

## Fair Trade: A tool for women empowerment

Franco, I.

Keywords: fair trade, tool, women, empowerment

### Abstract

*According to FINE, the umbrella organization that links the main Fair Trade Organizations in the world (FLO-IFAT-EFTA-NEWS!), Fair trade is defined as a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency, and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, disadvantaged producers and workers – especially in the South. The Fairtrade Labeling Organization International is charged to develop fair trade Standards, which distinguishes between minimum requirements, which producers must meet to be certified, and progress requirements that encourage producer organizations to continuously improve in all areas of the standard areas, and to invest in organizational development and in their producers/workers. This concept is developed for the target group of fair trade: disadvantaged producers. It encourages sustainable, social, economic, and environmental development of producers and their organizations. Different basic standards are provided for small farmers and for hired labor situations.*

*The concept of fair trade, however, goes far beyond a simple economic transaction. What is at the heart of fair trade is that buyers and producers build long-term partnerships. Unlike aid, which is dependent on donors, fair trade offers a more sustainable way for farmers, workers, and their families to improve their livelihoods, such as through better social, working, and living conditions of the producers, the workers and their families. The benefits often extend to the entire community, which thanks to the fair trade premium, can actively impact upon the lives of individuals, by improving health services, providing medical supplies, building community stores for low-priced staple foods, providing educational facilities, and extending educational opportunities for children. Furthermore, fair trade farmers and workers respect the environment and are encouraged to engage in sustainable methods of production. Farmers implement integrated crop management and avoid the use of toxic agrochemicals for pest management.*

*Women's experiences show that in every country of the world, the richest included, the empowerment of women is based on economical autonomy linked to democracy, participation, and non-discrimination. The latter are among basic fair trade standards, which include transparency, mainly in fair trade premium management. Therefore, important investments can be made in women's income generating activities that are not related to the farm, thereby strengthening their income, business experience, and position in the family. In many cases, women who are members of their organizations may reach strong positions within the organization. For instance, in APPTA, an association of small producers in Costa Rica, women constitute 38% of the members of the association, whose President is a woman.*

*Some examples may help to better understand how the position of women can be improved through fair trade certified producers' organizations, according to their local culture and their personal histories, such as the words of comfort, a cocoa farmer in Ghana, who is a widow, with five children, in her early fifties. She is a member of the Kuapa Kokoo Union cocoa farmers cooperative in Ghana.*

*Another example is given by the words of Regina, a member of the Windward Islands Farmers' Association (WINFA), based in the Caribbean territory in the east of Dominica.*