



Gender Equity and Women's Empowerment





I. Introduction

Fair trade is a movement that empowers farmers, workers, and fishers to fight poverty in ways that improve lives and protect the environment. Founded in 1998, Fair Trade USA is the leading 501(c) (3) nonprofit, third party certifier of fair trade products in North America. It is building an innovative model of responsible business, conscious consumerism, and shared value to eliminate poverty and enable sustainable development for farmers, workers, fishers, their families, and their communities. Fair Trade USA achieves its mission by empowering producers around the world with the business training, environmental knowledge, and capital investment necessary to create high-quality products that can compete in global markets, and by certifying and promoting fair trade products.

Fair Trade USA and its partners work together to drive system-wide impact goals related to resilient and sustainable communities, prosperity, mutually beneficial trade, and conscious consumption. At origin, this means that the farmers, workers, and fishers participating in fair trade, along with their families and communities, are prosperous, resilient and thriving. Fair Trade USA's vision and these goals cannot be achieved without addressing gender inequality and without empowering women to be agents of change for themselves, their families, and their communities.



"Working is my pride, and being able to work in an organized way is very important. The mango business makes it easier for the entire community because we can all prosper from it. It feels good to work and also to be able to hire friends to work, too."

Guerdie Belon, Brochette, La Chapelle, Artibonite, Haiti

Key Terms in this Document

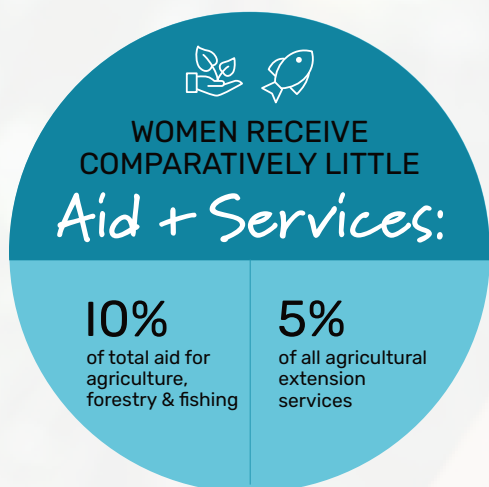
GENDER EQUALITY refers to the equal opportunity to develop and make choices unhindered by gender stereotypes, roles, and prejudices. It means that the different behaviors and needs of women and men are equally considered and valued. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities, and opportunities do not depend on whether they are born male or female.

GENDER EQUITY means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment, or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations, and opportunities. Promotion of gender equity (fair treatment) is a key step towards ensuring gender equality (equal freedom).

EMPOWERMENT refers to the ability of an individual or community to take ownership of their life and choices with confidence and the related sense of accomplishment and well-being due this ability to make decisions for themselves that affect their livelihoods and trajectories. Women's empowerment refers to this ability specifically for women and girls as individuals and a collective.

II. Background and Context

Gender equality is now widely recognized as a human right, and the role of women in societies has long been recognized as a key factor in sustainable development and sustainable economies. Despite this, gender disparities are a persistent form of inequality in every country. Even though progress is being made, women and girls are often discriminated against in a broad range of contexts related to education, the labor market, health, and more. Women are disproportionately represented in low wage jobs and in lower tiers of the supply chain. Within agricultural supply chains, women receive a disproportionately small proportion of both aid and extension services—it is estimated that women receive only 10% of total aid for agriculture, forestry and fishing, and female farmers receive only 5% of all agricultural extension services.



Biases against women are widespread and often unconscious. The United Nations (UN) conducted a World Values survey across 75 countries which found that approximately 90% of people, both of men and women, hold some sort of bias against women in areas such as education, economic roles, domestic partner violence, and reproductive rights.

The United Nations, a thought leader in this space, recognizes gender inequality as a major barrier to human development and to sustainability. Their Sustainable Development



Laurentina Calderon is a single mother and cacao grower who has been associated with CEPICAFE since 1998. The cooperative used Fair Trade Community Development Funds to help build a communal cacao processing and storage depot.

Palo Blanco, Chulucanas, Piura, Peru

Goals (SDGs) highlight gender equality as one of 17 overall goals, which are an urgent call for action by all countries around the globe.

