



FAIR TRADE: JUSTICE AND SUSTAINABILITY FOR PEOPLE AND THE PLANET

Oxfam International Fair Trade Working Group

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on Fair Trade, 2022



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INTRODUCTION



Fair Trade is a vision and practice championing just and sustainable trade. It is one of the ways through which Oxfam fulfils its mission^a: fighting inequality in trade to end poverty and injustices.

Oxfam is part of the global Fair Trade movement^b. Oxfam has been an important part of the Fair Trade story, both in Europe and internationally, beginning in the late 1950s with small-scale initiatives to support refugees by selling their crafts. The 1960s and early 1970s were a time of innovation and evolution for alternative trade policies and practices. During this time, Oxfam GB played a pioneering role by establishing one of the first fair trade organizations in Europe - a practical demonstration of a trading model based on 'trade, not aid'. After that, more affiliates became involved. As new partners joined, the principles of Fair Trade evolved, and new forms of governance emerged. This resulted in a movement consisting of millions of supporters and activists.

Together, we reach out to small-scale producers, workers, indigenous groups, and grassroots social entrepreneurs. We partner with activists, communities, democratically governed organisations, mission-driven enterprises, and social movements to promote trade justice - setting an example and advocating for its uptake, while challenging governments and companies to change trade practices and structures.

Oxfam subscribes to the ideas presented in the International Fair Trade Charter¹.

"The Fair Trade movement shares a vision of a world in which justice, equity and sustainable development are at the heart of trade structures and practices so that everyone, through their work, can maintain a decent and dignified livelihood and develop their full human potential."

a) Oxfam's mission is to fight inequality to end poverty and injustice. Its vision is a just and sustainable world.

b) The Fair Trade movement is a diverse grass roots movement consisting of a myriad of actors (producers, activists, ethical consumers, producer organizations and networks, labelling organizations, non-governmental organizations, civil society organizations, mission-driven enterprises) working together as a decentralized network. Due to this diversity, the term Fair Trade may mean many different things to many different people in different contexts.

Some key numbers^c

Four Oxfam affiliates are active in the Fair Trade movement: Oxfam-in-Belgium (Oxfam-Magasins du Monde & Oxfam België/Belgique), Oxfam GB (Great Britain), Oxfam Intermón (Spain) and Oxfam-Québec.

Together, we maintain 114 direct trading relationships with producer organisations and social enterprises all over the world. Many more products are sourced via trusted Fair Trade partners.

Over 31,683 grassroots volunteers raise their voices together with Oxfam to make the trade system fairer. They campaign, distribute Fair Trade products, collaborate with local municipalities, manage over 903 shops, educate and inform the public daily.

In 2019, Oxfam purchased over 15.7 million euro worth of products produced in accordance with the Fair Trade principles^{d,e}. Around 1.2 million euro of Fair Trade premium was generated^f.

In that same year, Oxfam ran 15 programs in collaboration with Fair Trade partners, working towards a better future for the producers, communities and their families.

Spelling of Fair Trade

The spelling 'fair trade' (two words, not capitalised) is used in many contexts to describe different and sometimes even competing visions on trade and the economy. We prefer using 'Fair Trade' (two words, capitalised) when we talk about the Fair Trade movement's vision and actions. Fairtrade (one word, capitalised) refers to the Fairtrade International system.

^c Numbers for 2019.

^d Calculated as the sum of direct purchases from producer organizations and indirect purchases from trusted fair trade suppliers.

^e Excluding Oxfam GB's activities.

^f Excluding Oxfam GB's activities.



[WHAT] TRADE JUSTICE IS NEEDED, NOT MORE TRADE



Trade is as old as human civilisation. **By connecting people, trade has been a driver behind thriving societies.** Trade has transformed economies but has been the subject of change too. Since the beginning of the 19th century trade has grown exponentially at a scale never seen before². Currently, 80% of global value chains can be linked to transnational corporations³ and about a quarter of total global production is being exported.

