



WIEGO
**Women in Informal Employment:
Globalizing and Organizing**

Developing Leadership and Business Skills for Informal Women Workers in Fair Trade



Women share basket weaving techniques. Photo: C. Wills.

Definition of the Problem

The work of women informal workers remains undervalued, unrecognized and underpaid. It is still perceived as a secondary activity even when it is the main source of family income. Informal women workers themselves remain unaware of their rights, largely unrepresented in consultations and policy forums, and under-represented in governance structures. There is a need for a change in positioning to recognize women as skilled workers making a significant contribution to their household and national economies.

Fair Trade: An Opportunity for Organizing, Networking and Market Access

WIEGO's Global Trade programme has been engaged with Fair Trade networks since 2009. Global Trade's project "Developing Leadership and Business Skills for Informal Women Workers in Fair Trade" helps build the capacity of its project partners, the Fair Trade networks in Kenya and Uganda, so they can deliver improved capacity building and services to their members who supply local, regional and international markets. These networks have members who support groups of informal workers, many of whom are home-based workers, to access local and export markets mostly in handcrafted products such as baskets, bead-work, soapstone and home-ware. In addition, the project works with two large cooperatives in Ghana (cocoa) and Uganda (coffee).

Contextual analyses found that, in spite of the existence of laws and policies aiming to promote women's equality and secure their access to assets and services, these laws and policies are rarely implemented. The WIEGO project will improve women's ability to negotiate for their rights and for better incomes by training them in leadership skills, awareness of rights for informal workers, and production and marketing skills.



Workers exchange knowledge on new product types. Photo: B. Leifso.

“ We are here, and we are willing to learn.”

– Home-based worker project participant, Jinja, Uganda.

Definition of Fair Trade

Fair Trade is 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 rights of, marginalized producers and workers – especially in the South. Fair Trade Organizations, backed by consumers, are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade.

WIEGO Project Goals

1. To increase informal women workers participation as members and leaders of self-help groups and cooperatives.
2. To foster increased realization of rights and access to assets.
3. To strengthen institutional capacity of the networks and organizations of informal workers for more effective market access, increased income, and women's economic empowerment.

Action Learning

The project has particularly focused on working with informal workers who are organized in groups such as self-help groups, associations or cooperatives who come together to market their goods collectively. By working collectively, informal workers can engage with global markets in a way that brings transformational change both economically and politically. Collective enterprises have a special place in Fair Trade for two reasons. Firstly, informal workers must belong to democratic, membership-based organizations in order to qualify for Fairtrade certification.¹ Secondly, many of the Fair Trade Organization (FTO) members of the World Fair Trade Organization (WFTO) are collective enterprises themselves or work predominantly with collective enterprises.²

The project relies on a cascading training method to maximize the number of women reached. The cascade works like this: a knowledgeable Field Mobilizer trains group facilitators from other member fair trade organizations. The facilitators take



Woman at posterboard: Partners in the project learn about Gender Action Learning Methodology. Photo: B. Leifso.

“The women did not know they could access funds, but after registration they could access funds from government.”

– Elizabeth Nzilani, Machakos Cooperative Union

what they've learned back to their communities and train women informal workers in self-help groups. The methodology draws on participatory training techniques such as the Gender Action Learning System (GALS), as developed by Oxfam Novib, and is appropriate for informal workers with very low levels of literacy. Opposite is a hand-drawn picture that emerged out of the training, showing all the work a woman must get done in a day.

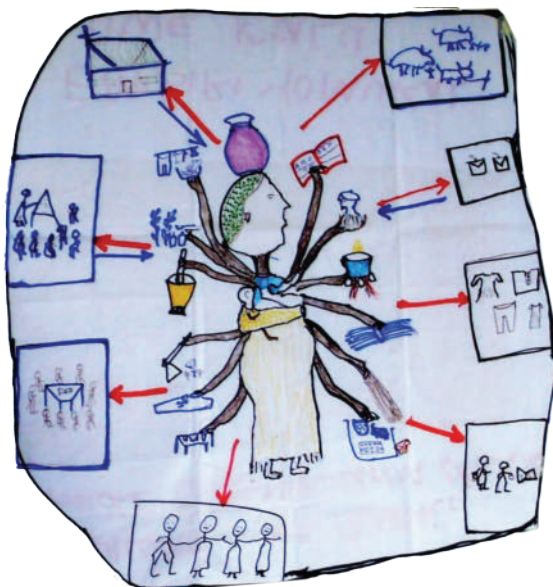
Strengthening the Policy Framework with an Informal Worker Perspective

The project has also worked with the WFTO, of which the country networks are members, to influence the adoption of a gender policy with an informal worker perspective.

Another of the project goals is that the participating groups of informal women workers become formally registered. In this way, they become visible in formal statistics and eligible for government support programmes that extend funding for skills and enterprise upgrading, credit, sales promotion and export facilitation.

“They see this as a business that will change their lives.”

– Elizabeth Nzilani, Machakos Cooperative Union



The project is also developing a package of training materials that seek to address the gaps and learning needs identified through this work.

MORE INFO



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