SDG 5 is a call to achieve gender equality and to empower all women and girls, and includes targets related to discrimination, violence against women, equal opportunities for leadership, and equal rights to economic resources, among others. The UN also tracks progress on gender inequality globally through their **Gender Inequality Index** and **Gender Social Norms Index**, where they find a strong correlation between gender inequality and a loss in human development.

The UN recognizes three important pathways to pursue gender equality: redressing socio-economic disadvantage; enhancing recognition and dignity; and, enhancing equal participation in decision-making. Fair Trade USA directly contributes to addressing all three of these pathways and the fair trade model works to bring together actors to collectively drive change. This is important as change within supply chains is complex and requires multiple actors. Governments, companies, employers, and cooperatives, as well as farmers, workers, and fishers must all take steps to recognize and address inequalities.



Women play an important role in the coconut industry. After harvesting, coconuts are gathered, husked, and hauled to the nearest roadside or buying station and sent on their way to be processed into food products like water, virgin coconut oil, and flour.

Luzon Island, Philippines

Strengthening production through collaboration

Coconut farmers Ma Lorena, Eden, and Eputacion are a few of the 1500 small producers that take part in fair trade through coconut processor Franklin Baker in the Philippines. Even though they have been farming for many years—they range in age from 45 to 65—the three women share a desire to continue to learn how to improve their productivity and quality. They are active participants in the fair trade program, and they shared the ways that the program supported them in their quest for knowledge.

Eden highlighted the power of bringing people together: “Through Fair Trade, I acquired new friends and new acquaintances. Knowing new coconut farmers gave me new knowledge. It is like an exchange of learning experiences. We share everything about coconuts, our methods in working in the farm, and many others. It gives me an idea to apply these new knowledge in my farm and continue on what works best for me.”

Ma Lorena spoke of the opportunities provided by access to inputs and training: “Our access to new varieties of coconuts and additional knowledge were made easy. This feeling of being upgraded because of the new knowledge and varieties of coconut can also bring us higher income in the long run because it will give a higher amount of harvest.”

Eputacion spoke of how important it was to her not only to learn, but to support others in their learning: “We are always active in every activity...because I want to be a model to my other members and I want to be able to disseminate information to members who were not able to attend.”

The three women continue to exemplify the power of lifelong learning and to serve as role models for other coconut farmers today.



III. Women in Production Systems

Fair Trade consumers have access to more than 12,500 products that carry the Fair Trade Certified seal. These products originate from over 60 countries and represent a broad range of industries and commodities—from coffee, cocoa, produce, and dairy in agriculture, to fisheries and aquaculture, to factories producing apparel and home goods.

Women play a critical role in all of these sectors. For example, women make up 80% of the workforce in global garment supply chains, as well as more than 80% of the seafood processing sector and half of all workers in the seafood industry more broadly. Women play a major role in the agricultural sector as well.

Globally, 1 in 4 women is engaged in agriculture. It is estimated that women in rural communities make up the majority of the agricultural labor force, especially in subsistence farming, and that across low-income countries women make up about 43% of the broader agricultural labor force.

Within the fair trade system, women make up approximately 30% of the Program Participants. Program Participants refers to the farmers, fishers, and workers that are the direct participants and beneficiaries of fair trade who engage in decision-making around the spending of the Fair Trade Community Development Fund. This percentage is significantly higher in operations that rely on hired labor, in particular the apparel and home goods sector, compared to in smallholder agriculture and in small-scale fisheries. This is consistent with the comparatively unseen role that women often play in the latter systems. In smallholder agriculture, for example, women often play a large role on the farm, while their husbands formally represent the family within a cooperative or at the market.

“Shrimp basically supports the whole community. By doing this I’ve been able to educate my kids and give them more opportunities.”

María Rodriguez, Co-op Ensenada de la Palma, Sinaloa, Mexico



“Before fair trade, as women, we never participated in a single meeting. Women were responsible for looking after the children, and the men did not think very highly of us. Those who were in charge, who made the decisions, were the men.”

Paula Chavez, president of the ASPROAGRO coffee cooperative

Although these women are essential to the production of fair trade products, and often do participate in fair trade programs, they are underrepresented in the data.