However, this growth came at a cost. The (dis)advantages of international and intranational trade have been distributed unequally as trade was instrumentalised by the powerful. Imperialistic, colonialist, racist and neoliberal policies have eroded trade's potential to deliver benefits to marginalized people. Instead, they created a situation in which **vulnerability is being exploited as a source of competitive advantage.**



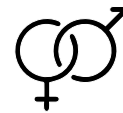
Climate injustice

Because of their push for low prices, cocoa traders are driving deforestation in cocoa-producing countries like Ghana and Côte d'Ivoire⁴. This leads to farmers increasingly being confronted with the detrimental effects of climate change. At the same time, responsible parties, often situated in the West, do not restore the damage done.



Economic injustice

The profits of trade are often captured by multinationals and their shareholders, especially at the expense of small enterprises, women (entrepreneurs) and rural communities⁵. Offshoring has contributed to increasing (geographical) inequalities within countries.



Gender injustice

Capitalism's striving for accumulation causes exporting firms to rely on cheap labour provided by marginalised women, leading to labour market segregation, further widening wage gaps and atrocious labour conditions⁶. This in turn increases women's vulnerability to exploitation.

The trade system finds itself at the crossroads of the most pressing contemporary global challenges. Trade acts as a catalyst for prosperity in some cases, while in other cases it is misused by the powerful to disproportionately increase their affluence and power to the detriment of the poor. It exacerbates the climate crisis through transport-related emissions, increased extractivism and carbon leakage, but may contribute to environmental justice too (for example through ecological-oriented investment in agroecological ecosystem services). Trade impacts women, men and children differently, depending on the cultural, socio-economic and political background in which they operate.

While many economists and policymakers have hailed the positive effects of trade on welfare, intersectional analysis and power structure analysis have often been missing from the equation. Nevertheless, these kinds of analyses steer the conclusion in the right direction: **trade justice is needed, not more trade. This requires system change.**

[HOW] THERE IS AN ALTERNATIVE: TRADE JUSTICE



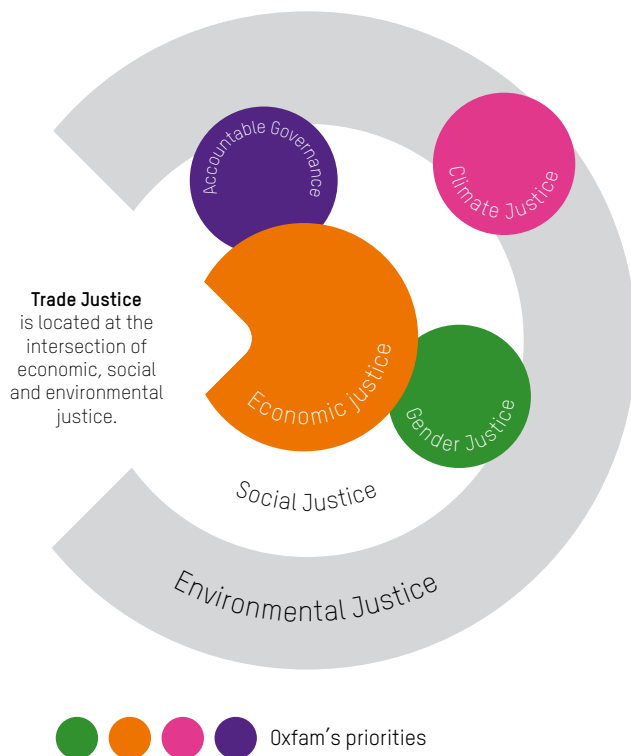
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How trade is conducted is as important as what is traded. Indeed, trade should lead to mutually beneficial outcomes for trading partners while upholding human rights, meeting basic human needs and respecting planetary boundaries. Trade should help bring us to the safe and just space of the Doughnut^{9,7} and contribute to the headline targets of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Moreover, trade takes place within a certain context which influences and is influenced by that act of exchange. This social, environmental, political and historical background should be taken into account. **A holistic approach to trade which puts people and the planet at the forefront, aimed at altering the structures that create or perpetuate oppression, is what we call trade justice.**

