

International Development: The Contribution of the Internet in Broadening the Scope of Solidarity-Based Consumption

Hanitra Randrianasolo-Rakotobe

Jean-Michel Ledjou

Paris-Sud University, France

Abstract:

While extreme long-term poverty is on the wane, there is a dangerous parallel increase in different forms of inequality that threaten regions such as Sub-Saharan Africa. Several initiatives have emerged aiming at tackling these structural inequalities. It is the case of the solidarity-based economy that is challenging the major social problems of today's world by seeking innovative solutions at economic, political, and social levels. Using the example of fair trade—which is well known to constitute the solidarity-based economy and that addresses social justice issues—this paper aims at demonstrating the contributions of the Internet in developing consumers' prospective responsibility, which is at the heart of a new way of behaving in an interconnected and interdependent world. By mobilizing the concept of “individualized collective action”, it shows how the Internet has contributed to the implementation of the trading partnership between consumers and producers suffering from inequalities within our global society.

Keywords: Fair Trade; Individualized Collective Action; Inequality; Internet; Prospective Responsibility; Solidarity-based Economy

Résumé:

Alors que l'extrême pauvreté à long terme est sur le déclin, il y a une augmentation parallèle et dangereuse de différentes formes d'inégalité menaçant des régions telles que l'Afrique sub-saharienne. Plusieurs initiatives ont vu le jour visant à lutter contre ces inégalités structurelles. Il en est le cas de l'économie solidaire venant contester les principaux problèmes sociaux du monde d'aujourd'hui par la recherche de solutions novatrices aux niveaux économiques, politiques et social. En utilisant l'exemple du commerce équitable—bien connu pour constituer l'économie solidaire et mettant l'accent sur les questions de justice sociale—ce document vise à démontrer les contributions de l'Internet dans le développement de la responsabilité prospective des consommateurs, se retrouvant au cœur d'une nouvelle manière de se comporter dans un monde interconnecté et interdépendant. En mobilisant le concept de l' "individualized collective action", cela démontre comment l'Internet a contribué à la mise en œuvre du partenariat commercial entre les consommateurs et les producteurs souffrant d'inégalités au sein de notre société mondiale.

Mots-clés: Action collective individualisé; Commerce équitable; Economie solidaire; Inégalité; Internet; Responsabilité prospective

An important global issue in the 21st century is the realization that no country is capable of addressing its economic and social challenges alone. A state can of course act through appropriate public policies. However, challenges that were once national and regional, have now acquired a global dimension. The 2008 global financial crisis that started in the United States of America and its worldwide consequences have lengthened the list of socio-economic factors that demonstrate the growing intensity of the interdependence of our societies. Financial and economic globalization and Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have been working to improve the irreversible interconnectedness of the world. In this context, this paper addresses the key changes that have occurred in international development. By mobilizing an evolutionary paradigm inspired by Paul Valéry, we have paid attention both to strong trends as the victory of humanity over poverty, the explosion of structural inequalities that increases sub-Saharan African vulnerability, and extreme and small trends with potential ones as the Internet contribution in shifting the scope of social justice.

To do so, this paper relies on perspectives drawn from the implementation of the solidarity-based economy as fair trade, and focuses, particularly, on the renewed interest in the consumption of products which have "the power to do good"¹ and can affect the livelihoods of the marginalized producers in developing countries. The "solidarity economy" refers to solidarity-based initiatives emerging worldwide in an attempt to improve the living conditions of the poorest and most vulnerable people.² This paper involves a multidisciplinary approach and takes advantages of crossing materials and methods from information and communication sciences and economics.

In an Increasingly Interconnected and Interdependent World, Does the State Remain the Scope of Social Justice?

Globalization and global growth have resulted in the emergence of new actors on the international scene. This has raised many hopes for the sustainable improvement of our living conditions, the welfare for all of humanity, but especially for millions of us who were previously private. On a social level, while long-term extreme poverty is on the wane, there has been in parallel a widening of structural inequalities that increase people's vulnerability related to an interconnected world (Dubois, 2009). Indeed, some people, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, do not benefit from globalization and are the most vulnerable. When millions of people face risks associated with global operations, whilst the 1% richest account for increasingly global wealth, the scope of social justice represents a major challenge of the 21st century.

