, therefore I am,' he meant that the only thing of which one can be sure is that 'I' exist (see Descartes 1970 for his exposition on doubt). He even argues, *'it may be a pious thought to believe that God made all things for us ... it is yet by no means probable'* (Descartes, 1853: 111)[3]. Descartes' doubt helped lead to a later understanding that human beings (and all creatures) pattern the world continuously as they process signals from it in a manner significant to each organism. Unique among animals however, human beings have come to realise that they <u>ascribe meaning</u> to the world. The world is out there, but the truth is not. Maturana and Varala (1987, in Capra 1997) do not assert that 'nothing exists', but rather that 'no things exist' independent of the process of cognition – the map making itself brings forth the features of the territory. Since individual organisms within a species have a similar structure, they bring forth similar worlds. Maturana and Verala further argue that, by virtue of their abstract world of language and thought, humans can bring forth their worlds together.

The understanding that the human observer is <u>free to create meaning in their world</u> rather than have to search for purpose is fundamental. We are now in the position to establish our own relationship to phenomena and, consequent upon this, to establish our ethical behaviour in the real world. This relationship is not restricted to the merely necessary, it goes much further. Human beings can determine their <u>personal responsibility</u> for the quality of that relationship. This is surely astonishing, for it endows us with huge power and creative potential.

**Part Two: Overview of the Study Domains - The Producer-Consumer Relationship in Organic Agriculture**

Based upon the arguments above, the author makes four key assumptions:
1. We are able to think about the kind of relationship we want to have with the world.
2. This relationship can be ethical in character (as well as being aesthetic, for instance).

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[2]  Though creationists and a few other groupings still seek pre-determined purpose.

[3]  The author is not suggesting that Descartes did not believe in God.

3. We can take responsibility for the effective working of that relationship.
4. We try to seek coherence between what we think about the world and how we act in the world.

The producer-consumer relationship in organic agriculture is impoverished. Although producers and consumers are linked by a physical organic product, potatoes for example, the broken-up nature of the production chain means that consumers and producers tend to inhabit different 'realities' with little knowledge of each others' lives and aspirations. This is all the more so when the material commodity chain spans continents. People in the chain lack physical presence for one another: they exist in the realm of ideas.

Farmers' markets in the North[4] are seeking to re-connect these two stakeholders in organic agriculture through shortening the production chain. However, enriching relationships between Northern consumers and Southern producers scarcely exist. Why does this matter? One reason is that northern consumers who want to translate their ethical views into effective purchasing action find their room for manoevre limited. The information flow from the producer is limited and mediated by other stakeholders in the food chain, rendering the platform upon which ethical decisions are made by the consumer shaky and open to question. Southern producers likewise tend to lack effective decision-making power with respect to market values, and often have little understanding of consumers. A finely-textured qualitative relationship cannot be created or thrive in these circumstances.

In order to develop an enriched understanding of the concept of quality relationships, the author decided to study - and help co-create to differing degrees - three initiatives to develop quality relationships and the structures necessary for their maintenance in the real world. These are:
1. Social certification in organic agriculture.
2. The development of a quality of life toolkit to develop and capture criteria for well-being among organic smallholders and plantation workers.
3. The development of a social label to enable organic consumers to reward 'more than purely price' values in the marketplace.

Clearly each of these initiatives, or domains, is wrought with tension and contradiction – they are not neat packages but rather bubbling cauldrons of contested meanings and unequal power relations. The first aim of the study was therefore to unpack each initiative and, by thinking through some of the key issues, contribute to a clarification of the debates in each domain.

Domain 1: *'Social certification in organic agriculture'*, existed prior to the author's study. A number of actors, including the Soil Association (the leading organic certifier in the UK) and IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) have recently started examining how to certify the production chain not only for its organic properties, but also for its contribution to producer well-being. The author suggests, on the basis of her study, that important aspects of producer well-being are not being captured by current initiatives.