THE DEFINITION OF TRADE JUSTICE

Trade Justice is a holistic approach to trade in which social and environmental considerations outweigh the purely economic characteristics of such interchange. It takes into account distributive aspects of trade (equality) as well as past or future infringements on the viability of ecosystems, human rights, labour rights, women’s and minority rights, and civil, cultural or political rights (equity). Trade justice aims to alter the very structures that create or perpetuate oppression or environmental destruction.



For Oxfam, trade justice encompasses four essential systems⁸: economic justice, gender justice, climate justice, and accountable governance.

As they are interlinked, all four systems need to undergo profound transformations to obtain trade justice. Fair Trade, both as practice and theory, offers a roadmap for doing so. Our ambitions for a just and sustainable trade system are listed below. Nevertheless, Fair Trade actors need to go beyond these basic principles.

Figure 1. Trade justice is not possible without economic justice, climate justice, gender justice and accountable governance.

^g The Doughnut is a visual framework developed by economist Kate Raworth depicting an economic model in which social fundamentals are met (the inner side of the Doughnut) without transgressing planetary boundaries, such as carbon emissions (the outer side of the Doughnut).



<p>Living wage & living income</p>	<p>Trade must contribute to sustainable livelihoods and the ability of small-scale producers and workers to earn a living income and living wage. Companies, with the support of certifiers, must credibly work towards a living income and wage for the people in their supply chains. Government regulation and international governance are necessary to end the downward spiral of falling prices and incomes. A minimum price calculated per commodity and covering the cost of sustainable production^h could contribute towards this much-needed improvement, albeit possible negative side-effects should be taken into account by applying a case-by-case approach. Effective social protection schemes must serve as a safety net mechanism besides price stabilisation mechanisms.</p>
<p>Opportunities for disadvantaged producers</p>	<p>Where possible, trade partnerships should seek to provide local, regional, and global market access to marginal farmers and producers, supporting them in building up their power within those markets. Trade partners guarantee the payment of fair prices and create an environment in which small-scale and mission-led enterprises can diversify their activities, move beyond supplying commodities, and increase added value creation, making sure small-scale producers and workers reap the long-term benefits of trade.⁹</p>
<p>Autonomy and fair trading practices</p>	<p>The independence of trading partners is respected and promoted. Systemic market power concentration is challenged through effective government policy and action. All actors refrain from engaging in unfair trading practices like late payments, last-minute cancellation of orders, harmful just-in-time approaches, or making unilateral changes to contracts. Risk and value are shared equitably throughout the supply chain. Transparent, direct, long-term, and stable relationships are fostered.</p>
<p>Human and labour rights</p>	<p>As a minimum, basic human and labour rights are respected throughout the whole supply chain. Child, forced and exploitative labour is never accepted and are addressed in a spirit of victim-first. All actors involved in trade, including governments, recognize that the source of these problems is to be found in historical and systemic power imbalances and act accordingly. Additionally, organizations ensure safe working conditions, reasonable working hours and respect the freedom of association and the right to organize.</p>

^h) A price reflecting the cost of sustainable production consists of a price in which all social, environmental, and economic costs related to the creation of a good are internalized. This includes amongst other things living income and wages for producers, workers or artisans; and costs related to environmentally friendly production methods.