Victory of Humanity over Poverty

At a global level, great hopes for improved living conditions in the third millennium are particularly based on poverty alleviation. Morrisson (2012, January 16) suggests a victory for humanity on this great scourge and stresses that for the first time in three centuries, the number of poor and very poor has decreased. An article in *The Economist* (2013, June 13) argues that the world has been making extraordinary progress in lifting people out of extreme poverty. Between 1990 and 2010, their number fell by half as a share of the total population in developing countries, from 43% to 21%—a reduction of almost one billion people.

On the one hand, as far as poverty reduction in a globalized world is concerned, the benefits of participation in world trade have always been put forward. The largest multilateral provider of aid for trade, The World Bank Group, first announced its \$15 billion annual funding in 2002. The objective is to contribute to achieving the Millennium Development Goals³ by continuing to expand market access to developing countries, and by supporting the establishment of a predictable and rules-based trading system (The World Bank, 2013). The Commission on Growth and Development led by The World Bank Group stresses that all developing countries that have experienced sustained periods of high economic growth have prospered by being open to global markets. The trading system is at the heart of dynamic research, initiatives, and funding. More than ever, trade is seen as key to eradicate poverty, by helping countries to benefit from globalization. On the other hand, the intensity of the interdependence of the various parts of the world has changed the discourse and the way of perceiving growth. On paper, the idea of a shared and inclusive prosperity—that has become a public-private policy—constitutes a pillar of the international agenda. However as Piketty (2013) highlights, a phenomenon that characterized the savage capitalism of the late 19th century can hinder this global program. He was referring to the explosion of inequalities in both developed and developing countries.

Inequality Does not Belong to the Past, Poverty is African

Morrisson (2012, January 16) presents an overview of three centuries of global inequality detecting a strong trend from the 18th to the 20th centuries: the share of the poorest 80% continues to decline, while the share of the 20% richest continues to increase. In agreement with Piketty (2013), he notes a rapid increase of the global income inequality during the 19th century and—just as for the poverty issue—a sustained decrease in the late 1990s. Morrisson (2012, January

16) outlines that its primary cause is the decrease in income inequality between countries, which is commonly related to globalization, benefiting mainly emerging countries and China. Also looking forward to 2030, he concludes that the global inequality trend will depend especially on China and India, and also on African countries. Indeed, since the early 2000s several red flags were raised about the challenges and even dangers that Africa has to face. Given the African economy, a strong global inequality does not benefit this continent, as it is the main actor of the poorest 20%. Despite a significant decrease in inequality in the 21st century, the world remains highly unequal with a Gini coefficient of 0.7⁴. Milanovic (2012) states that it is much higher than the coefficient of the most unequal countries like Brazil, where adverse effects on poverty have been demonstrated. Whilst there has been a victory of humanity over poverty and inequality in many parts of the world, this is not the case for Africa, particularly sub-Saharan Africa, but excluding South Africa, which is ranked within emerging countries. Drawing on statistics from the World Trade Organization (2016), as far as international trade and its benefits are concerned, with 599,500 million U.S. dollars out of a total declared value of 18,784,000 million U.S. dollars within the World Trade organization, African exports of goods accounted for only 3.2%. More than half of these exports (55%) come from four countries, Nigeria, South Africa, Angola, and Algeria, known for their mining sectors. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa, excluding South Africa, the Ivory Coast, and Equatorial Guinea, constitute less than 5% of African exports and less than 0.2% of the world's export of goods. The extraordinary development of ICTs has facilitated and boosted great progress, especially in the global trade of services. However, again, sub-Saharan Africa has benefitted the least. With a total of 90,530 million U.S. dollars out of a total declared value of 4,623,710 million U.S. dollars, the African export of commercial services represents only 1.9%. Nearly half of these exports come from three countries, Egypt, South Africa, and Morocco. Countries in sub-Saharan Africa excluding South Africa include less than 15% of African exports and less than 0.3% of world exports of commercial services (The World Trade Organization, 2016).

Finally, considering the income inequality mentioned above, the agricultural sector remains dominant in Africa, and the average income of farmers is significantly below the poverty line. Let us take the example of cocoa, the European Voice Network shows that income would have increased by 341% in Ghana, or 1608% in Côte d'Ivoire, to reach the poverty line of two dollars per day (Alet, 2013). Poverty does not just belong to the past, rendering African farmers more vulnerable. The rural poverty report (IFAD, 2011) points out that sub-Saharan Africa (especially the east and south), untouched by the positive effects of globalization, is an area that has one of the world's highest concentrations of poor people. They suffer from a multidimensional poverty, but also and above all, from an unequal access to specific resources of a globalized world such as technological resources. Thus, as far as social justice is concerned, their growing importance in wealth creation, in improving living conditions, and the interdependence of our societies motivated us to study ICT, namely the Internet.