For Domain 2: *'The development of a quality of life toolkit to develop and capture criteria for well-being among organic smallholders and plantation workers'*, the author developed and piloted a quality of life toolkit in Madagascar. The first objective was to assess the toolkit's ability to assess producer well-

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4    Here the terms South and North refer to entities elsewhere defined as developing and developed countries, third and first world or majority and minority world. The choice of the terms South/North seeks to avoid notions of superiority and inferiority, being more conceptual than geographical in nature. They remain problematic however, for instance rendering invisible substantial numbers of indigenous peoples in areas like Australia, always defined as North. The history of the South has been very different to that of the North, this is why it is preferable to analyse the two seperately.

being, thus providing a new method for social certification in organic agriculture. The second objective was to contribute to improved producer-consumer relationships through providing information for social labels. The toolkit was developed and tested in Madagascar with organic smallholders and plantation workers.

With respect to Domain 3: *'The development of a social label to enable organic consumers to reward 'more than purely price' values in the marketplace'*, the author developed the concept of a social label. This is a 'fair trade plus' label. A social label would move beyond the levy of financial premiums on Southern products in order to support community projects - the norm in fair trade. Instead (or in addition) attention would be paid to other values and aspirations producers hold, the aim being to ensure that these are supported, rather than eroded, through production for the Northern market. An important feature of the label would be its ability to acknowledge and build upon the ethical values held by the consumer. Indeed, a central selling point of such a label would be its dynamic character. It should evolve as quality of life aspirations among organic producers and consumers change. An iterative learning process would need to set up between producers and consumers to achieve the goal of a true social label. Research was carried out with organic consumers in Germany in order to assess their potential receptiveness to such a project.

The domains can be brought together in a practical manner through taking the findings and ideas from the Malagasy quality of life index into on-going debates in domains one and three. Questions such as the following arise:

- Does involvement in producing certified organic goods for export bring about positive change in the lives of both men <u>and</u> women producers in Madagascar? How can we know this?
- Can, and should, social certification standards be shaped in part by producer values? That is, can the development of standards play a role in enabling producers to create the world they want?
- Should social certification have a remit to contribute to 'development', in the sense of leading to growth (however defined) in the community? Or should it be simply about measuring adherence to particular standards?
- How can German consumers connect and engage with the lives of producers in meaningful ways?
- Can, and should, social labels be shaped in part by producer values?

The domains can also be examined at one remove. This involves examining some of the issues raised through the applied thinking just discussed by asking further questions:

- Is it possible to create new relationships along the producer-consumer value chain?
- What are the pre-conditions for the forging of successful quality relationships along the producer-consumer chain in organic agriculture?
- What difference might the emergent properties/ higher values arising in such relationships make to the three initiatives?
- Fundamentally: who is the system for?

These questions informed and orientated the author's fieldwork studies in Germany and Madagascar. They cannot be answered in the space of this paper, but should be kept in mind when reading the following sections on (1) how to capture indicators of a good quality of life among organic smallholders and plantation workers, and (2) how to enable the consumer to act in accordance with their ethical beliefs in the marketplace.

**Part Three: The development of a quality of life toolkit to develop and capture criteria for well-being among organic smallholders and plantation workers**

This section is divided into three sections. Section A demonstrates that there is a lack of agreement on how to understand and measure quality of life. Section B presents some principles which can help inform a quality of life toolkit, and against which it may be judged. Section C presents the Malagasy quality of life toolkit.

*Section A: Understanding and Measuring Quality of Life*

Over the years there have been many attempts, including measuring gross domestic product, devising genuine progress indicators, a women's empowerment measure, and the human development index (see Neumayer, 2000; Kabeer, 2000; Hamilton, 1999; Murray, 1991 for comments). Work has also been done at the micro-level. Nazarea et al. (1998) aimed to correct the biases, as they saw it, of most mainstream development projects in the Philippines by measuring the target population's internally defined standards, many of which turned out to be qualitative, nonmonetary, nonmaterial, and long-term. Gender, age and ethnicity of the respondents significantly structured the responses.

Eckermann (2000), in a study of the Australian health sector, discusses the seemingly puzzling discrepancies between objective conditions of well-being and subjective perceptions. Eating disorders, high rates of suicide, and drug abuse among people having all the objective conditions necessary for 'good health" point to the reality of people feeling deeply unhappy with the way the world is organized. She concludes that quality of life indicators need to reflect people's lived experience more accurately, which can only be achieved by abandoning universalistic assumptions. These and other studies (see Richmond et al., 2000; Ahluwalia, 1997; Farlinger, 1996; Shepherd, 1995) demonstrate that subjective perceptions of well-being sometimes have little to do with the provision of 'objective" conditions of well-being.