How Fair Trade actors must go further: Fair Trade partnerships

Fair Trade actors provide additional resources to producer groups and workers for social, economic, or ecological transformation, for example through the payment of a premium in the food sector, providing access to pre-financing and offering support in the development of their business. They make sure any product contains significant amounts of Fair Trade raw materials/ingredients and that all ingredients that can be Fair Trade, are Fair Trade. Finally, they re-invest all their profits in their stakeholders, according to their needs.¹⁰



Essential rights	Any trade configurations should respect, uphold and support human rights and ILO conventions throughout the supply chain and include mechanisms that counteract all forms of discrimination based on gender identity, sexual orientation, political affiliation, cultural background, marital status, migration status, origin, nationality, ethnicity, physical appearance, social status, disability, union membership, illness, religion, pregnancy or parenthood, or age. Protection against any form of gender-based violence (GBV) must be ensured. Proactive and diversified governmental action and stakeholder engagement is needed to ensure that these rights are protected and exercised in practice.
Women’s leadership	Trade partners should create an environment in which women’s leadership is promoted including their involvement in the decision-making process at all levels (at producer level, in worker unions, marketing organisations, certification governance levels and governmental institutions). Trade relations should challenge, instead of reinforce, visible, hidden and invisible power dynamics harming women and girls, both at a local and a global level.
Gender equality and equity	Trade systems should be designed in such a way that girls and women (1) have equal opportunity to reach their full potential, (2) have equal access to resources and opportunities, and (3) are not confronted with gender-related violence and conflict. In many cases, this will require active positive discrimination policies. Special attention must be given to the double burden women face and other elements that lie at the basis of gendered impacts of trade.
Intersectionality	Climate justice, economic justice and racial justice cannot be achieved without gender justice. Therefore, trade actors must recognize that gender justice is not a single-issue struggle. Diversity stemming from the different backgrounds and roles of women is considered a richness and a strength, including various cultural interpretations of feminism. This is reflected in trade practices and policies.
Culturally responsive trade	All trade configurations respect the rights of Indigenous people. Cultural identity and traditional skills are preserved, promoted, and celebrated. Alternative livelihoods of Indigenous and peasant economies are protected and nurtured. Harmful cultural appropriation by dominant actors is dismissed, while cultural exchange is promoted.

How Fair Trade actors must go further: Fair Trade focus

Purposefully, Fair Trade actors choose to support marginalized individuals and groups and provide opportunities to those who would be otherwise excluded. They should champion the causes of Indigenous people if possible. Fair Trade enterprises are purpose-driven and mission-oriented which means they want to create social and environmental benefits through entrepreneurial means.¹¹



Environmental rights	Trade partners should promote the resilience of small-scale producers and workers against the detrimental effects of climate change and other environmental challenges through financial and knowledge transfers for adaptation and mitigation purposes. Everyone's right, including that of future generations, to a healthy and thriving environment is guaranteed in a spirit of global solidarity, taking into account historical and current environmental imbalances, ecological debts and injustices. On a structural level, this requires reparation and restoration in a spirit of common but differentiated responsibility.
Sustainable transport	Traders involved in supply chain logistics should champion the use of carbon neutral transport methods. In the first instance, they consider how emissions can be reduced within their operations. This includes questioning the necessity of the trade operation itself. Only as a last resort should carbon offsetting be considered as a form of mitigation.
Sustainable production	Buyers opt for goods produced in an environmentally conscious way and offer (financial) support to their suppliers to implement green practices like agro-ecological techniques, organic certification, circular initiatives, renewable energy generation and other low-carbon techniques.
Protection and regeneration of ecosystems	<p>Both the producers as well as the buyer carry responsibility and are accountable for protecting the environment in which production takes place. To that end, compulsory due diligence legislation is needed which holds companies accountable and liable for their actions.</p> <p>Effective environmental legislation should not be regarded a barrier to investment or trade, due to the ultimate reliance of investment and trade on planetary boundaries. Along these lines, accompanying compensatory measures for those affected disproportionately by climate change should be the rule. This means taking historical and current inequalities into account with regard to the climate crisis and the socio-economic position of states, communities and individuals. Solidarity must thus be the cornerstone for a shift to a truly environmentally and socially embedded economy.</p>
Trade policy	<p>In all cases, efficiency gains from trade are embedded in a strategy of sufficiency, not growth. In addition, governments must mainstream (a) social and environmental principles throughout their trade policy and (b) include conditionality with regard to fundamental multilateral environmental and climate agreements.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Governments must uphold the 'polluter pays' principle, the common but differentiated responsibility and the precautionary principle by embedding them in a binding and enforceable fashion throughout trade agreements. In case of conflict between environmental and commercial provisions, the former should be accorded precedence over the latter. Trade agreements should distinguish goods based on how they are produced (for example on the basis of their carbon content or social impact) in an attempt to stimulate the uptake of good practices. b. Adhering to the Paris Climate Agreement as well as the Convention on Biological Diversity should be binding preconditions to signing any trade agreements.

