



SOPA/CDI rights gender inequality © Twinkl

# Trade for development, also for women ?

## Gender in Trade for Development Centre projects

Projects in Peru, Congo and Morocco highlight the fact that to turn fair and sustainable trade into a means of leverage in the fight against poverty and inequality reduction – which is the Trade for Development Centre's view – two questions must be kept in mind when approving projects: who does the work when producing goods and who manages the profits once the project boosts revenue?

### Gender

In the context of development cooperation, it has been clear that the involvement and participation of women influences positively the effectiveness of projects. But we had to wait the early 90s for the *gender* concept to be launched. Gender does not refer to biological differences but to a social and cultural approach to differences between men and women. Intercultural and anthropological studies show that the roles and tasks of men and women are socially and culturally determined, and therefore changeable.

Gender equality is a fundamental right, but unfortunately the relations between men and women are usually not equal. Worldwide, women deliver two-thirds of all productive and reproductive working hours whereas they receive less than half of the revenue. Moreover, studies show that when women manage money they set aside extra money more often for food, education and healthcare. That is why gender became so important in the Millennium Development Goals and every development process should start from a thorough gender analysis. Not to approach women as a separate target group but because equality is a goal.

### Men's work

High in the Peruvian Andes, where the Puno and Cuzco departments border, indigenous communities strive to survive on agriculture and their alpaca and lama herds. Because of their flock the region is also traditionally known for its weaving and knitting, which dates back to Inca times. Traditionally this was men's work, but men increasingly leave their homes to work in the mines. Also, young people leave in search of better prospects elsewhere.

Since 2012 the Trade for Development Centre (TDC) supports a project of **Royal Knit**, a Peruvian family business that aims to train *indígenas* in traditional weaving and knitting techniques and gives them an opportunity to contribute to its line of products.

"It is very important that the women who participate can do this work at home and combine it with raising children and doing household chores," says Steven De Craen, the TDC's Financial Support Officer.

## Incomes doubled

The TDC-supported project focused on training sessions in Ocongate and Lampa with a twofold goal: on the one hand, preserving the region's traditional weaving techniques, and on the other hand, creating economic opportunities for those who do not work in the mines. Most participants were women, but there were some men too.

### Royal Knit

This Lima-based company has been a member of the World Fair Trade Organisation (WFTO) since 2004.

It has already organised more than 40 training sessions throughout the country, applies the fair trade principles with hundreds of weavers and trades textile products worldwide.

The impact on their income is significant: those who did handicraft before have seen their income doubled at least, partially because quality has improved and fewer products are refused, partially because Royal Knit pays more. Royal Knit does the coordination and quality control work and deals with (fair trade) customers worldwide. A good thing is that women in both communities have become more empowered and that they have united to organise their work better.

### Impact

On Peru's *altiplano* the idea still exists that education matters for men only. *Machismo* endures: girls must listen to their fathers and brothers; women are responsible for education and household chores and consequently depend financially on their husbands. Under such conditions it comes as no surprise that many women passively accept domestic violence.



Start of training in Lampa © Royal Knit

The Royal Knit weaving and knitting work provides some women in Ocongate and Lampa with an income without having to abandon their household. For the first time they have the power to make financial decisions. Usually women give priority to education, also for their daughters. "Projects such as this one, regardless of how small they are, boost women's self-confidence and change men's perception of women," concludes Steven De Craen. "That is why we have decided to extend the project and to give these women's groups the chance to develop an *ética de lujo* ("ethic luxury") collection which Royal Knit can promote at (fair trade) fairs in Peru and abroad."



Women at work in Ocongate © Royal Knit

## Coffee widows

We see a similar story in eastern Congo in the fertile hills surrounding Lake Kivu. Long ago, Belgian colonists successfully introduced the coffee culture to the region. Over the last twenty years the regions have been hit extremely hard by war and violence, and farmers have often been forced to abandon their land – i.e. their coffee plantations. The Congolese State was absent and coffee traders quit doing business in the region. There was only one way out: cross Lake Kivu in small makeshift boats and illegally sell the coffee in Rwanda. Boats often capsized and many farmers' wives were widowed.

Often, these widows lost the land and its coffee trees to their husband's family which claimed it. Others were forced to marry a relative of their husband's family. Also, marauding rebel forces and Congolese army units repeatedly resorted to sexual violence and many of the victims were consequently ostracised. But today hope has returned to the hills thanks to a few cooperatives that kept believing in the potential of the excellent quality of their *arabica* coffee.

## Head of the household

In 2011 the TDC decided to finance some of SOPACDI's initiatives, namely nurseries and the very successful training sessions on sustainable cultivation techniques. "It is very remarkable that one out of four of today's 5,600 members is a woman," says Steven De Craen. "It is remarkable, because until recently it was rare for a woman to be considered a head of household. It shows SOPACDI really wants to fight gender inequality. In their evaluation report they mention 'changes for women, in particular in self-awareness and in their capacity to take matters into their own hands' as a major achievement."