However there are two frameworks, the functionings framework devised by Sen (1985 in Saith and Harriss-White, 1998) and the capabilities framework devised by Nussbaum (2000) that plead the need to assess basic levels of functioning and capability according to indicators everyone may agree are valid, below which truly human living is not possible. The functionings framework argues that it is not posses-sion of a commodity or the utility it provides that is a proxy for well-being, but rather what the person actually succeeds in doing with that commodity and its characteristics. Saith and Harris-White (1998) use Sen's framework to discuss three basic functionings: being healthy, being nourished, and being educated. They assert that in developing countries, gender differentials may exist even at the level of such basic functionings. Their assumptions are first, that these three functionings are so elementary as to be necessary for well-being, and second, that a differential in any one of these functionings will result in a differential in well-being.

Nussbaum's (2000) capabilities framework promotes a cross-cultural normative account of human capabilities. This approach asserts that there should be basic constitutional principles respected and implemented by all governments. Such principles should focus on human capabilities, that is, what people are actually able to do and to be. These principles are informed by an intuitive idea of a life that is worthy of the dignity of a human being.

Acknowledging the validity of all these insights made by researchers seeking to understand and measure well-being suggests that a quality of life index capable of eliciting subjective perceptions and also levels of basic functioning and capability through the use of objective indicators could be very powerful.

*Section B: Principles for a Quality of Life Toolkit*

The author has devised, on the basis of the material above and wider reading on quality of life, nine principles for forming a quality of life toolkit. They are presented here. The principles are interlinked and aim to be mutually supportive. The numbering does not indicate the priority of any principle. The aim is rather to create a flow of logic between each one.

1. Quality of life research means thinking about real lives

In the morass of theory it is easy to forget, sometimes, that we are talking about real people living real lives. Thus the endeavour to measure quality of life is not just about objective indicators such as the state of housing. It is also about appreciating human emotions like hope and aspiration, poverty and desperation, anger and pleasure.

2. Assessing quality of life is an ethical issue

Des Jardins says (2001: 18) *'One of the first and most serious challenges in any study of ethics involves identifying an issue as an ethical issue. We all need to practice this stepping back in order to recognise ethical issues in our everyday experience.'* Kavka (1978) presents two fundamental ethical guidelines against which, the author argues, assessments of quality of life must be made:

- There cannot be degrees of membership in the human moral community
- Substantive concepts of the good life need not be shared.

There is plenty of evidence to suggest that these guidelines are frequently flouted in the real world. For one reason or another, particular categories of people suffer severe disadvantage. Reseacher ignorance of these two principles, whether conscious or not, can compound such disadvantage. This is why it is imperative therefore to 'step back' and recognise everyday issues as ethical issues. Ballet et al. (2003) take this view to a logical conclusion, saying that actors connected in one way or another to poor people are placed under an ethical obligation not only not to harm, but also to enhance the effectiveness of the poor's capability sets.

Recognising quality of life as an ethical issue takes us closer to understanding what is necessary for people to achieve their 'maximum selves' (Ho, 2000). Ho's concept of maximum selves shares ground both with Kavka's (1978) injunction that there cannot be degrees of membership in the human moral community, and with Sen's (1990 in Clark 2002) insistence that people be viewed as ends in themselves. The ethical concept of intrinsic value is embodied in these three approaches. A person's gender, among other markers, can affect the likelihood that he or she is seen as a bearer of intrinsic value.

3. People's subjective understanding of their life-worlds is important

There are a number of difficulties with actually capturing the way in which people subjectively experience their 'life-worlds.' However it is nonetheless necessary to recognise that people experience their particular situations in myriad forms, and from this basis aspire to different goals. This insight should be built into the research project. The aim is not to correlate provision of certain material conditions with satisfaction with those conditions, but rather to gain a rich picture of what actually matters to people. We are speaking fundamentally about trying to understand how people create 'quality relationships to the world', and the ingredients necessary for this endeavour. Blindness to that *'flash of revelation at what we are from the inside out'* (Firouz 2002: 288) will lead to a profound disconnection between internal and external appraisals of the same situation. Indeed such disconnection could lead to unwitting removal by policy makers of the conditions necessary for a subjective sense of well-being to thrive.[5]

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[5]    This has tremendous implications for social certification and social labelling initiatives, among others.

