

Nobody wants to talk about the huge dependency that coffee-farming families have on coffee as their only source of income. A dependency that holds farmers continuously hostage to the grinding poverty so intimately related to the coffee trade. A dependency that has led to an on-going crisis for coffee-farming families that has no end in sight. A dependency that keeps farmers growing as much coffee as they possibly can regardless of the price of coffee or consumer demand because farmers have nothing else but coffee to sell. A dependency that ensures a worldwide oversupply of coffee that will continue to sustain the lowest coffee prices in 100 years. A dependency relieved mostly by emigration to the cities and across the border, away from family, community and culture that have been home for centuries.

Instead, everyone wants to talk about how sustainable coffee is, how it's organic and how much money a farmer earns per pound. **It doesn't matter a hill of beans what a farmer earns per pound anywhere near as much as it matters how much a farmer earns.** Besides, only a tiny percentage of the world's coffee-farming families benefit from premium priced coffees that are commonly referred to as "sustainable" anyway. Only a handful live above the poverty level, most struggling to scrape together the most basic of needs to survive from day to day. Most of the world's coffee-farming families are threatened with extinction as they abandon their farms for a job, any job.

In the meantime, even *poorer* farmers from Viet Nam are lured *into* the coffee trade out of a deeper desperation ensuring the sustainable line of supply of bargain basement coffee prices. Resulting depressed prices exert such overwhelming pressure on the entire coffee trade that it even keeps the "fairest" prices in the basement. Of course, it could not possibly be otherwise. Coffee could not possibly remain the second largest traded commodity in the world for decades if its supply were not sustainable.

**The truth is that the supply line of coffee is sustainable. And, it is sustainable at the lowest prices in 100 years.** As long as coffee-farming families are dependent upon coffee as their only source of income, all these dynamics will remain in place and the only thing sustainable about coffee will be the coffee crisis. **Now is it time to talk about the huge dependency that coffee-farming families have on coffee as their only source of income?**

For 16 years, Coffee Kids has collaborated with coffee-farming families as they create their own self-managed, grassroots, community based projects that focus on alternatives to coffee so coffee-farming families are no longer totally dependent upon coffee as a sole source of income. Projects are related to local economies, well understood by the coffee-farming families who live there, well outside the unpredictable coffee market that pulls their strings, and well within the margins of self-sufficiency.

Ironically, income separate from coffee is one of the few true roads toward a sustainable lifestyle for coffee farming families, a lifestyle in which nutritious foods are available to children, a lifestyle in which children can go to school instead of to work in the coffee fields, a lifestyle in which basic health care is accessible, a lifestyle in which families can remain together in the same communities, a lifestyle in which coffee-farming families can remain coffee-farming families instead of becoming refugees, a lifestyle in which coffee-farming families can *sustain* themselves.

It's time to stop talking about sustainability and start talking about helping coffee-farming families to liberate themselves from the debilitating dependency upon coffee that keeps them trapped in a sustainable coffee crisis.