Women working in these sectors face a broad range of challenges, often perpetuated by cultural norms and/or government policies. Challenges include, but are not limited to:

- Women face many barriers to economic opportunity, including laws that prevent them from owning land or opening a bank account. The World Bank reports that 75 countries still restrict women's rights to own and/or manage assets. Less than 20% of landowners globally are women.
- The role of female farmers in smallholder agriculture often goes unseen and unmeasured, and their voices go unheard. It is common for men to represent the family within a cooperative and at the market, while women undertake the bulk of the labor on the farm.
- Female workers are often subject to harassment and assault, which can be exacerbated in situations where women work alone in isolated areas such as in fields.
- Discrimination prevents women from advancing and keeps their income low. Female workers face discrimination in wages, allocation of benefits, promotion opportunities and access to higher waged positions, while female farmers face discrimination in access to inputs and trainings.
- Women are responsible for the bulk of the child-care and household responsibilities in addition to their paid work—they spend three times as many hours as men each day on these unpaid duties. Women are also responsible for water collection in 80% of households that do not have water access on the premises.



Sandra Intriago, Vice President of the Quiroga Association, plays with drying cacao beans.

Manabi, Ecuador



"Women had to walk really far to get water. It was dirty and unsafe. Now, the water pump area is clean, efficient, and safer for our community."

Michel Yao Kouassi, on his Côte d'Ivoire village's water pump made possible by Community Development Funds.

IV. Fair Trade USA's Approach to Gender

Fair Trade USA envisions a future where women and men have equal opportunities and are equally empowered. To reach this end, it is first necessary to promote gender equity, or fair treatment, which levels the playing field in terms of ensuring that men and women have equal ease of access to resources and opportunities. Fair Trade USA's approach to gender is three-pronged: 1) create a safe space for women, 2) focus on empowering women, and 3) recognize gender equality as a means of driving broader impact goals.

CREATING A SAFE SPACE FOR WOMEN

Ensuring that core protections are in place, that individuals feel safe, and that basic needs are met, is a critical first step in addressing gender inequities. Fair Trade Standards support the creation of a safe space for women. Fair Trade Standards:

- Prohibit sexual harassment, abuse, and forced pregnancy testing and/or contraception.
- Prohibit discrimination in the workplace in hiring, wages, promotion, and access to training as well as discrimination against female small producers in areas such as prices, membership, and access to cooperatives' services.
- Recognize protections and needs specific to women, such as working conditions while pregnant, maternity leave, and breastfeeding breaks as well as access to feminine hygiene products at fair prices.
- Require grievance systems and policies be in place to enable all individuals to report incidents and concerns, and for these grievances to be reviewed and responded to in an appropriate manner.

Fair Trade USA staff work with producers on the ground to ensure that both male and female producers and workers understand



"Before, we women were ashamed to speak up, to ask, to give our opinions. Now, we know our rights, and machismo has waned. It is hard to eradicate completely, but things have changed drastically."

Maria Sabina Hernandez Cueva, mother of two and president of Cafe Femenino, a select brand of coffee made only by women. San Miguel, Peru.



these requirements, understand their personal rights related to these areas, and understand what actions are available to them if they feel their rights or the requirements have been violated.

Once women have a safe space, they have more freedom and ability to invest in themselves, their families, and their communities.

EMPOWERING WOMEN

Fair Trade USA aims to empower all individuals and communities participating in Fair Trade and to support individuals in building leadership skills. All aspects of the Fair Trade USA program, from the standards and certification process, to producer services, to the Fair Trade Community Development Fund were designed with empowerment of the program participants in mind and with the goal of raising the voices of those who have traditionally been less heard.

Fair Trade USA recognizes that women tend to have fewer opportunities than their male peers. Through its standards, the organization works to level the playing field on Fair Trade Committees and on other Committees formed as part of fair trade. Committees must be representative of the workforce or the smallholder group, including being representative of gender. The program also encourages consideration of the particular needs of women when conducting trainings, assessing the needs of program participants, and determining spending of the Community Development Funds.

The opportunity to demonstrate their leadership abilities and build skills via participation in fair trade supports women in understanding and realizing their potential. When women step up to lead, they also help to shift the perspective of others about gender roles and gender equity—among their peers (male and female), as well as within company or cooperative management and leadership.



Her Voice Is a Force for Good

Saidel Hernandez (pictured) has lived in Baja California since she was born, and has spent her entire career working in the state's agriculture industry. When she was younger, she worked picking tomatoes and green peppers and has memories of spending her school vacations and weekends harvesting vegetables near her home. Later, she began working as a berry harvester, and today she works for BerryMex, one of Driscoll's independent growers, on a Fair Trade Certified farm.