It is possible to establish some degree of correlation between markers such as gender (others include race, disability etc.) and how people experience their world. At the same time acceptance of 'puzzle' and 'strangeness' is vital. It is not possible to fully know *'the unique random blend'*[6] of other human beings. Furthermore, acknowledge of the fact that many values are incommensurable is crucial.

## 4. All indicators are proxies

Indicators are signs trying to signify something. There will be always be a gap between 'what is', and what we think 'is'. The aim of research can only be to seek a reasonable approximation.

## 5. The naturalistic fallacy must be avoided

Ethics is concerned about how we should live, how we should act and the kind of persons we should be (Des Jardins, 2001: 132). We need to acknowledge that although quality of life is fundamentally concerned with ethics, we have to be particularly concerned about committing the naturalistic fallacy, that is reasoning from facts (what is) to values (what ought to be). Descriptions of the world do not commit one to particular conclusions about how the world should be. It is also possible to commit another kind of error, based on an inability to recognise that substantive concepts of the good life might not be shared, namely reasoning from value to fact. In combination, these two errors set up a self-reinforcing feedback loop admitting of no new knowledge.

## 6. The concept of agency and meaningful choice is critical

The ability to shape one's world depends on the ability to make meaningful choices and thus to move forward. Developing new preferences depends on a person being able to imagine and experience alternatives. It is here that the concept of agency arises. Agency, it has to be pointed out, does not only have an explicit functional character. It is also about disruptive, boundary-skipping, elusive, hard to capture behaviour.

## 7. Quality of life is not only a state of persons, it is a process

An understanding quality of life as a process is crucial to any robust concept of quality of life. As Ho (2000) suggests, people are not themselves coherently bounded entities. Naess (1973) argues for an appreciation of human embeddedness in the world, the idea that <u>relationships</u> constitute who we are.[7] The author adds that one can conceptualise people as being in a state of flow. They are in dynamic interaction with their world, which is itself ever changing. A consequence of this perception is that concepts of what constitutes 'the good life' will likewise be in a state of flux.

The concept of process is of course ineluctably bound up with the concept of time. Inter-generational and intra-generational processes need to be considered. Other time processes relate to seasonality and the pattern of daily activities. Understanding how time is conceptualised in a particular place enables a better insight into how concepts of the good life are transmitted, and also how to break poverty cycles through strengthening the capability sets of poor people.

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[6]  Quote from a poem 'Ambulances' by Larkin, P. ( in Jones, ed. 1999: 134)

[7]  Naess (1973) bases his ideas in part upon *gestalt* theory. He insists upon 'rejection of the man-in-environment image in favour of the relational, total field image. Organisms as knots in the biospherical net or field of intrinsic relations. An instrinsic relation between two things A and B is such that the relation belongs to the definitions or basic constituents of A and B, so that without the relation, A and B are no longer the same things.'

8.   The material conditions of existence form an important platform for a good quality of life

The functionings and capabilities framework, and the so-called Scandinavian approach (see Rapley 2003), both overtly proclaim the necessity of providing certain material conditions in order to allow people to achieve basic functionings (such as being healthy, being nourished and being educated). Enabling 'people to live really humanely' (to have) is a prerequisite for them 'to be' and 'to do'. The necessity of a reasonable standard of life is also acknowledged in the American tradition (ibid.). This tradition emphasises the importance of subjective appraisals of well-being.

9.   Bounded thinking is of limited value

Quality of life is a multi-dimensional concept which can be analysed across a series of subjective and objective domains. Correlations between subjective and objective axes may or may not be sought. Yet category-based models run the risk of binding and limiting what we understand. Perhaps, and also, they bear little relation to the ways that real world people actually think and behave. The researcher runs the risk therefore of 'making sense' of complex information by slotting it into a particular category whilst at the same time snipping away at the links which give this information meaning. The researcher therefore needs to pay attention to the effectiveness of category thinking and to consider whether, and when, it might be useful to blur the boundedness of the concepts he or she is using.

