

Kenya

FAIR TRADE FOR WOMEN PRODUCERS

"Men respect women who belong to a group. The group has helped to elevate us. Before, no one listened to us. Women in groups have better educated children than women who are not in groups."

Rosabella Eyanae, Ekisil Group, Turkana, November 2010

Partner: The Kenya Fair Trade Network - KEFAT

MISSION & MEMBERSHIP

KEFAT membership is open to any legally registered organization engaged in, promoting or supporting Fair Trade. KEFAT has 90 rural, urban, family-based and grassroots member organizations and its mission is to promote social justice in trade and economic development. It works to improve the livelihoods and well-being of disadvantaged Kenyans by linking and strengthening organizations practicing Fair Trade and improving Kenya's position in the regional and international market place.

Three women's groups are participating in the action research:

The **Baraka** and **Turkana** Groups market product locally and through Undugu Fair Trade Limited. Undugu's focus is business-driven social empowerment through Fair Trade. Baraka is a self help group with 38 members engaged in organic farming of vegetables and fruits. The Turkana Women's Group in the remote north of Kenya has about 180 members who weave palm leaf baskets and mats; some also produce bead jewellery and wooden carvings. They also trade in fish from Lake Turkana.

Mathima group members weave sisal baskets which are sold via the Machakos Cooperative Union (MCU), which was set up in 1964 by coffee farmers' cooperative societies to improve the marketing of coffee beans. In 1987 it began to include women's handicraft groups such as Mathima. Today it encompasses 78 primary cooperatives in crafts, dairy, horticulture and ranching; 60,000 individual farmers and other producers are members of the MCU.



Photo by Carol Wills

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT

Launched in 2009, the Women's Economic Empowerment project is funded by the MDG3 Global Fund by the Government of the Netherlands. Through the project, WIEGO and its partners are advocating for the needs of informal workers, especially women. The projects seeks to promote the voice, visibility and validity of working poor women across different countries, sectors and issues in the informal economy. As part of this project, WIEGO's Global Trade Programme, in partnership with leading Fair Trade organizations in seven countries, initiated *Fair Trade for Women Producers* with a focus on documenting, analyzing and disseminating key success factors of fair trade by involving women producers in all stages of development.



Development Cooperation
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

LOCAL AND GLOBAL CONNECTIONS & MARKETS

KEFAT is the country network member of COFTA (Cooperation for Fair Trade in Africa), which is affiliated to WFTO (World Fair Trade Organization). Both Undugu Fair Trade Limited and MCU are members of KEFAT, COFTA and WFTO.

Several KEFAT members have Fair Trade shops in Nairobi and sell products from other members. COFTA and KEFAT represent members at large trade fairs in Europe. KEFAT members can attend the regular exhibitions and fairs the Export Promotion Council holds.

Sisal baskets made by the Mathima Group with a value of about \$100,000 are sold all over the world through the Fair Trade movement.

CURRENT CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

The trading environment is difficult for Kenya. The global economic downturn has meant traditional Fair Trade export markets are in decline. In addition, lack of market information and access, exploitation by middlemen, and low product standards all hold women back in selling products.

Women believe themselves to be more equal and empowered than before, but their domestic chores still take considerable time and energy away from their income-generating pursuits. For example, many spend hours each day gathering firewood and collecting water. Most do not have ready access to health care and affordable medicines, and a pension or any kind of social protection is out of reach for most of study participants.

FINDINGS FROM THE RESEARCH

The study showed membership in self-organizing groups – especially those with links to the Fair Trade market – does increase empowerment. For example, members of the Baraka Women Self Help Group have received training in organic farming and arts & crafts. The Undugu Society is helping them develop an export market niche for amaranth, a plant with a high nutritional value. However, the project needs assessment revealed

they need additional support in production quality and access to markets, as well as improved farming and record keeping methods.

During facilitated discussions, the Mathima basket weavers talked of how coming together regularly to work allowed them to share designs and colours, ideas and skills and even equipment, such as a machine to remove yarns from the raw sisal. Older and less able women are helped with certain tasks, and even help each other till their farms – another important source of subsistence.

Through the interviews and discussions, many women acknowledged that they need training and stated they would like to travel to exchange experiences and learn from what other groups are doing.

MOVING FORWARD

Change is coming in Kenya. In 2010 the Government changed the Constitution to recognize women's rights. A Ministry for Gender has been established, as well as a Constituency Development Fund which pushes responsibility for some government spending to the level of the constituencies and has a special focus on women's development.

Because it acknowledges that the informal economy drives economic growth, it wants to promote decent wages, increase incentives to register businesses and lower bureaucratic costs. It is aware that cultural and social norms prevent women from owning assets, which makes obtaining credit difficult.

A Kenya Women's Micro Credit fund of KSh 1 billion has been established to enable registered self-help groups to access credit. The KEFAT Board has indicated these initiatives are "revolutionizing Kenya to assist women."

KEFAT would now like the government, working in cooperation with Fair Trade organizations, to help ensure poor women in the informal economy are aware of their rights, and to improve working conditions and access to social protection.



**KENYA FEDERATION
FOR ALTERNATIVE TRADE**



Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO) is a global action-research-policy network that seeks to improve the status of the working poor, especially women, in the informal economy by increasing their representative Voice through more and stronger organizations and their official Visibility through better statistics and research. The individuals and institutions in the WIEGO network are drawn from three broad constituencies: membership-based organizations (MBOs) of informal workers; research, statistical, and academic institutions; and development agencies of various types (non-governmental, governmental, and inter-governmental). For more information see <http://www.wiego.org>