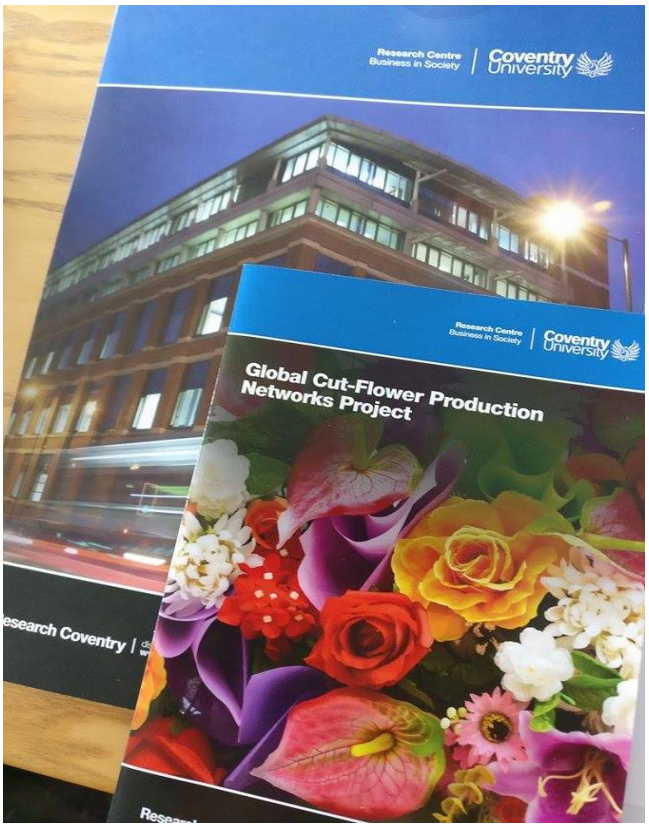

2020 WORKSHOP

Resilience and Sustainability in Global Cut-flower Supply Chains

10 December 2020, Online

SUMMARY

Our third multi-stakeholder workshop of the Global Cut-Flower Production Network Project took place on 10 December 2020 via the online Teams platform. This had to be postponed from the original plans of meeting in May 2020, where the Dutch Flower Council were intending to host the event. This needed to be changed not only due to the global Coronavirus pandemic making travel impossible, but also as many of our stakeholder were facing serious challenges and threats to their business. However, we were very keen then appropriate and possible to draw together our key stakeholder to share ideas for coping with the challenges and to make plans for working together to overcome these through the development of more resilient supply chains in the future. Work is now being done to take these plans forward after a significant level of interest from the group and a prioritising of their continued work on the project with Coventry University.

Acknowledgements

This workshop draws on several research projects and we would like to highlight the contributions of Dr Alex Hughes (University of Newcastle), Dr Luc Fransen (University of Amsterdam), Nora Lanari (Coventry University) and Dr Natalie Dukes (Coventry University).

All pictures and figures in this report were either taken during the workshop or drawn from the participants' presentations. We also that Dr Rebecca Beech for her assistance with the workshop and the production of very prompt notes following this, despite Christmas being nearly upon us.

The Project

The Global Cut-Flower Production Network Project is co-led by Dr Jill Timms and Dr David Bek and based at the Centre for Business in Society (CBiS) at Coventry University in the UK. During the global Coronavirus of 2020, the project has continued and pivoted to continue its aims but in a way that addresses the immediate challenges of sustainable supply chains and the impact of the virus on different parts of the chain. We were successful in a competitive bid for funds from DFID as part of their Rapid Response to COVID-19. For this bid we are partnering with MM Flowers, the Fairtrade Foundation, M&S, Tesco, COOP and Women Working Worldwide. It will run until 31 July 2021.

Our longstanding and evolving project aims are (i) to investigate the promotion of ethical flowers and how this can contribute to improved environmental and working conditions in supply chains, (ii) to understand the role of private standards, and (iii) to examine how demand for ethical flowers could benefit businesses and promote sustainable improvements for all stakeholders in flower supply chains. It draws on inter-related research funded by the British Academy/Leverhulme Trust, WWF South Africa, and Coventry University Pump Prime grants, IMPAKT-SS funds and DFID Rapid Response COVID-19 funding. A wide range of university, commercial, and NGO partners are also involved.

Core Project Team

Dr Jill Timms

Associate Head of School for Research, School of Strategy & Leadership & Research Associate, Coventry University

Jill is the Associate Head of School responsible for Research in the School of Strategy and Leadership and an Associate at the Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University (UK). She is co-lead of the Global Cut-Flower Production Network Project, investigating the social and environmental impacts of supply chains and mapping the certification landscape. Jill has been researching the flower industry for over 10 years. Her teaching focuses on ethical business, managing change and corporate social responsibilities. Jill is a sociologist of work and organisations, with a PhD from the London School of Economics that investigated CSR and campaigns for workers' rights. She is Co-Convenor of the Work, Employment and Economic Life group of the British Sociology Association, and on the committee of the Global Studies Association.