*Section C: The Malagasy Quality of Life Toolkit*

Although the theoretical considerations might be complex, the tools selected for the fieldwork in Madagascar had to be simple to use. This is because the quality of life toolkit has to be  flexible enough to be used anywhere, specific enough to produce unique meaning in a particular situation, and yet universal enough for the results to be understood and operationalised by other stakeholders. The toolbox did not seek to produce 'objective data' on the respondents' quality of life, by directly measuring the health status or checking the educational qualifications of the respondents for example. Rather, the aim was to capture the respondents' <u>perceptions</u> of their quality of life, in other words to gain some kind of insight into their lived and experienced world.

A sampling frame was designed with the objective of canvassing opinion from different groups (by wealth) in each community. Permission to move around the community was sought from the village head – the *Tangalemena*. The meetings with the Tangalemena were crucial in establishing rapport and gaining first insights into the constraints facing each community, critical locally-relevant quality of life components, and beyond this the aspirations of village members. The author chose to weight the Malagasy toolkit with widely-used participatory methods such as transects, participatory maps, seasonal calendars, daily activity diagrams, historical calendars and the like. An access and control profile was also elicited (see Pretty et al 1995;  Mikkelsen 1995; Chambers 1994, and Feldstein and Jiggins 1994 for examples and discussion of these and other participatory methods). The methods chosen aimed to elicit spatial and temporal data, the thought being that quite simple, easy to use tools could create a complex picture if used flexibly and imaginatively.

It should be noted that the methods to be used in a particular situation were not decided upon in advance. Rather, extensive discussion with smallholders and plantation workers took place in the first instance. Such open-ended discussions provided a clear picture of the main concerns of the respondents – in other words, themes were permitted to emerge. In order to understand these themes further, specific participatory methods were then selected to enable 'fit' between the theme and method. Furthermore, methods were adapted *in situ*. For example a 'well-being transect', not known to the author from the literature, was devised. This was not only spatial, but also temporal, in character because the well-being of ancestors and of children appeared important to the respondent population. Gender sensitivity was

woven into all stages of the process. Women and men were usually interviewed separately by someone of the same gender. Data remained gender-disaggregated throughout.

In order to specifically allow surprising findings, new themes and fresh ideas to emerge thematic apperception tests (TAT) were also used. This was devised by Murray (1943 in Nazarea, 1998: 161). In its original form cards with ambiguous representations are presented to respondents. The respondent is asked to tell a story about each card and the account is recorded verbatim. The premise behind this is that informants identify with some of the figures. In the process of story telling the respondents reveal their own self-concepts and deep wishes. The TAT was chosen as it explicitly allows for complexity and emergence. It is worth noting that visual tools and story telling are especially valuable when working in other language cultures. In addition a simple camcorder was used with the plantation workers. The aim was to permit respondents to convey their sense of quality of life in their own words and images. The video itself was made after several days of discussion with the respondents on themes such as local conceptions of happiness and the constituents of well-being. Filming was done separately with men and women.

No quantitative work in Madagascar was undertaken by the author. However in order to study objective quality of life indicators, statistical reports on the research sites issued by the Ministère de l'Agriculture, statistics compiled by local health and education workers (Centre de Santé de Base; Collège d'Enseignement Général) and by local and international NGOs (for example the Fédération des Associations Femme et Développement and Développement Agro-ecologique Régional de USAID) were collected. Key informants from a range of professions were also interviewed. Triangulation of 'objective' and 'subjective' data was however not used as a way of achieving rigour – critiqued by Winchester (1999, in Crang, 2002: 252) as another attempt to seek empirical realist, objective generalisability. Rather, the purpose of seeking statistical data was to gain an understanding of objective indicators, to add to the rich texture of the data being produced from work in the field and to raise questions to be discussed with respondents. Triangulation of data also – and significantly – should not be permitted to allow closure by ironing out irregularities and dismissing puzzling data. Rather it should be taken as an opportunity to reflect upon what apparently incompatible data on one theme - acquired by use of different methods - might be telling us.