### SOPACDI

With the support of the Rwandan COOPAC cooperative and the British fair trade organisation Twin Trading **SOPACDI (Solidarité Paysanne pour la Promotion des Actions Café et Développement Intégral)** has paved the road.

Over the past five years the cooperative has grown seriously, obtained fair trade as well as organic certification and established a foothold in the fair trade circuit, while the farmers have seen their income grow.

Inmaculée Nimavu Musangi is the president of the women's group and a board member of the cooperative: "When SOPACDI came to my village it encouraged men as well as women to become members and to sell their coffee to the cooperative. We had never heard anything like it. Also, I learned to better tend to my coffee trees and dehusking and washing is now done in the washing station, which makes for significant time gains."

## Women's coffee

A few years ago Twin Trading, British retailers and a few African cooperatives launched a *women's coffee* action. SOPACDI invested the extra 'women's premium' – 2 cent per pound of coffee – in the establishment of women's groups. Meanwhile, the statutes of the cooperatives lay down that across levels – local units, regional sectors or general board – at least one woman must be a member of the decision-making board. In addition, the women's groups can spend part of their premium on initiatives of their own.

Anaurite Baseme Mutebwa, president of the women's committee of Kalungu: "In one place, a motor was purchased for a boat and the women now offer transportation services on the lake. This benefits the community and is also an extra source of revenue. In Kalungu we bought a small mill and now we can sell maize and cassava flour on the market. The benefits are shared fairly. It is nice to share dreams in a group and to cherish the hope of sending all children to school."



The women's committee of Kalungu is proud of their mill © Twin

## Women's rights

But in November 2012 the rebels of M23 conquered Goma while units of the Congolese army fled. In a few villages where SOPACDI operated hundreds of women were raped. With Human Rights Watch and the United Nations, SOPACDI and the NGO Action d'Espoir are now trying to break the taboo. Witness accounts are collected to prepare a long legal fight.

The TDC finances a small project of awareness-raising (involving up to 25 % men) on sexual violence, while providing the financial means for medical, legal and psychological support to victims among SOPACDI's members. "It shows that SOPACDI considers the integration of women in the economy as an important means to achieve gender equity," concludes Steven De Craen.

## Moroccan gold

Our last story takes us to 'the secret of the beauty of Moroccan women': argan oil. Traditionally, the production of argan oil has been a women's business. Mothers taught their daughters how to crack the nuts of the argan tree and how to press the kernels with a hand mill to extract oil.

Men are only involved in the process after this diligent work as they sell the oil at wayside stands or in the souk. When foreign demand for argan oil boomed in the 1990s, Zoubida Charrouf, a chemistry professor at the University of Rabat, saw its sustainable development potential for southern Morocco: "The argan forest is an unique buffer against desertification. By providing people with a decent income that is directly related to forest protection, the forest can be saved. Major companies have discovered argan oil and partially industrialised the production. A social alternative is needed that provides an income to those who do the work, i.e. the women."

## Reading and writing

Charrouf created in 1996 the first cooperative of argan oil producers and in 1999 the NGO Ibn Al Baytar was established. Since then, the organisation has helped many starting cooperatives and with the support of international donors and later also of the Moroccan government a whole series of projects was launched in the region.

The results are noteworthy. When the cooperatives started to generate extra revenue, the men's resistance gradually subsided. For the first time women manage their own income. This has strongly boosted their status within Berber culture.

Many thousands of women also follow Arabic classes and are learning to read and write. As a consequence more and more mothers are sending their daughters to high school.



Berber women breaking the nuts of the argan tree © Tighanimine

## Fair trade

In 2010 the Trade for Development Centre started financing a project in three cooperatives supervised by Ibn Al Baytar. In Targant and Aquain Ouargan the production line and the presentation of the product are improved.

Especially the Tighanimine cooperative has made progress. It soon succeeded in obtaining a PGI label (protected geographical indication) and organic certification. To cap it all, in 2011 it became the first fair trade certified argan oil producer. The women attended national and international fairs and in two years' time their turnover has grown tenfold. That way the cooperative's 60 members have become the main wage earners in their households.

In 2014 the TDC decided to further support Ibn Al Baytar and to use Tighanimine's success as leverage to develop the whole region.

**“There is a similar story behind these three fascinating initiatives,” concludes Steven De Craen. “By creating their own sources of revenue weavers on the altiplano, coffee farmers near Lake Kivu and the women of Morocco's argan oil cooperatives have seen their world – and that of their daughters – change significantly.”**



Coffee production brought new hope to Kivu, including for women © Twin

R. U: Carl Michiels, BTC Hoogstraat 147, 1000 Brussels

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