

## Gender Makes the Difference

Fair Trade is a concept of trading partnerships, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, which seeks to attain greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers, especially those of women. Fair Trade is also a pragmatic approach to reducing poverty. Without doubt, this has been a key part of its success, particularly in the case of women's involvement in the business arena.

Fair trade seeks to ensure that women's work is properly valued and rewarded, so that women are paid justly for their contribution to the production process. The independence of women as producers is developed through sustained relationships with trading partners, which provide much needed continuity and often include training in management skills, improved access to markets and financial and technical assistance. In addition, attention is paid to the empowerment of women in their organizations and to the recognition of their intellectual property rights in the use and management of natural resources. Fair trade is "quality that cares," and it opens up spaces for making women's contribution visible, through recognition that income, security and support are necessary for pulling them and their families out of poverty.

### Fair Trade helps in the following ways:

- To organize and properly recognize the work of women throughout the entire chain of production and to secure their employment, improve their income and ensure access to technology, credit and the decision-making process.
- To support women in their struggle for economic, social and political emancipation and encourage their active role on the farm, in society, in organized groups and in managerial levels.
- To improve the living conditions and well-being of men and women producers by facilitating their access to markets, reinforcing producer organizations, paying a better price for their products and providing continuity in their trading relations.
- To develop a safe environment with favorable conditions for conservation and sustainable development through responsible corporate citizenship, taking into account existing differences between men and women and their mutual need to achieve a wholesome life.
- To improve production systems available to women and men, at the same time ensuring recognition of their inputs, reduction of costs and efficient processes leading to environmentally and socially sound results.



**FURTHER INFORMATION ON THIS TOPIC CAN BE FOUND AT:**

IUCN Gender and Environment  
[www.genderandenvironment.org](http://www.genderandenvironment.org)

Fair Trade Federation  
[www.fairtradefederation.com/](http://www.fairtradefederation.com/)

Oxfam International  
[www.oxfam.org/](http://www.oxfam.org/)

FLO International  
[www.fairtrade.net/](http://www.fairtrade.net/)

Fair Wear Foundation  
[www.fairwear.nl/](http://www.fairwear.nl/)

**SOURCES:**

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Fair Trade Federation.  
Switzerland. 2000.

Fair Trade International.  
**FLO International.**  
Bonn, Germany. 2003.

Fair Wear Foundation.  
**Conference.**  
Amsterdam, Netherlands. 2003.

Future Harvest.  
**Women Feed the World.**  
[www.futureharvest.org/people/women.shtml](http://www.futureharvest.org/people/women.shtml)  
2001.

Raworth, K. and Harvey, C.  
**Más por menos: El trabajo precario de las mujeres en las cadenas de producción global.**  
Oxfam International.  
United Kingdom. 2004.

- To create and develop opportunities for less favored producers, especially women and indigenous groups, and protecting young girls and boys from being exploited during the production process.
- Within the context of Corporate Social Responsibility, it is an instrument that favors commercial ethics.

**WHY GENDER MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN FAIR TRADE INITIATIVES**

- Gender equity makes more visible the input of women in terms of: knowledge, production, and protection of biodiversity, within the fair trade concept. In the Andean region of South America, women collect and store seeds in “seed banks” upon which their future food production relies. In the field, women farmers sow, weed, apply fertilizer and pesticides, harvest, and prepare the crops for market. Women have traditionally been trusted with all the knowledge of the diversity and conservation strategies of the seeds in the region. Thanks to fair trade practices, these women have found recognition through fair payment for their products and a new awareness of the crucial importance of their work, knowledge and participation in conservation initiatives to protect biodiversity.
- It creates spaces for the development of associative programs among groups of women producers, which strengthen their entrepreneurial skills, as well as their access and ability to tap sources of information, credit and new markets. Such conditions will contribute to improve the socio-economic conditions and the quality of life of women and their families, through greater capacity to bring their products directly to market.
- It preserves sustainable farming methods through fair market prices, which in turn, become an instrument for diversification of production and development of alternative sources of income, thus contributing to improve the nutrition and health of the population. Evidence shows that women farmers can achieve agricultural yields equal to, and even significantly higher than, those of men.
- It recognizes that contamination impacts women and men in different ways. Fair Trade supports small domestic economies that utilize good production practices and strive to reduce contamination of water resources, soils and the atmosphere, while at the same time making efficient use of energy sources.
- It makes consumers aware of the contribution of women and children to production and promotes educational programs designed to expose the negative effects of exclusive international trade on producers, enabling consumers to exercise their purchasing power in a positive way. Fair trade has increased women’s employment and working conditions in the production of flowers in Colombia and Ecuador, as well as in fruit production in Chile.
- It promotes recognition of the investment in time and effort made by men and women in the marketing and sale of their products, which otherwise has no compensation in traditional marketing practices. Through the rendering of support services, including pre-export financing, Fair Trade impels buyers to make a considerable difference in the lives of the producers and helps to dilute risks associated with the production and sale of their products.
- It helps to target women as valid beneficiaries of fair trade. Women are the key to sustainable development and the disproportionately subject to absolute poverty.

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