Women from Saidel's crew nominated her for the Fair Trade Committee, but she was hesitant. "A few of my coworkers said I should be part of the Committee. I said, 'I can't, I won't be able to do it!', but they really pushed me. When they said, 'we trust you because you listen to us', I was convinced." During the election, Saidel was nervous to address the group. "It's a big deal to have to speak in front of 700 people when you've never done it." "It really surprised me how many people believed in me—I could never have expected such a thing. But, when the vote happened, I saw them all supporting me. It was beautiful and it motivated me to do whatever was in my power to support them also." Since then, she's definitively acted on that desire by helping to run an in-depth assessment of the needs of the workers and their families and supporting the implementation of projects to address the identified needs.

When Saidel thinks about the future, she's optimistic. She imagines the opportunity to use the Community Development Fund to leave an indelible mark, a "plasmado", on the workers, their families, and their communities.



Workers at Rajlakshmi Cotton Mills, like Deepali Das, used Community Development Funds to purchase bicycles for their children to commute to school.

Kolkata, West Bengal

Empowering women has other benefits as well. Women often demonstrate a different model of leadership than men, one that can improve efficacy of organizations. Research shows that in committees, for example, women tend to be more willing to share information, collaborate to resolve disputes, and represent the interests of wider membership than their male peers.

GENDER EQUALITY AND WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT AS A DRIVER OF POSITIVE CHANGE

Fair Trade USA also recognizes that gender equity, gender equality, and women's empowerment are directly linked to the other impacts goals we are working to achieve. Increased education, income stabilization, and environmental stewardship are all linked to women's empowerment. Advancing gender equality is critical to a healthy society and has a powerful positive impact on communities. This is reflected in the fact that many of the targets and indicators associated with the UN's other 16 SDGs also are directly linked to gender.

Women tend to prioritize families and communities. Studies have found that when women work they invest 90 percent of their income back into their families, compared with 35 percent for men. Investing in women also makes economic and business sense. Programs improving income-generating activities for women have been found to return \$7 for every dollar spent. In smallholder agricultural systems, when knowledge gaps between men and women are reduced via training for women, productivity can increase by as much as 131%. In addition to these productivity increases, studies also show that prioritizing women's participation in smallholder supply chains leads to improved product quality and better use of inputs.

"With fair trade we've been able to create a women's committee that does training and education in self-esteem, preventative health care, as well as raising small animals like chickens and guinea pigs so the women can increase their income when the money from coffee runs out. There's a lot of machismo in our society. This way the women have their own source of income."

Esperanza Dionisia, general manager at PANGO cooperative in Peru

Women
who work
invest 90% of their
income into their families



Fair trade works to deliver more money to all producers and workers, via the Community Development Fund, through minimum prices in some commodities, and through price and wage transparency and equity requirements. The model provides women more opportunity to make decisions about financial investments, within their own family and collectively with other Program Participants. Aspects of the fair trade model help ensure that women have the increased knowledge, opportunities, and confidence to increase their personal income and/or increase their participation in their family's financial decisions.

And when women are represented on the Fair Trade Committee, their focus on family and community is clear in how they choose to spend the collective fund. Women's influence on the spending of the Community Development Fund results in investments such as the funding of daycares, subsidized grocery stores, cooking stoves, washing machines, and access to healthcare, that benefit the health and well-being of families and communities for years to come.



V. Gender in Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E)

Gender is directly or indirectly related to many of the outcomes that Fair Trade USA works to drive. These outcomes are measured, monitored, and evaluated according to the organization's **Impact Management System (IMS)**. Fair Trade USA is committed to understanding how fair trade impacts women and girls and improved its approach to gender M&E in recent updates to the IMS and data collection systems.

In order to understand how many women are in the fair trade system, Fair Trade USA captures data on the gender breakdown of Program Participants in Fair Trade Certified supply chains as well as gender data for hired labor certified against Fair Trade USA Standards. It must be acknowledged, however, that because women often play a hidden role within smallholder supply chains, the organization is not at this time able to accurately account for the female relatives and wives that work on small farms but whose male relatives are the formal member of the producer group. Despite this, Fair Trade USA has updated their monitoring and evaluation processes for surveys of Program Participants and households to include wives and female co-farmers in the surveys.

In some regions washing laundry in the river is commonplace, and is the responsibility of women. At the Agrocoex flower farm, women like Luz Sisa chose to use the Community Development Fund to build and operate an on-site laundry room to spare themselves evening trips to the river.