The Special Status of Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

On the one hand, digital technology has become an essential tool of social life: providing access to employment, knowledge, public services online, social relations, and participation in public debates (Cardon, 2010). On the other one, technological surge upsets our relationship to the world, to others and to ourselves (Biagini, 2012). Actually, ICT exploitation constitutes a tremendous concern of our interdependent societies. But compared to international development,

the technological challenge that has an important economic and social significance remains at the heart of the actions led by international development organizations. As underlined by the United Nations Development Programme: throughout history, technology has been a powerful tool for human development and poverty reduction. Hence, improving ICT access in one of the poorest regions in the world is one of the agendas of the United Nations. Global programs such as Connecting Africa have involved the United Nations, financial institutions, governments, businesses, and citizens. Such efforts are seemingly successful. In 2012, The World Bank and its partners noted that Africa had about 650 million subscribers. More generally, the United Nations Development Programme reported that poor countries had recorded nearly 56% of mobile phone subscriptions, with a growth rate well above 35% in most developing regions. Regional inequalities in terms of penetration rate have thus also significantly decreased. However the gap remains especially for high speed Internet. The penetration rate of mobile broadband in Africa is about 19%, far behind Europe (64%) and the U.S. (59%). The global penetration rate is estimated to be 32% and 90% of non-connected people live in developing countries. There remains much to be done, particularly in terms of ICT exploitation. If success is based on and quantified by the number of subscriptions in developing countries, in these regions—although the mechanisms are still not very clear—ICTs are perceived, as are economic and financial globalization, as being responsible for the long-awaited and qualified extraordinary growth in the 1990s.

However, in the short run, hope is revived. In the poorest regions, the local appropriation of ICT has affected several generations. Mobiles have replaced computers as a tool for communication. Private operators have taken the low banking system into account and customized their offers and services (Ledjou & Randrianasolo, 2013). In some countries, the relationship with productivity has been focused on highlighting a better information flow, a reduction in travel time, and the impact of mobile broadband. From a social point of view, the Internet and social networks have facilitated citizen movements, as the world observed during the Arab Spring. Fogel and Patino (2013) state that with the Internet, the classical references of social life are shifting. A connected person can broaden the scope of their actions. A social network user can get thousands of friends or fans, followers of a simple microblog can reach over million. By addressing the multiple challenges of the contemporary world, ICTs have also greatly contributed to our awareness of a common destiny. With the interdependence of our societies, improving the living conditions of the most vulnerable people and victims of structural inequalities, multidimensional poverty is no longer a local or even national issue, but a global one.

Following on from Milanovic's works (2012), Duru-Bellat (2014) also raises the issue of social justice. She presents two main streams: the first defending the national scope, the second a global one as a relevant perimeter of solidarity. However without waiting for what the author calls the creation of a hypothetical global state, solidarity-based citizen actions have emerged around the world. And again, ICTs, mainly the Internet, continue to play a crucial role. However, despite the Internet's huge potentials and benefits, it cannot overcome the challenge of regulating these global citizen actions and the businesses it has brought with it alone.

The Internet and the Challenge of the Solidarity-based Economy

As previously mentioned, despite the difficulties in providing accurate measurements, there is an emerging consensus regarding the benefits that developing countries have gained from their

participation in world trade. An exception that may prove the rule is the case of sub-Saharan Africa. We show that the interdependence of our societies has led to the social construction of a new characteristic of various goods being produced in poor countries suffering from poverty and inequality, and exported to developed countries. This social construction takes root in the relationships that have been forged between producers and consumers since the advent of international trade; since ancient times, international trade has contributed in linking consumers and producers in remote areas.