**Part Four: The development of a social label to enable organic consumers to reward 'more than purely price' values in the marketplace**

This section is divided into two sections. Section A presents a short theoretical overview of ethical consumption. Section B provides an overview of the research process.


*Section A: Overview of Ethical Consumption*

Social labelling is a means of providing consumers with information on the well-being of the producer by including these details as part of the packaging, or via other channels of communication such as the Internet. It is not quite the same as fair trade labelling, which is marketed to the consumer as a means of ensuring that a 'fair price' be paid to the producers for their goods. Although fair prices also form part of social labelling, 'more than purely price' values (i.e., nonfinancial and nonmarket) are given explicit weight in social labelling initiatives. Browne et al. (2000: 70) concur that fair trade labelling is not rich enough as a concept and suggest that ethical trading (with which social labelling may be aligned) embraces the idea of sustainable resource management as well as fair trade agreements and safe working

conditions. Here is the conundrum: a social label must be simple to appeal to the consumer, yet behind it will lie a world of deep complexity. Its sole aim must be to enable consumers to act in line with their ethical reasoning. Yet to achieve this means establishing transparency all along the food chain, ensuring accountability, and most profoundly, providing the certainty that consumers, through their purchases, indeed are helping the producers create the world they seek – or, at least, not actively harming the producers' ability to do so.

It is already known that a substantial body of consumers take into account 'more than purely price' values when shopping. Browne et al. (ibid. 79) in their study of British consumers, distinguish between different tiers of ethical consumers. 'True' ethical consumers make up 2% of the population, and a further 20-30% are 'semi-ethical': they are willing to pay a modest premium but will not go out of their way to purchase ethically. However, it is estimated that 80% of the population is willing to be ethical if no price premium is involved and if no special effort is required to shop ethically.

Although the Browne study has gone some way towards disentangling the threads, to say that consumers have ethical concerns has undoubtedly become something of a lazy commonplace. Indeed, 'ethical' seems almost to have become synonymous with 'good', with other shoppers by implication 'bad'. It would seem vital, if we are to better understand the complex world within which all consumers make decisions, that we refine our understanding of the ethical frameworks consumers draw upon. These are most likely not coherently bounded frameworks, nor are they necessarily explicit to the consumer. However, *sense-making* in this muddled situation - disentangling the threads with consumers themselves - might help towards the development of a genuinely empowering social label: empowering in the sense that it will permit consumers to 'act in the real world' in line with the way they ethically perceive the world.

Consumers, as citizens, are influenced by a whole range of ethical frameworks, for example utilitarianism and rights.[8] Briefly expressed, utilitarianism considers that the right action in any one situation is the one that causes the most happiness, or at least minimal unhappiness, to those affected. Its proponents argue that utilitarianism enables individuals and their representatives to take moral decisions in a rational way. In this scenario, the consumer may be hoping to increase the happiness of, say, children in other countries through *not* purchasing particular makes of trainers, or, more positively, through buying a special brand of chocolate.

Rights theories view individuals as moral agents, with duties and obligations to others. By the same token, each person has expectations of what others may, and may not, do to them (or should/should not do for them). These constitute their rights. Thus one person's right is another person's duty. In this scenario, consumers may view themselves as moral agents with particular duties towards the rights bearers, i.e. the producers.

The lives of other consumers may be infused, for example, with Biblical injunction. Here each purchase symbolizes solidarity with other human beings seen to be of tremendous intrinsic worth. A further group may be seeking to counter global capitalism through selective purchasing from cooperatives, for example, and still another group may simply be interested in sharing the goodness of the world equally, not only among members of the present generation but also those yet to come.[9]

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[8]   The definitions provided here are drawn from Wye College/Open University (1997).

[9]   Please refer to Kavka (1978) on ´The Futurity Problem' and Howarth´s (1992) thoughts on 'Intergenerational Justice and the Chain of Obligation'.

