

WHAT'S BEHIND STITCHVILLE'S ETHICAL POLICY?

“Worldwide, the overwhelming majority of poor people are women, making up 70% of the world's 1.3 billion people living in poverty. (Source: World Revolution). Indeed, it has become almost a cliché to say that poverty has a woman's face. More women than men are poor, and women are more poor than men. What is more, the absolute number of women living in extreme poverty is on the rise.

And yet, women are the engines of economies. While they earn less than men, they also work harder overall, both in total number of work hours and in unpaid work in the home. As the majority of workers in the huge and burgeoning informal sector (the informal economy or informal sector is that part of the economy that is neither taxed nor regulated) in the Global South, women strive to support their families and raise their children while bearing the burden of extreme and debilitating poverty.

The Women's International Network estimates that 66% of the world's work is done by women – and yet they earn less than 5% of the world's income and own less than 1% of property in the world. Working so hard for so little gain, they produce half of the world's food (source: World Development Indicators, 2007, Womankind Worldwide).”

Why are women poor?

“There are a range of causes, complex and inter-related, for women being poorer than men, and for women in the Global South being poorest of all. Gender-related causes of poverty include:

- Women have unequal access to education
- Women usually earn less than men
- Women tend to be concentrated in lower-paid areas of work
- Much of women's work goes unpaid
- Women often head single-parent households
- Women may live longer than men
- Inheritance laws may discriminate against women
- Women lack capital, land and credit that can help them get started

(Some of this material is adapted from Women and the Economy, a project of UNPAC, <http://www.unpac.ca/economy/what-causes.html>)”

“**Unequal trading relationships**, years of resource extraction through colonization, the devastating impact of the HIV pandemic and diseases like tuberculosis and malaria, the burden of massive debt repayment and structural adjustment are just a few of the causes of poverty in the countries of the Global South. Desperate poverty hits women – already labouring under the burden of economic and legal discrimination – hardest.

In fact, the global economic system stacks the cards strongly against women ever working their way out of poverty. (...)

Looking back at the list above, you can see that several of the factors that tend to make women poor relate to the work they do. It's for just this reason that UNIFEM, the United Nations' organization dedicated to improving the condition of women, warned in a 2005 report that more attention needs to be paid to the links between women's work and women's poverty.

If women were compensated for their work at a rate that reflects their cost of living, if they were given access to capital, land and opportunities to borrow small amounts of money, if their jobs were long-term and with reasonable work conditions, they would be far less vulnerable to unstable prices, global supply and demand, and competition driving prices and wages ever lower, as well as to inequalities in society that prevent women from gaining economic stability - sound impossible? It's not.

Fair trade (...) is a powerful tool for global change, and provides an opportunity for you to challenge global inequities.”

“A fair trade system is one in which people who buy and people who sell come to an agreement to go outside the conventional market system to set standards that are

just, and that allow producers to make a decent living from their labour. Sometimes fair trade products are more expensive than their non-fair trade equivalents because they more accurately reflect the real costs of producing the item, rather than depending on an artificially low cost of labour to make them cheap.”

“Fair Trade standards go beyond initiatives like a code of conduct by not just setting minimum requirements, but actually guaranteeing a fair price to the producers of these products – no matter what is going on in the volatile global commodities market. They also include a fair trade premium that the producer re-invests into her economic, social or environmental development.”

Seven Pillars of Fair Trade

1. Direct trade
2. Fair pricing
3. Democratic and transparent organization
4. Protection of the environment
5. Community development
6. Long-term trade relations
7. Access to credit for producers

International Fair Trade Association (IFAT)

Fair trade handicrafts are traded under International Fair Trade Association (IFAT) standards that apply to organizations and not products, though products are traded.

Members of IFAT are mainly associations and co-ops, a majority of which are women-based. Successful examples of a co-ops are Asarbolssem and Q’antati from Bolivia. These two organizations which produce textiles, traditional handicrafts, musical instruments, ceramics, pottery and jewellery are women-run and they’ve been quite successful on the export market.”

Three important initiatives often go along with fair trade:

1. **Co-operatives:** In a co-operative, the workers are also the bosses, and decisions are taken together, risks assumed together and earnings fairly distributed.
2. **Micro-credit:** Small loans (...) allow women to get a small – tiny! – business off the ground. While banks would never loan to women with no credit history, little experience and no collateral (or in many places, no husband to sign for them), micro-credit initiatives give them a chance.
3. **Environmentally Friendly Agricultural Techniques:** Often mistaken with organic, fair trade is not organic and vice versa. Nonetheless, a very comprehensive list of chemical pesticides and fertilizers known to be hazardous for the environment and humans is banned in the fair trade standards, which lends to a healthier environment, and fewer health hazards for the people who are working in the fields.”

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MOBILIZATION KIT
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Based on this knowledge, Stitchville is committed to operating in a way that supports fair trade, thus making difference in the world.

For us, it’s about informed choices and bringing awareness and understanding to how you and I can impact the realities and challenges that our social co-dependencies present us with. Your thoughtful choice is a powerful statement.