Rumipamba de Espinosas, Latacunga, Cotopaxi, Ecuador

The IMS also includes a number of gender-related Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that are monitored via farmer, worker, and fisher surveys. These include KPIs such as the % of Fair Trade Committee members that are female, and the % of female Program Participants who feel valued equally to their male counterparts, as well as the % of female workers experiencing discrimination, sexual harassment, or harassment at their workplace. Fair Trade USA is also able to conduct gender-breakdown analyses against all core KPIs to more holistically evaluate progress towards gender equity and awareness. For example, within hired labor supply chains, data on the % of workers who are satisfied with their working conditions might be analyzed by gender of the respondents.



"We feel a sense of ownership through our work with all the material and financial support provided to our community of workers through Fair Trade."

Sumoti Gorh, Maud Tea Estate in Assam, India

Women: The New Leaders

As part of its monitoring and evaluation process, Fair Trade USA conducts interviews with Program Participants where individuals share, in their own words, the changes they have experienced in their lives and their communities since joining fair trade. Through this "Most Significant Change" technique and research, Fair Trade USA heard the story of Roma Gonju and Suma Mal, who are tea pluckers on an estate in Assam, India.

***Roma and Suma were democratically elected** to their Fair Trade Committee, which decides how to invest the Fair Trade Community Development Funds. They advocated for better facilities in the tea estate where they work, spearheading efforts to invest in water filters and deep-well hand pumps that reduce water contamination in their community. Emboldened by their impact, they decided to run for village office – a rare move for tea workers and even more so for women. Against all odds, they both won.*

***When Roma and Suma were interviewed,** they spoke about the benefits of the water projects and other premium projects to their families and their communities—their focus was on others. Their peers, however, highlighted the significance of Roma and Suma's journey to those around them, and the influence that it has had in the workplace and the community. One tea worker, a man, shared that "The most significant change at West Jalinga has been interaction with management. Especially that women can now interact with management....when workers talk to management, they become leaders. A lot of the women have become leaders too. Two women at Jalinga have even become political leaders who ran for office in Silchar in the election."*



Waepure Village,
Buru Island, Maluku, Indonesia



Fair Trade USA recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as core to its model and as essential for sustainable change and impact. The organization is committed to continuous improvement in its approach to understanding the role of women in fair trade supply chains, to ensuring the model benefits and uplifts women, and to driving towards the vision of gender equality.

Fair Trade USA calls on its partners to collaborate on the journey towards gender equality and women's empowerment. It also calls on partners to celebrate progress along the way by recognizing the value women bring to supply chains, businesses and workplaces, as well as families and communities.

References

International Finance Corporation. *Working with Smallholders: A Handbook for Firms Building Sustainable Supply Chains*. Washington, DC. 2013.

International Labour Organization. *ILOSTAT database*. Data retrieved on January 29, 2021.

ISEAL Alliance. *Mainstreaming gender equality considerations within multi-stakeholder initiatives*. An endline report. June 2020.

Leach, Melissa, Lyla Mehta, and Preetha Prabhakaran. *Gender equality and sustainable development: a pathways approach*. UN Women, 2016.

Lmodóvar-Reteguis, Nayda. Where in the World Do Women Still Face Legal Barriers to Own and Administer Assets? World Bank Blogs. World Bank, June 18, 2019.

Monfort, Marie Christine. The role of women in the seafood industry. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), Globefish Research Programme, Rome, 2015.

Solidarity Center. *Factsheet: Women Workers in Agro-Industry*. 2018.

United Nations, *Gender Equality: Why it matters*. 2018.

United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). *2020 Human Development Perspectives. Tackling Social Norms: A game changer for gender inequalities*. 2020.

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). *Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The Gender Snapshot 2020*. 2020

United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women). *Women and Sustainable Development Goals*. 2016.

The World Bank. *Databank*. Accessed May 2020.

Women Deliver. *Global Goals Infographic*. March 2020.



"We joined CORA because of the many advantages it provides us producers through their fair trade program. The loans, workshops, access to machinery, and the whole environmental ideal, have been beneficial for everyone. The benefits come back to help us."

Artemia Rodriguez is a lifelong sugar cane producer, and lives in a home built with Fair Trade emergency funds. Tebicuarymi, Paraguari, Paraguay.