Ethical purchasing is thus about the practical application of considerations of how one should live and how one should treat others. It involves an examination by the consumer of whom they consider to form part of the 'moral community', and whether they are convinced that they can actively influence the well-being of members of that community.[10] Ethical purchasing also very much demonstrates the point that the 'local is created', and is not merely geographical in scope. Farmers´ markets or a social label are pertinent cases in point. The latter is indeed a particular expression of the belief that farmers in Mali are equally the neighbour of a consumer in Germany as the person living next door.

In the real world the patterning of these theories will be highly complex, and they are unlikely to be present in pure form. Rather, an intermingling will inform behavior. A useful image is that of various ethical standpoints converging to form a spotlight upon a particular issue.

*Section B: The Research Process in Germany*

A two step process was devised. During 2001 questionnaires were applied to almost three hundred organic consumers. The first version was piloted at the world's largest organic trade fair, the Biofach (www.biofach.de), by Dr. Hiltrud Nieberg (Farnworth, 2003e). A revised version was applied in Berlin and Braunschweig by master's student Lilja Otto (2002). This provided substantial data which not only had independent value but helped inform the second round of research.

Gender-balanced focus groups with organic and fair trade consumers were held in Hamburg in 2003. The questions themselves aimed to provoke lively and thoughtful discussion and thus needed to echo with participants' lives. At the same time they had to fit within the ethical and systems thinking analytical frame planned by the author. Three sets of questions were asked under the following theoretical headings (1) Do organic and fair trade consumers have different ethics in action? (2) Is ethical consumption an effective way of bringing about the kind of change consumers want? And (3) What kind of relationship can be established between organic/fair trade consumers and farmers in the South?

**Part Five: The Reseach Sites and Research Findings from Madagascar and Germany**

Research commenced in 2001 with smallholder organic farmers in an isolated region near Brickaville on the east coast of **Madagascar**. They harvest plantation and wild-sown cinnamon for Phaelflor, a small private Malagasy-owned organic company exporting essential oils to the USA and Europe. First order distillation of the cinnamon oil takes place locally with further refinement in the capital Antananarivo. This endeavour is supported by the US Agency for International Development, since it is seen as a way of preserving important forest biodiversity by encouraging economic use of the buffer zone between the forest and farmland. Research continued with plantation workers at Plantation MonDésir (PMD), which is located close to urban centers and tourist resorts likewise on the east coast. PMD produces organic oils, spices and black pepper for use in European pharmaceutical and charcuterie industries.

The findings did not resolve themselves neatly into a clear pattern. However distinct - sometimes complementary, sometimes contradictory - themes emerged as fieldwork progressed. The author has identified the following clusters:

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[10] Readings on where to draw the line of the moral community, and who or what is ´morally considerable` (to be taken into account in its own right in ethical judgements) include Leopold (1949), Goodpaster (1978) and Elliot (1991).

- the ways in which the respondents sought to achieve security in the context of chronic insecurity (for instance through land ownership or the possession of cattle)
- respondents' interest in upward mobility (through running a business, for example)
- a sense of 'entitlement' among respondents (e.g., to basic literacy or affordable health care)
- affirmation of local values by respondents in a situation where such values are seen to be increasingly under attack due to a generally perceived worsening economic macro-climate and the promotion of entrepreneurial values by government and NGOs (respondents resist by promoting food self-sufficiency and rejecting wage labor in favor of personal independence, for example, even though this restricts cash income)
- methods the respondents used to manage the complexity of their lives. For example, both men and women plantation workers found their lives constrained by 'clock time' – *de rigeur* at the plantation. This seriously limited their ability to accommodate other polycyclic rhythms governing their existence: the agricultural year, pregnancy, festivals, cooking, and childcare. Research showed that they developed many strategies to manage the complexity of their world.

Land and zebu cattle were seen by all as playing a central role in the achievement of well-being by virtue of the economic stability and cultural recognition they conferred, yet neither was in reach of the plantation workers. The research demonstrated that other culturally specific concepts of well-being could be discerned, some of which were highly personalized in expression, others more clearly structured by variables such as age and gender[11]. For the Malagasy respondents, well-being clearly was neither a unitary concept nor an end-state. Rather, it is constantly being achieved, it is in a process of becoming. As the situation changes, so do the strategies aiming to define and achieve well-being. Though local concepts of well-being are in flux, they are closely aligned with the particular circumstances prevailing in the research areas. The cultural expression of well-being in the local Malagasy culture is intertwined with multiple influences coming from elsewhere.