According to Mouzon (2014), rather than waiting for economic globalization and ICTs to enable the global community to achieve the living conditions of producers in developing countries, a minority of consumers are interested in the production conditions behind their purchases. This ethical trade dates back to the early 19th century, when activist shops against slavery appeared in the United States. Mouzon identified an initial wave of responsible consumption that increased from the 19th century to the 1930s. With the increasing globalization of production and abusive practices that were highlighted and gradually communicated worldwide, a new dynamic was born in the early 1960s. Its intensification is illustrated with the fair trade movement, which is the most well-known practice of what is currently known by the term “solidarity economy”. In this section, we address the contributions and the limitations of the Internet to the progress of individualized collective action (Micheletti, 2003) and prospective responsibility (Jonas, 1979 cited in Randrianasolo, 2006) which, theoretically, may constitute the main pillars of a solidarity-based economy.

The extra cost of solidarity-based quality is mainly supported by consumers

According to Dubigeon (2009), there is an awareness of a growing global threat happening within our interdependent societies. In terms of social justice there has been a growing exclusion—of some of the world’s population—thus generating a profound social destabilization. Access to economic opportunities has certainly increased but paradoxically, the degree of social inequality is seen as a source of threat to basic survival. Combining several studies on the topic, Dubigeon discusses the ethics of responsibility that have become key in the new socio-technical system that underlies the modern world. The analysis of the development of fair trade has helped to outline and clarify the impact of this responsibility (e.g., Ballet, Dubois & Mahieu, 2007; Randrianasolo, 2006) and the role played by the Internet.

Fair trade was launched in 1945 and saw the improvement in the living conditions of marginalized producers as a priority, by selling the produced goods with a “fair price”, thus benefiting the producers and not only the intermediaries. This global movement depends on consumers in developed countries backing this partnership. In daily life, it is about making the choice to purchase chocolate, coffee, or any other fair trade products, not only for the organoleptic characteristics, but also for their solidarity-based quality, which has the “power to do good” in the producers’ countries, including sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the entire process of sensitization aims to transform the willingness to buy a solidarity-based quality into an act of purchase, generally involving a higher price. According to the fair trade founders, this solidarity-based purchase will enable the producers to improve their freedom to choose their life; that is, to remain a producer and not be forced to leave their land or to improve their income and quality of life (Randrianasolo, Dahmani & Dubois, 2014). The role of the consumer is of the utmost importance because within this solidarity-based movement, a study led by a French consumer group (acronym CLCV) concluded that the payment of this extra cost related to solidarity is

currently mostly provided by the consumer. The association has, quite naturally, invited retailers and intermediaries to try to reduce their margins and prices (Randrianasolo, 2010). The explanation for the payment of this additional solidarity-based cost of produced goods can be found, at least, in two existent theoretical concepts, which help to better understand the new way of consumers' behaviour in interdependent societies. The first echoes to the ethics of responsibility mentioned above, in particular, the "prospective responsibility" of Hans Jonas (1979). The second is the concept of "individualized collective action" developed by Micheletti (2003). The Internet is involved in both concepts.

The Internet and Consumer's Prospective Responsibility

According to Jonas (1979), it is the vulnerability of the people whom we influence that is the source of our responsibility. It is because their fate depends on us, because they need us to live, or because they may be threatened by some of our actions that we have to feel responsible for them before we act. This means that our responsibility is engaged at the source of our action; that is, *ex-ante* or *a priori*, and not only in its consequences—*ex-post* or *a posteriori* (Randrianasolo & Dubois, 2014). The economic history of fair trade shows that the pioneering fair trade shops represented in France by "artisans du monde" were not only a place to sell goods but a place where volunteers have taken care of the educational component, made aware regarding the relationship between producers and consumers, and especially the consumer's ability to act and to impact the producers' living conditions. With the arrival of the label fair trade (in France, Max Havelaar), fair trade products are retailed at hypermarkets and supermarkets. Volunteers have disappeared in those places. But the education and awareness component is not completely unreachable, thanks to the Internet. The communication of the two major international organizations of fair trade (World Fair-Trade Organization, Fair-trade Labeling Organizations) through their website highlights information and education components. Specific communication starts with the general heading "About Us", which sets the scene: fair trade is about man and woman considered as an "Agent for change" (World Fair Trade Organization, 2016). Then, a section dedicated to the history of fair trade and its principles gives more details of how this change occurs. There is always a section dedicated to the producers and the benefits of fair trade on their livelihoods, illustrated by producers' testimony. Finally, the website visitor, regardless of their status (e.g., citizen, consumer, businessperson, member of association, policy maker, retailer) is invited to act, to join the movement.