How Fair Trade actors must go further: Fair Trade leadership

Fair Trade actors aim to transform the current profit and consumer-oriented growth model. They challenge shareholder primacy by setting up democratic and mission-led enterprises and organizations. In this way, they are the first inhabitants of a new ecosystem in which the goal is to provide decent livelihoods while minimizing ecological impacts. The crises we are confronted with, require a change of system. Fair Trade may be one of the levers making such a transition possible.



Democracy	Farmers, workers, and artisans should be included in the decision-making processes of their organizations, as well as in the governance of certification organisations, by means of substantial decision-making power. Enterprises too should embrace democratic governance and stakeholder ownership structures and should consider communities in which they operate as important stakeholders. On the level of states, parliaments should be included in the trade policy process in a meaningful way, always having the final say. Additionally, the system of exclusive arbitration mechanisms outside the regular court system for companies and investors (ISDS, ICS) should be abolished. International trade institutions should make sure there is a level playing field in negotiations between all parties. Equitable sharing of voting rights must be assured. Historical injustices (like unequal contribution to climate change, historical debt and colonialism) must be rectified by providing direct (funds) or indirect (debt cancellation, intellectual property waivers) reparations.
Transparency	Trade must be transparent. Companies and certifiers communicate openly about the trading conditions in their supply chains. This includes sharing information with producers about trading terms and conditions, customer base and financial information. Information about producers (including their location) is shared with the public. Governments conduct trade negotiations in a transparent manner. Parliaments are included in the process in a meaningful way. Civil society plays an important role exposing malpractices and gathering evidence.
Evidence-based	Governance of any trade system should be based on evidence, continually carrying out impact assessments to understand the effects of trade on people and the planet. Such analyses must be gender- and power-sensitive. Best practices must be demonstrated and publicly communicated. Certifiers rely on independent, third-party assessments of objective benchmarks. They do not overstate their impact.
Safeguarding & grievance mechanisms	Individuals involved in trade should receive proper training on safeguarding practices, be bound by a code of conduct and be accountable for their behaviour. Any trade configuration should include an accessible and functional grievance mechanism for workers and producers, which provides timely and rigorous resolution to complaints or disputes, anonymised if needed.

How Fair Trade actors must go further: Fair Trade advocacy

Fair Trade actors support workers and producers to speak out against inequality and power imbalances in global, regional and local trade. They offer a model of transparent, democratic and accountable trade governance through their own organizations internationally, regionally, and locally¹². They promote and enable the agency of small-scale producers and workers to organise and advocate on their own behalf in national and international arenas. They advocate for structural change in trade policies, trading relationships and company practices to ensure fair conditions for small-scale producers and workers throughout the supply chain. In coalition with like-minded movements (for example the worker-ownership movement, the cooperative movement or well-being and social economy alliances), the Fair Trade movement beats the drum for a new economy.

[WHO] FAIR TRADE IS A MATTER OF SHARED RESPONSIBILITY



Oftentimes, conventional trade subordinates humans to the products they deliver, reducing their skills and creativity to mere commodities. Oxfam believes that trade should be about people connecting with each other first and foremost, seeking to realize their potential and live a life free from poverty and fear within a just society.