The questionnaire-based research in **Germany** took place in 2001, parallel to the Malagasy work. The focus groups were held in 2003. Although sustained analysis has yet to be carried out, the findings from these studies can be tentatively clustered as follows:

- For both fair trade and organic participants a strongly holistic view of the world emerged. The interdependencies between animal, plant and human life were emphasised.
- With respect to responsibilities to future generations, concern about the state of the world was balanced by an equally firm faith in progress and the ability of future generations to ameliorate living conditions.
- Participants were ambivalent about their relationships to people in the South. On the one hand many rejected neo-colonialist attitudes and argued that people should choose their own development pathways. Equally if not more strongly, many participants felt that the North could help bring positive and necessary change to the South.
- It emerged that participants consistently associated fair trade labels with producer well-being, even if they purchased these products in supermarkets. Yet only those participants who purchased organic goods direct from the farmer considered producer well-being. This group were more likely to consider environmental issues, the use of pesticides and animal welfare than those who purchased organic goods in supermarkets. This latter group did not consider the person behind the product and tended to prioritise the health and flavour aspects of organic food.

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[11] For an extended presentation of the findings, see the two working papers by Farnworth et al. (2002 a, b). See also Farnworth's key paper for the Overseas Development Institute - AgREN email discussion on Globalisation and Pro-poor agricultural development in May 2002 (www.rimisp.cl/agren).

- When asked whether all food retailers should pre-select goods according to ethical criteria, opinion was divided. Many argued for consumer freedom of choice. Almost everyone made an automatic association between higher ethical standards and higher prices – which was seen as undesirable.
- On the other hand participants supported the idea of raising the bar by making higher standards across the European Union, and for goods entering the EU, compulsary. However scepticism was rampant as to whether this could be achieved.
- Participants felt that their age undoubtedly had a bearing on their decision to purchase organic and/or fair trade products. Some were doubtful though as to whether gender played a role. When gender was seen as significant, participants argued consistently that women were more conscious shoppers, given their caring and familial roles.
- When asked whether they would support Southern-based farmer initiatives that might clash with their own values, some participants said they undoubtedly would. Others however argued that a balance between consumer and producer values would be required.

The findings showed that participants were, in the main, thoughtful and concerned consumers who certainly considered 'more than purely price' values when shopping. Ethical purchasing was one way among several in which they expressly tried to contribute to a better world.[12] Two snaps in the holistic world views so clearly expressed in the opening round of discussion can be discerned. Firstly, participants tended to have highly ambivalent or highly politicised attitudes to people in the South. This was in many cases evidently due to a lack of founded knowledge about the lives of the people there and what they wanted. The second break relates to the shopping experience – supermarkets appear to render invisible the producer to consumer chain.

**Conclusion**

It is possible to employ a quality of life toolkit as part of social certification procedures in organic agriculture. The toolkit should aim to not only to record, but also to help bring into existence, local conceptions of well-being. The rich pictures thereby created will help ensure that the process, and the product, has meaning for the respondents. Social certification can thus contribute to a process whereby producers can move towards attaining the worlds they seek. At the same time, returning to the functionings and capabilities frameworks, it is important to assess levels of functioning. This may help ensure that the respondents can be objectively agreed to have a life 'worthy of the dignity of a human being.' In this way a powerful set of social standards in organic agriculture with meaning to stakeholders across the producer to consumer chain can be created.

If quality relationships are to be built between consumers and producers, consumers also need to have an awareness of the producers' rich pictures and their aspirations. Such rich pictures can be provided by the quality of life toolkit. In this way consumers may be enabled to achieve more coherence between their ethical views and the translation of these in the real world. It would be essential to build in acceptance of flux and a level of complexity into these initiatives. Concepts of quality of life are not and cannot be static. An iterative learning process between producers and consumers is key.

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[12] For an extended presentation of the focus group fndings, see Farnworth, CR. and Raabe, W. (2003c; 2003d). Otto (2002) presents and analyses the questionnaire data.

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