Firstly, we argue that the Internet has offered new opportunities to consumers wishing to contribute to improving living conditions in the poorest producers. An impact of the Internet has been its ability to revitalize traditional sales channels by retaining a well-adapted offer, with a set of consumers sharing potentially common interests (Resnick & Varian, 1997). Moreover, due to the Web, purchasing fair trade products is no longer solely linked to a militant approach, which previously required a commitment to belong to an association, to pay financial contributions, to go to meetings. With the Internet and the dedicated websites, blogs, and forums, consumers can now learn about the living conditions of small producers in the southern hemisphere. In some cases, it is even possible for them to interact with the actual producers. With the Internet, consumers can find information about the different organizations, labels (e.g., Fairtrade, Ecocert Fair), voluntary codes of conduct, codes of ethics (e.g., hourly compensation, opening hours, days off, but also gender/women). They can even access information on the conditions of production and producers. All forms of expression are used: articles, videos, forums, or social

networks. Hence, considering the fair trade movement, one can argue that consumers in developed countries have exercised a prospective responsibility related to the vulnerability of the producers living in poor regions suffering from global inequality. The payment of the solidarity-based extra cost is part of this responsibility a priori. Better access to information related to producers, dynamic interactivity between consumers, and fair trade, via the Internet key actors can help in exercising this responsibility. Our next point discusses one of its main consequences.

The Internet and “Individualized Collective Action” in Developed Countries

From a theoretical standpoint, the consumption of fair trade products can be seen from several perspectives. First, as a responsible consumer to mitigate the negative consequences of consuming. It can also be regarded as a positive form of the political consumerism based on “individualized collective action”. Concretely, consumers voluntarily purchase specific products regarding various values; that is, they “boycott”. A responsibility expressed by a positive form of protest, which differs from the traditional types of protest, the most well-known one being boycott. It is based on the idea that consumers are not merely passive and manipulated by the media, but potential agents for political change. They use their freedom to purchase products in harmony with their own values. Responsibility, here, means identifying the products, complying with the rules specified by the fair-trade chain, and buying them so that targeted producers can benefit from this transaction (Randrianasolo & Dubois, 2014).

This last concept emphasizes the consumer’s political role and, theoretically, proves to be the most advanced in terms of formalizing the inclusion of prospective responsibility and collective agency. In this positive form of consumption, the consumer-citizen more directly addresses the political sphere than the market. To induce global change and address fair-trade goals, individual choices need first to be modified. Political consumerism makes the individualisation of collective action possible. Thus Micheletti (2003) argues that, even without belonging to an association or a formal group with leaders representing the members’ interests, individual consumers can exercise their own prospective responsibility by adding pressure to change unfair market rules. The resulting network is naturally more diffuse, but can be extremely efficient in a globalized and interconnected world. Boycotting, as a way of choosing to buy fair-trade products in order to change the market rules, is the perfect example of such individualized collective action based on prospective responsibility. It is the aggregation of all these individualized and responsible purchases that provides the economic weight required to force the market into new directions (Dubuisson-Quellier, 2006).

Political consumerism contributes to building bridges between different groups in society and to gathering together people with the same beliefs. Its positive form is about the emergence of new institutions where citizens can pursue their own interests and public interests. Hence, the consumer has neither to look for a prefabricated refuge or association, or be represented by an elected person. Each consumer can have “its own political area” (Micheletti, 2003: 28), which nowadays can be simply inside a room, in front of a connected laptop, or everywhere with a smartphone. A consumer can be an activist in daily life, look for information, be aware, and act by making a solidarity-based purchase.

Our interest in this positive form of political consumerism lies in its ability to best reflect the consumption trends in a world that is increasingly interconnected and interdependent. Indeed, Micheletti shows that the specificity of political consumerism lies in the individualization of collective action, which is opposed to the traditional more collectivist collective action. Taking

