

Fair Trade Beads

IN A WORLD WHERE THE RICH ARE GETTING RICHER AND THE POOR ARE GETTING POORER, SOME ORGANISATIONS AND BUSINESSES ARE TAKING MATTERS INTO THEIR OWN HANDS BY DEVELOPING BUSINESS RELATIONSHIPS WITH THE UNEMPLOYED (OR “UNEMPLOYABLE”) AND HELPING THEM AND THEIR FAMILIES SURVIVE. SARAH EZZY-DICKSON FINDS OUT WHO AND WHAT IS INVOLVED, HOW IT WORKS AND HOW WE CAN HELP.



Above: Peru terracotta beads

THE CONCEPT OF FAIR TRADE is based around a trading partnership where equality and respect is of utmost importance. Fair Trade agreements contribute not only to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to the poorer communities, but also improving their rights and working conditions on the job. Two major

organisations, the Fair Trade Federation and the International Fair Trade Association, help ensure that the right conditions are met and the deals are fair. There are also organisations set up in many countries that do a similar job on a local scale, such as the Fair Trade Association of Australia and New Zealand.



Lampwork beads

The making of beads has been around for centuries, and each culture has their own way of producing beads either from silver, clay, paper or cloth. Fair trade allows these cultures to continue making these products, passing on the skills to the next generation and allowing their art form to survive when ordinarily it may have been wiped out.

Fair Trade agreements help people in countries such as Africa, South America, India and many Asian countries, like Thailand and Bali. These countries also happen to be some of the largest bead producers as well, with many businesses linking up to tribes and villages in these areas to provide support so they can continue to produce beads for us to use in our jewellery designs. By dealing with the craftsmen and women directly, not through the use of a middleman, the money generated by the sales of the items goes straight back into the hands of the original artist.

The principles behind fair trade agreements include:

- Paying fair prices to the producers which reflect the cost of production, not the world market price which often doesn't cover raw materials
- Fair labour conditions, including safe working environments and decent living wages. Child labour is strictly prohibited
- Globally promoting the empowerment of women
- Investing in social and business developments, such as health care, schools and improved training

- Encouraging environmental responsibility and preservation
- Committing to long-term trade relationships, which provide stability and security
- Campaigning to highlight the unequal world trade system that is currently in place

The number of organisations and businesses that are supporting fair trade is increasing, but not as fast as the free trade agreements that are being forced upon many developing countries by wealthy countries such as the USA and Europe. Free trade undermines small villages and the craftsmen and women involved in the production of goods, simply because the amount of money offered for their services is well below the costs of raw materials and labour. Many families survive on less than two dollars a day while trying to support immediate and extended families, many of whom have been orphaned or widowed by HIV/AIDS or war.

Fair trade products are labelled as such, making it easier for consumers to choose ethically produced items. The labels are given only to the products that can be certified as coming from a fair trade agreement, and are handed out by several different organisations depending on the



Bali silver

Free trade undermines small villages and the craftsmen and women involved in the production of goods, simply because the amount of money offered for their services is well below the costs of raw materials and labour.

country you're in. The labels also guarantee that every step of a particular product's production has followed international fair trade criteria. Fair Trade Labelling Organisations International (www.fairtrade.net) is an organisation that oversees the production and labelling of fair trade products, and ensures that every item marked as fair trade, truly is fair trade. It is wise to note that even if one particular item produced by a company has been marked as fair trade, this doesn't automatically make all of their products fair trade; it only applies to that one specific item.

Businesses can become a fair trade supporter, either by selling fair trade goods sourced directly from the artisans, or by selling items bought from fair trade wholesalers. Importing goods sourced from IFAT members in developing countries enables traders to buy directly from the source, which reduces how many hands the money needs to pass through before getting to where it is really needed. It also gives traders the added security of knowing exactly where the products have come from, and under what conditions they have been made. A catalogue that has been compiled by IFAT which allows traders

to search through products produced by IFAT members can be found at <http://catgen.com/ifat>. There are also many IFAT members situated within each country that traders, along with general consumers, can purchase from to support fair trade. A list of Australian and New Zealand IFAT members and resellers can be found at <http://www.fairtrade.com.au/IFAT/membersANZ>.

While the concept of fair trade is usually used in conjunction with coffee, chocolate and other agriculturally grown items, it also extends to crafts, jewellery, clothing and accessories. More and more bead companies are beginning to support fair trade, as it allows them to sell unique, handcrafted items that also have a story behind them. The making of beads has been around for centuries, and each culture has their own way of producing beads either from silver, clay, paper or cloth. Fair trade allows these cultures to continue making these products, passing on the skills to the next generation and allowing their art form to survive when ordinarily it may have been wiped out.

Fair trade beads come from many countries, such as Bali, Thailand and many

places in Africa. Bali and Thailand are famous for their intricately handcrafted sterling or fine silver beads, such as the Karen Hill Tribe, whose beads can be found at www.rishashay.com, a certified fair trade supporter. African beads made from clay, recycled glass or paper are becoming more well known as well, with many companies supporting direct fair trade links with small villages. One notable organization is Bead for Life (www.beadforlife.org), which is based in Uganda, and has created a community of bead makers, many of whom are suffering from the effects of HIV/AIDS. Bead for Life has provided funding for a small village to be built, as most of its artists are either homeless or are living in a tiny mud hut, with as many as 10 other family members. Bead for Life, in conjunction with the Fair Trade Federation, is offering a tour where you're able to visit the families within the community, attend workshops in bead making, and go on a safari (more details can be found at <http://www.fairtradefederation.org/ht/display/EventDetails/i/7179>).

Semi-precious beads and stones can also be produced under fair trade agreements, and while this may mean an increase of cost for the consumer, it means a far better way of life for the person who created the beads. Many gemstone cutting factories in developing countries do not have adequate ventilation or preventative measures put in place, meaning the workers are often left with silicosis. Silicosis is an untreatable disease that is often misdiagnosed as Tuberculosis, and kills many people before the age of 40. It is caused by minute dust particles produced by the grinding and sanding of gemstone materials entering the lungs, and slowly kills by suffocation. It can be prevented simply by wearing a ventilator mask, which many workers simply cannot afford on the wage they earn, and many companies refuse to hand them out.

There are many ways of supporting fair trade, not only by purchasing fair trade products. You can do volunteer work with an organization such as Oxfam (www.oxfam.org.au) or donate to fair trade supporting

organizations. There are also many petitions going around, started by various fair trade organizations directed at your local area, or you can request your local supermarket, bead shop or craft store to start selling fair trade products.

Some websites that offer fair trade beads and bead related items are:

- Just Africa - <http://www.justafrica.com.au>
- Oxfam - <http://www.oxfamshop.org.au>
- Happy Mango Beads - <http://www.happymangobeads.com>
- E-Shop Africa - <http://www.eshopafrica.com>
- Ten Thousand Villages - <http://www.tenthousandvillages.ca>
- Bead for Life - <http://www.beadforlife.org>
- Global Exchange - <http://store.gxonlinestore.org>

Fair trade products are labelled as such, making it easier for consumers to choose ethically produced items.



Terracotta beads