Dr David Bek

Reader, Coventry University

David is a Reader in Sustainable Economies based at the Research Centre for Business in Society at Coventry University (UK) where he co-leads the Sustainable Production and Consumption Research Cluster. David has extensive experience undertaking research into sustainability within horticultural supply chains, especially cut-flowers. He has worked alongside organisations in the fruit, wine and flower sectors in South Africa to develop training courses and monitoring and evaluation tools to promote enhanced sustainability in practice. David is especially interested in developing an evidence base to demonstrate how innovations within sustainability practice can lead to improvements in businesses' resilience, productivity and profitability. He is also engaged with projects that seek to shift the focus of standards and certifications away from audit-dependency towards an approach based upon continuous improvement.

Dr Rebecca Beech

Lecturer at School for Strategy and Leadership and Project Research Assistant, Coventry University

Rebecca gained her PhD at the Centre for Business in Society in 2020. She has previously been a Research Assistant on the Global Cut Flower Network Project and now contributes as a full time member of Coventry University staff. Her background is in marketing and she has a keen interest in sustainability and the circular economy.

Workshop Participants

Organisers

Jill Timms	AHoS for Research & Research Associate, Coventry University
David Bek	Research Fellow, Coventry University
Rebecca Beech	Lecturer and Project Research Assistant, Coventry University

Participants

Anna Barker	Supply Chain and Programme Manager Flowers, Fairtrade Foundation
Angela Coulton	Owner and manager, Petal & Twig, member Flowers From the Farm
Chanel de Kock	Marketing Manager United Kingdom, Flower Council of Holland
Caroline Downey	Executive Director, Women Working Worldwide (WWW) and MM Flowers
Lauren Welch	Sustainability Officer MM Flowers
Brian Wills-Pope MBE DL	Chair, British Florist Association (BFA)

Resilience and Sustainability: Experiences of COVID-19 in the Cut-Flower Industry

This workshop has been postponed due to the serious implications of the 2020 pandemic for our research, the industry and the organisations and individuals on our key stakeholder group. Although we have retained contact, we limited this when we knew many were struggling for business survival and uncertainty continued

Therefore we gathered feedback with regards to when to meet, and held this event as an online meeting before the end of the year. We began by listening to how each participant had experienced the lockdown and their current position. We also shared updates from the project and particularly the work being undertaken with Fairtrade and MM Flowers on a rapid response to farm worker need and efforts towards resilient supply chains. Due to the circumstances and for practical reasons this workshop was smaller in terms of number of participants and for less time, but as they were our key steering group members we were able to address discussions in-depth due to our shared histories and trust. We also see this as a step towards increasing our reach out once again.

Brief overview of the workshops so far

Dr Jill Timms and Dr David Bek launched the Global Cut-Flower Production Network Project with a one-day workshop in July 2017. This first workshop brought together 16 participants from academia, industry, and NGOs. It focused on *identifying the sustainability challenges at different points of the global cut-flower supply chain*. During this first workshop, participants identified sustainability challenges at the supply end (e.g. lack of transparency); the retail end (e.g. use of plastics); and concerns expressed by wider stakeholders (e.g. women's rights, unclear certification confusing for consumers). All participants agreed that sustainability needs a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach.



Thanks to the positive feedback received from this first workshop, Jill and David organised a second event, kindly hosted by MM-UK at their new facilities in Alconbury Weald, with a two-day duration. This second workshop gathered 17 participants, including florists, wholesalers, academics, NGOs, and standards and certification setting bodies.



The aim was to investigate *what a sustainable/ethical flower is and how it can be assured*. The discussions emphasised that a sustainable flower needs to fulfil economic, social, and environmental requirements. Three important outcomes resulted from these discussions: there is a need for guiding principles about sustainability; standards need to be simplified so they are easier to communicate; and sustainability needs mainstreaming within floristry education.



As a result, Dr Jill Timms and Dr David Bek have begun to implement a series of smaller projects, including:

- Collating information about certification standards with the aim to produce a leaflet for florists together with the British Florist Association (BFA).
- Training on sustainability for florists
- Development of a sustainability standard for small-scale growers in collaboration with Flowers from the Farm.
- Embedding sustainability in the South African Cape Flora sector through multi-stakeholder dialogue.
- Development of an online sustainability training course, together with Tesco.
- Planning and holding a third multi-stakeholder workshop in the Netherlands.



The third multi-stakeholder workshop took place from 3rd to 4th of April 2019, in Aalsmeer, the Netherlands. The overarching aim of this third meeting was to *identify the ways and actions through which we can drive sustainability in the cut-flower industry*.

Our visit to the Netherlands was planned to coincide with the Spring Trade Fair at Royal FloraHolland Auction House and so not only included being hosted by two different stakeholders, but also a sustainability focused visit by the group to the Trade Fair as the guests of FloraHolland.

The fourth workshop being reported on here, was held on 10 December 2020 and involved some participants who had attended all previous workshops and so it was useful to reflect on dramatic changes they faced.