example of French consumers, Mathé (2009) notes that the national barometer reflects clearly the willingness to pay more to get goods with proven social or environmental characteristics, including fair trade products. More recently, a study led by ADEME (French Environment and Energy Management Agency, 2014, April 2) highlights a trend towards reconciliation with nature, with oneself, and others. It reveals a social awareness: everyone can act at this level, in particular, through what is defined here as boycott. The Internet—through the explosion of websites, forums, platforms enabling information exchanges, learning-by-doing, transactions, new ways of behaving—has been likely to facilitate the exercise of responsible, solidarity-based consumption of any consumer. This digital dynamic has influenced deeply the social representation of consumption. In 2014, some 82% of French people believed that the opportunity to act responsibly by consumption has improved over the last ten years (ADEME, 2014, April 2). Regarding solidarity-based consumption benefiting development, limitations are related to the lack of regulation within the fair trade movement and the glaring absence of the producers from poor regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, which we will discuss whilst concluding with a needed modern public action.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Internet has reproduced and stimulated political debates on socio-economic issues, such as poverty and inequality, which continually “feed” the consumer’s prospective responsibility. This in turn results in a willingness to choose and to pay an extra cost for specific products. Without belonging to a formal group, the Internet helps to foster individualized collective action. Indeed, according to Dahmani (2007), it allows the circulation of ideas out of conventional institutional frameworks and facilitates direct contact between individuals and groups from different geographical origins, social and cultural. In this paper, we aim to illustrate this thesis by analyzing fair trade, a solidarity-based trading partnership. Within interdependent societies suffering from a high level of inequality, fair trade has experienced a significant growth since the 1990s. Taking the example of French consumers, one can note that they have adopted the values of solidarity and responsibility towards the poorest. However, fair trade has also suffered from a lack of regulation, thus encouraging free riders and opportunism. According to IPSOS, a well-known French polling institute, buying fair trade products makes sense to consumers in the developed countries who view it as a way to make equitable purchases. However, nearly 60% of consumers felt, in the mid-2000s, that they had too little information about how fair trade really works, about the production processes, and the financial benefits that effectively reach the marginalized producers and workers in the southern hemisphere. With the emergence of new labels, it became difficult to prevent opportunism, and people raised the issues of the credibility of so many competing labels and the traceability of fair trade products. According to Karpnya “business gains a stranglehold on the movement and gets rich from the fair trade idea” (2009: 125). This threatened the consumer’s freedom to choose effective fair trade products, which in turn, had consequences for the producers’ agency and empowerment (Randrianasolo & Dubois, 2014). According to national consumer groups, Gresham’s Law and adverse selection: “bad labels could drive out good ones” constitute a serious threat (Randrianasolo, 2010). This lack of regulation may lead to solidarity-based actions and initiatives, which could transform the opportunities into a source of exclusion. A lack of confidence between banks and financial institutions was enough to provoke a global financial crisis in 2008. It is not an exaggeration to consider the threat within the solidarity-based movements where reciprocity, liability, and

confidence play a major role and help in the willingness to buycoot a solidarity-based product and pay the extra costs involved.

According to Randrianasolo and Dubois (2014), the French government has considered this regulation issue. Fair trade organizations have required the French ministry, which is responsible for social and solidarity economy, to play a pioneering role in the labeling of fair trade initiatives through an appropriate certification process. In response, in 2005 the French government designated a member of parliament to investigate irregularities, and initiated a quality assessment in order to improve fair trade regulations. The government was concerned with those consumers who choose to buy fair-trade products and who were looking for guarantees regarding the origin and quality of these products. It also wanted to encourage consumers to go beyond the usual focus on price, and considered introducing tax incentives to promote ethical consumption (Herth, 2005). However, the main issue at the heart of the debate remained the certification process, which involved the definition of fair trade standards. After three years of intense debate, in 2006 the French Standards Agency issued a specific memorandum of agreement on fair trade. This was, unfortunately, only an agreement and did not provide the official benchmark or standard that was initially sought and expected by some consumer organizations. Some fair trade organizations therefore considered it a success while others viewed it as another setback. According to a national consumer representative (Huguet quoted in Randrianasolo, 2010), even it was well-known that the presence of the producers within the working groups involved in this labeling initiative would have made the difference for both the consumers in developed countries and the producers in developing countries, those latter cannot attend Paris meetings. Producers' trip and accommodation were too expensive. At the same time (in the beginning of the 2000's), businesspeople have already taken advantages of alternatives offered by ICTs, such as e-conferences (video conference). The interconnectedness has shaped new and relevant business models and new ways of producing wealth. Thus, lessons can be drawn. The concept of "global public action" may be not a utopia regarding solidarity-based actions, namely, solidarity-based communication in favour of international development. Connecting sub-Saharan Africa, and other developing countries, is not only a technological challenge, but for sure a worldwide socio-economic one. Structural inequalities in ICT access and exploitation are a cost to us all.