In this chain of human connections, all actors have to take up their responsibility, taking into account the privileges or deficits each is faced with. Responsibility should thus always be proportionate to one’s capabilities and opportunities.

Oxfam takes up its responsibility too. We engage with all types of supply chain actors, always championing people power, applying our feminist principles, and challenging unjust systems on the global, regional and local level. Oxfam applies a values-based approach. That is, our values form the basis of our actions: equality, empowerment, solidarity, inclusiveness, accountability and courage.

	The responsibility that is needed.	How Oxfam takes up its responsibility.
Citizens	Citizens wield the power of the people. We have to actively stand up against unfairness in supply chains and policies, acting in solidarity with people experiencing inequality and champion their causes. We can stand up for justice through the multiple roles we occupy as voters, activists, consumers, workers and as members of society.	Oxfam raises the awareness of citizens and their communities on the social and ecological impacts of trade and invites them to look beyond price in their purchasing decisions. Even more, we connect the provision of alternative goods with activism. Together with our volunteers, we encourage people to stand up for trade justice.
Producers and workers	Producers and workers are key. Their decision to produce in a way that is environmentally friendly and conscious of its social surroundings is a basis for thriving societies. Nevertheless, they often carry the heaviest burden within unequal globalised supply chains. Consequently, they should be supported as organisers of just alternatives and their activist struggle to challenge and change these power imbalances.	Oxfam acts in solidarity with those who experience inequality and champions their causes. We make a conscious choice to primarily work with small-scale farmers and artisans, marginalised workers, or disadvantaged women. Their traditional knowledge is often based on sustainable production methods and teaches us that it is possible to secure livelihoods while respecting the rights of people and their communities.

Private sector	<p>Multinationals and other private sector actors could have the potential to significantly contribute to a sustainable human economy. However, this demands due diligence procedures and trade relationships in which all parties get a fair chance. It requires business behaviour in line with human rights and our planet, for which companies are accountable and liable. Such a shift requires an overhaul of the conventional business model towards mission-driven models with stakeholder ownership and democratic governance.</p>	<p>An inclusive human economy consists of enterprises with a special kind of business model. Mission-led enterprises (of which Fair Trade organisations are part) take the lead, showing such an economy is possible. Oxfam affiliates reinvest all their profits, contributing to such a transformation, challenging shareholder primacy and promoting women’s leadership along the way. We work in partnership with the private sector to achieve better practices where possible and challenge them when needed.</p>
Certifiers	<p>Fair Trade certification and guarantee schemes should be the guardians of the Fair Trade principles. They validate the credibility of Fair Trade players and have a big responsibility regarding the final impact of their scheme. At the same time, they must maintain complete transparency between producer and consumer. Workers, small producers and their organisations must be informed and involved in all parts of the auditing and certification process and must know the results of respective auditing visits.</p>	<p>Whereas Oxfam sees Fair Trade schemes as valuable operations, we also recognise that they are by themselves not enough to achieve the change we hope to see in the trade system. For that reason, Oxfam affiliates set up additional programs with producer organisations. We actively engage partners to ensure that Fair Trade principles are respected throughout the supply chain. Oxfam engages with certifiers to raise their standards and practices and calls out certification schemes where they give the illusion of a cheap solution without providing meaningful change at production level, i.e. fairwashing and greenwashing. At the same time, Oxfam must remain critical of its own claims.</p>

Government	<p>Finally, governments and international institutions hold the key to a just trading system. Whereas voluntary schemes innovated with Fair Trade policies, it is governments and international institutions that are able to bring scale to the table. Not only should Fair Trade principles be mainstreamed in national legislation, but international trade organisations should be truly democratic, equitable, multilateral and rules-based, without impeding the self-determination of countries to protect their people and the environment.</p>	<p>Oxfam believes that in order to achieve an economy that works for people and the planet, we need systemic change. To that end, we are in the business of informing the public, campaigning and raising awareness about the necessity of trade justice, together with over 31,683 activists from around the world. On top of this, we demand that governments and international institutions change trade policies, rules and agreements to the advantage of marginalised producers and workers all over the world.</p>
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CONCLUSION



Oxfam's history is tightly intertwined with that of the Fair Trade movement. Indeed, both movements share the same goal: justice for all.