10 December 2020

Objectives of the fourth multi-stakeholder workshop

- To bring **together** people from different parts of the cut-flower supply chains, to facilitate learning and understanding, and share updates on the project and research
- To understand the **key challenges** each participant has experiences in the pandemic and their current position after the UK second lockdown
- To **share key learning** and ideas for improving resilience
- To **develop a plan** for a steering group to keep in touch and drive goals forward

Our meeting began with apologies and messages from those who were unable to join due to other commitments. Participants were welcomed and the agenda agreed. The parameters for the meeting, ethical information and consent for recording were confirmed.

Experiences and perspectives on COVID-19 from across the Flower Supply Chain

All participant presentation

We spend this section of the meeting giving a space to each participant to reflect on their experience during the pandemic, since March 2020 through to the second lockdown. Each specifically described what had happened to their organisation and own work, drawing out the differences at the different stages. Each was asked specifically to identify which were the most difficult times, the key challenges and the current situation.

Although the exact experiences differed in terms of where exactly in the supply chain they represent, key themes were identified in terms of the crisis management of the first lockdown, the significant costs, risks and stress involved, as well as the need to adapt. Perspectives on the sudden halt in some flower orders, the subsequent rise in online sales, the impact of COVID on their staff as well as those right through to the growing farms, as well as the challenges of maintaining standards and in particular conducting sustainability audits were all key themes identifies.

It was also very clean that all participants continued to face significant uncertainty in terms of the immediate term for government restrictions possible for Christmas and also whether or not or what deal might be struck for trade with Europe as we count down to the Brexit deadline.

Updates on the Sustainable Flowers Project

Presentation from David Bek and Jill Timms, with Fairtrade and MM Flowers

Dave and Jill took the opportunity to present to the group the different strands of the project that have continued during the pandemic and how some of our aims have pivoted to take account of the dramatically changed landscape of the industry in 2020. This included:

- the work on Wildflower Harvesting and new certification being developed for this
- the development of work on Modern Slavery regulation implementation during the pandemic and how this relates to the agricultural sector, including flowers, and the impact of Brexit
- the successful bid we joined with the Fairtrade Foundation, MM Flowers, Women Working Worldwide and retailers M&S, Tesco and Co-op, for Department For International Development. This rapid response COVID-19 project is already delivery relief in the form of food gardens, PPE and awareness programme for flower farm workers in Kenya, with more work planned on developing resilience in the industry for any future crisis.

We took questions and had a fruitful discussion, with interest in contributing and suggestions for developing the work from the wider group.

Brian from the BFA also shared work he had been involved in on raising the sustainability agenda at a European level with a coalition coming together to try to do this. He will be happy to connect us to those efforts too.

Learning from the first COVID lockdown and how they are being applied

All participant presentation

For this section of the meeting, each participant was asked to consider what they and their organisation had learnt during the experience of the first wave of the pandemic, and if they were or hoped to put this into action for current circumstances. It was obvious that March to July 2020 had been a very steep learning curve, as in most industries with the pandemic of this nature being unprecedented. In sharing the experiences from different perspective, it became clear that whilst crisis management was needed to some degree in the current uncertainty, actually some of the adaptations made were still serving well and in some cases were providing better or increased options from usual business practices.

Key themes will be taken up in more detail at subsequent events, as this one was designed to be a connecting link to our next in 2021. Notably these included communication and the need for up to date information. Key organisations such as the BFA and Dutch Flower Council were looked to for providing advice and the latest news for their members. Fairtrade also reported that they had taken on a much more significant role than before as a communication hub for different organisations to gain an understanding of what was happening on the ground in East African farms. This is seen as a learning to be applied in terms of showing value in the organisations ability to provide this and the opportunity to build on trust which was demonstrated to be growing. A sense of needing to share information and collaborate on ways to overcome challenges was also a strong point picked up.



The impact of the pandemic on buying patterns and behaviour were a key topic discussed. The longer term significance of this is yet to be understood and indeed will continue to be part of our project, but certainly the move to online flower sales, the need for flexibility in variety depending on source availability, and the strengthening position of local growers due to the need and interest in buying locally was an

Taking the project forward

Discussion facilitated by David Bek and Jill Timms

We returned to the aims of the session and the group unanimously agreed it had been a valuable meeting, and that they would benefit from more regular events of this nature. Given the different format for this fourth session, this could likely be possible due to it being online so not determined by funding or travel. We also discussed a plan for developing a pathway forward from the pandemic towards a more resilient industry.

We agreed to follow up on various parts of the discussion, but recognised there were some significant capacity issues at present due to uncertainty around a possible new lockdown and the upcoming Brexit. Therefore we agreed that meeting post-Valentines' Day and before Mothers' Day would work best. At this point we will develop our agenda for the 2021 year ahead and update further on the research. We will also be following up with individual organisations in how we might be able to coordinate shared best practice and learnings, and to understand their experience in more depth. This will help to inform our plans further and to allow inclusion of those unable to join today. We all hope to be able to meet in person again by next summer.



Many thanks to all who took part and have demonstrated their interest.

We look forward to working together for a more resilient and sustainable flower industry in 2021.

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