Notes

- 1 To best illustrate this consumption component, this paper uses data from our previous studies in France.
- 2 The solidarity economy therefore includes a large range of projects with differing objectives. Some may be economic (based on production, consumption, and trade), others social (education, health, employment, etc.), cultural (culture and identity, tradition, and religious affairs), or political (participation, empowerment). Fair trade is the most well-known of those emerging initiatives (Randrianasolo & Dubois, 2014).
- 3 The Millennium Development Goals are the world's time-bound and quantified targets for addressing extreme poverty in its many dimensions—income poverty, hunger,

disease, lack of adequate shelter, and exclusion—while promoting gender equality, education, and environmental sustainability. They are also basic human rights—the rights of each person on the planet to health, education, shelter, and security (United Nations, 2015). The eighth Millennium Development Goal is especially related to a global partnership for development.

- 4 According to The World Bank (2016), the Gini coefficient, also known as Gini ratio or Gini Index, measures the extent to which the distribution of income of individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. A Gini coefficient of zero represents perfect equality, while a coefficient of one implies perfect inequality as where only one person has all the income, and all others have none.

References

- ADEME. (2014, April 2). *Consommation responsable. Retour sur 10 ans d'évolution*. Retrieved January 6, 2016, from <http://www.presse.ademe.fr/2014/04/consommation-responsable-retour-sur-10-ans-devolution.html>.
- Alet, Claire. (2013). Un chocolat au goût amer. *Alternatives économiques*, 320, 48-54.
- Ballet, Jérôme, Dubois, Jean-Luc & Mahieu, François-Régis. (2007). Responsibility for each other's freedom: Agency as the source of collective capability. *Journal of Human Development*, 8(7), 185-201.
- Biagini, Cédric. (2012). *L'emprise du numérique. Comment Internet et les nouvelles technologies ont colonisé nos vies*. Paris: Editions l'Echapée.
- Cardon, Dominique. (2010). *La démocratie Internet, promesses et limites*. Paris: Seuil, La république des idées.
- Dahmani, Ahmed. (2007). Economie politique de l'Internet au Maghreb: Incertitudes d'une démocratisation du numérique. In Dahmani Ahmed and Gabas Jean-Jacques (Eds.), *La démocratie à l'épreuve de la société numérique* (pp. 293-324). Paris: Karthala.
- Dubigeon, Olivier. (2009). *Piloter un développement responsable*. Paris: Pearson Education.
- Dubois, Jean-Luc. (2009). Comprendre le bien-être pour l'assurer de manière équitable. *Tendances de la Cohésion Sociale*, 20, 81-100.
- Dubuisson-Quellier, Sophie. (2006). Pluralité des formes d'engagement des consommateurs sur les marchés: le cas des produits issus du commerce équitable. *GDR Economie & Sociologie, Les Marchés Agroalimentaires 23 et 24 mars 2006*. Retrieved September 16, 2010, from <http://symposcience.lyon.cemagref.fr/exl-doc/colloque/ART-00001962.pdf>.
- Duru-Bellat, Marie. (2014). *Pour une planète équitable. L'urgence d'une justice sociale globale*. Paris: La République des idées-Le Seuil.
- FairTrade International. (2016). *Home*. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from <http://www.fairtrade.net/>.
- Fogel, Jean-François & Patino, Bruno. (2013). *La condition numérique*. Paris: Grasset.