Nevertheless, the global trade system is far from just or sustainable. It was captured by imperialistic and colonialist forces in the past and remains, even today, to a large extent under the control of large transnational corporations in a neoliberal regime. The powerful have instrumentalised trade to increase their own affluence.

Luckily, trade justice offers an alternative approach: one that requires systemic change in the economic, gender, climate, and governance realms. The trade system cannot be just and sustainable if corporations do not embrace democratic governance models and redirect their business models towards social and environmental value. It cannot be just and sustainable if the global trade regime is not managed in an equitable way or does not respect the limits of our planet. It cannot be considered just or sustainable if it excludes people and future generations from benefitting from its welfare-creating properties.

This confronts us with a big challenge - one that Oxfam cannot address alone. Therefore, we partner with those that are experiencing the negative impact from our current trade system: citizens, activists, producers, and artisans. We engage with the private sector as well as with governments and international institutions to change their practices and demand fairer trade rules.

Until justice for all has been achieved, our struggle continues.

DEFINITIONS



INEQUALITY refers to the uneven distribution of power, resources and opportunities among people and groups based on divides such as class, religion, caste, age, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, education, geography, gender and sexual orientation. It means abundance for the few, and injustice for the many. Inequality keeps poor people poor and powerless, and denies millions their rights. An inequality lens acknowledges the inter-connection between the multiple dimensions of inequality and consistently asks who does and does not have access to power, resources and opportunities, and why.

POVERTY is not just about wealth but the multiple deprivations that impoverished people experience daily. This includes lack of access to resources, opportunities and quality basic services; poor working conditions, inadequate living standards, living in environmentally hazardous areas; the threat of violence and conflict; an increasing digital divide; and lack of power over the decisions that impact them.

FEMINISM is diverse, dynamic and multi-faceted in its content and its historical manifestations across the world. It asks questions and searches for answers to end all forms of discrimination, injustices and violations of rights suffered by women and gender non-conforming people. At its most basic, feminism seeks to ensure that women and men are equal in law and in practice. A feminist approach offers an inclusive way of thinking to help understand how diverse systems of hierarchy, power and subordination interact across social contexts. Its objective is to create positive futures that uphold the dignity and rights of all.

TRADE JUSTICE is a holistic approach to trade in which social and environmental considerations outweigh the purely economic characteristics of such interchange. It takes into account distributive aspects of trade (equality) as well as past or future infringements on the viability of ecosystems, human rights, labour rights, women's and minority rights, and civil, cultural or political rights (equity). Trade justice aims to alter the very structures that create or perpetuate oppression or environmental destruction.

TRADE CONFIGURATIONS are any arrangements consisting of two or more actors engaging in an act of economic interchange. It includes all cultural, socio-economic, and political contextual factors influencing that interchange. It ranges from two persons trading to the global trade regime.

FAIR TRADE ACTORS are all organizations and individuals involved in the Fair Trade movement who work towards the fulfillment of the movement's vision. This includes (home) workers, artisans, producers, labour unions, civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, traders, activists, consumers and citizens.

GENDER JUSTICE is the goal of full equality and equity between women and men in all spheres of life, resulting in women jointly, and on an equal basis with men, defining and shaping the policies, structures and decisions that affect their lives and society as a whole, based on their own interests and priorities. Gender justice commits us to taking a gender perspective on the definition and application of civil, political, economic and social rights.

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