Balancing Growth and Resilience in the $200 Billion Global Coffee Industry

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As global demand for coffee continues to rise, fuelled by evolving consumer preferences and expanding premium segments, the sustainability and resilience of the coffee value chain have come under increasing scrutiny. From climate change and price volatility to inequitable value distribution, the sector faces a complex set of challenges that directly impact the livelihoods of nearly 25 million farmers worldwide.

In this exclusive interaction with NUFFOODS Spectrum, El Mamoun Amrouk, Senior Economist and Team Leader in the Markets and Trade Division at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), shares his insights on the significance of the UNâ??s proclamation of International Coffee Day, the shifting dynamics of global coffee markets, and the urgent need for sustainable and inclusive strategies. He also highlights the role of policy frameworks, innovation, and public-private collaboration in ensuring that coffee producers, particularly smallholders, can thrive in an increasingly demanding and sustainability-driven global marketplace.

How do you expect the official UN proclamation of International Coffee Day to influence global discussions regarding the sustainability and resilience of the coffee value chain?

The UN proclamation of International Coffee Day formally recognises coffeeâ??s socio-economic, cultural and development importance and helps raise global awareness. This can support dialogue and collaboration across the coffee value chain to address the challenges facing the sector.

With the global coffee industry generating over $200 billion annually and supporting 25 million farmers, what are the key business opportunities and challenges facing producers, particularly smallholders, in the evolving market?

Growing global demand and expanding higher-quality segments create opportunities for producers to upgrade quality and move into higherâ??value activities along the value chain. However, most value addition occurs downstream and producers, especially smallholders, capture only a small share of final value, while remaining exposed to climate variability, price volatility and rising production costs.

As climate change increasingly affects coffee-growing regions, which sustainable farming practices or innovations does the FAO view as most critical for ensuring long-term productivity?

Practices such as agroforestry, improved soil and water management, climate-resilient varieties, and improved pest and disease management can help sustain coffee production and reduce vulnerability to climate variability.

How can coffee-producing countries balance increasing global demands for traceability and sustainability compliance with the economic realities faced by small-scale farmers?

Countries can balance these demands by ensuring that sustainability and traceability requirements remain accessible to smallholders and are supported by capacity development and institutional support. Strengthening producer organisations, improving information systems and expanding technical assistance can help farmers meet market requirements.

Coffee exports are vital to the economies of countries such as Ethiopia, Uganda, and Burundi. How can policy frameworks and investments help strengthen value addition and income stability for producers in these regions?

Coffee-producing countries can strengthen value addition and income stability by investing in stronger domestic value chains. This includes quality upgrading, expanding processing capacity, improving human and infrastructure assets and strengthening producer organisations to retain more value locally.

What role can public-private partnerships and global institutions play in building a more inclusive industry while ensuring fair returns for farmers?

Public-private collaboration and international cooperation can support investments in sustainable production, strengthen coffee value chains and provide finance and technical assistance. Coordinated action across the value chain is important to support more sustainable and inclusive outcomes for producers.

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