- Herth, Antoine. (2005). *Le commerce équitable: 40 propositions pour l'améliorer. Rapport au Premier Ministre*. Paris: La Documentation Française.
- International Fund for Agricultural Development. (2011). Rural poverty report 2011: New realities, new challenges: New opportunities for tomorrow's generation. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from <https://www.ifad.org/documents/10180/c47f2607-3fb9-4736-8e6a-a7ccf3dc7c5b>.
- Jonas, Hans. (1979). *The imperative of responsibility: In search of an ethics for the technological age*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Karpyta, Frédéric. (2009). *La face cachée du commerce équitable*. Paris: Bourin Editeur.
- Ledjou, Jean-Michel & Randrianasolo-Rakotobe Hanitra. (2013). *Des réseaux et des hommes. Les Suds à l'heure des TIC*. Paris: Karthala.
- Mathé, Thierry. (2009). Comment les consommateurs définissent-ils l'alimentation durable? Paris: Publication du Crédoc.
- Métayer, Michel. (1997). *La philosophie éthique, enjeux et débats actuels*. Québec City, Canada: Edition ERPI.
- Micheletti, Michèle. (2003). *Political virtue and shopping- individuals, consumerism and collective action*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Milanovic, Branko. (2012). *Global inequality by the numbers in history and now: An overview*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- Morrisson, Christian. (2012, January 16). Inégalités et pauvreté depuis trois siècles. *Académie des sciences morales et publiques*. Retrieved April 3, 2014, from http://www.asmp.fr/travaux/communications/2012_01_16_morrisson.htm.
- Mouzon, Céline. (2014). *Consommer autrement*. Paris: Alternatives économiques Scop-SA.
- Piketty, Thomas. (2013). *Le capital au XXIe siècle*. Paris: Editions du Seuil.
- Randrianasolo, Hanitra. (2006). Changement de comportement du consommateur dans la démarche du commerce équitable. Colloque international sur le commerce équitable et le développement durable, CRSDD, UQAM. Retrieved June 20, 2012, from http://www.crsdd.uqam.ca/Pages/docs/pdfColloques/colloque_international/Seance_2/RANDRIANASOLO%202006.pdf.
- Randrianasolo, Hanitra. (2010). De l'improbable normalisation du commerce équitable. Une approche par la dépendance au sentier. Thèse de doctorat ès Sciences économiques. Université de Versailles saint Quentin en Yvelines, saint Quentin en Yvelines.
- Randrianasolo-Rakotobe Hanitra & Dubois Jean-Luc. (2014). The French public involvement in fair trade: An opportunity to relate solidarity-based economy and the capability approach. In Ibrahim Solava and Tiwari Meera (Eds.), *The capability approach: From theory to practice* (pp. 231-248). Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Randrianasolo-Rakotobe, Hanitra, Dahmani, Ahmed & Dubois, Jean-Luc. (2014). De la nécessité d'étendre les références éthiques de l'approche par les capacités. Enseignements tirés des pratiques du commerce équitable. *Mondes en développement*, 168, 59-76.

- Resnick Paul & Varian, Hal R. (1997). Recommender systems. *Communications of the ACM*, 40(3), 56-58.
- The Economist. (2013, June 13). The world's next great leap forward: Towards the end of poverty. Retrieved September 1, 2014, from <http://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21578665-nearly-1-billion-people-have-been-taken-out-extreme-poverty-20-years-world-should-aim>.
- The World Bank and African Development Bank. (2012). *e-transform Africa*. Washington, D.C.: The World Bank.
- The World Bank. (2013). Trade and poverty reduction. *Trade*. Retrieved July 22, 2014, from <http://www.worldbank.org/trade>.
- The World Bank. (2016). The Gini index. *World Bank Data*. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI>.
- The World Trade Organization. (2016). *Trade by region*. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from https://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/tradebyregion_e.htm.
- United Nations Development Programme. (2001). *Human development report: Making new technology work for human development*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- United Nations. (2015). The Millennium Development Goals report: 2015. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from [http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20\(July%201\).pdf](http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/2015_MDG_Report/pdf/MDG%202015%20rev%20(July%201).pdf).
- World Fair Trade Organization. (2016). *Home*. Retrieved June 5, 2016, from <http://www.wfto.com/>.
-

About the Authors

Hanitra Randrianasolo-Rakotobe teaches economics at Paris Sud University and is a member of the CEI-IDEST research team. She obtained her Ph.D. from the University of Versailles, France. Her dissertation was on fair-trade certification and path dependency issues. Her research deals with technological and social innovation and development, especially solidarity-based initiatives, as a way of providing feasible new alternatives to deal with the current social challenges facing development.

Jean-Michel Ledjou is a senior lecturer at Paris Sud University. He teaches mainly in the computer science department. Being a specialist in information science and communication, his current research focuses on the relationship between communication and development in the global South. He also conducts research on the link between media and democracy.

Citing this paper:

Randrianasolo-Rakotobe, Hanitra & Ledjou, Jean-Michel. (2016). International development: The contribution of the Internet in broadening the scope of solidarity-based consumption. *Global Media Journal -- Canadian Edition*, 9(1), 73-86.