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Title: **Do mainstream fashion markets offer a means by which to scale up truly fair trade employment, and if so, how?**

Over the last decade Fairtrade labelled products (predominantly food) have seen exceptional market growth through access to mainstream markets, and yet Fair Trade 'craft' enterprises, which include many fashion items, have struggled to attract interest from mainstream buyers. Whilst the absence of a Fair Trade product label for these items is one possible cause of this failure, it is also the case that Fair Trade craft/fashion enterprises have traditionally struggled to meet the expectations of mainstream buyers with respect to the quality of the products, speed of production and product price. In recent years however a handful of pioneering Fair Trade enterprises producing fashion accessories for mostly mainstream buyers have arisen. This paper will explore whether mainstream markets offer a good opportunity to scale-up truly fair trade employment but reporting on the analysis of ten case study chains in which pioneering Fair Trade enterprises in South Africa and Kenya are selling the majority of their output to mainstream buyers.

The findings are based on a comparative multi-case research design in which the author researched three factors; the nature of the relations operating between chain actors (referred to in Value Chain Analysis as *governance* or *co-ordination*); the quality of employment offered to those making the products; and the opportunities for value chain *upgrading*. How these three factors interact in the particular social, economic and business contexts of their location is also explored.

It was found that whilst high quality employment truly capable of delivery Fair Trade pro-poor aims and more is possible, only in instances when buyers relate to Fair Trade enterprises over the long term and in a collaborative manner. These collaborative relationships occurred only when the Fair Trade supplier concerned showed considerable competence in the tangible capabilities, i.e. design, sourcing raw materials, production quality, turn-around times and prices. Somewhat unexpectedly, the content of collaborative relationships did not concern these tangible aspects but rather the joint development of marketing and branding strategies, core competences that lead firms in fashion are usually unwilling to share/relinquish. The stability of these buyer-supplier relationships offered the best opportunity for Fair Trade enterprises to grow, and in all instances researched they passed the benefits of stable buying relationships onto their workers in the form of sufficient and secure employment. In the majority of instances however, both mainstream and Fair Trade buyers did not relate in this manner, instead engaging in low risk arms-length relationships, resulting in large fluxes in order levels of products and a flexible insecure workforce to match.

Given the ongoing enthusiasm amongst Fair Trade fashion enterprises to scale-up through access to mainstream markets, this research is first reassuring in demonstrating that this can be done in a way which provides truly high quality Fair Trade employment, but also challenging because it reveals that the converse is also possible. This paper finishes with a discussion of what some of the policy and practice implications for the Fair Trade movement of participating in these emerging markets might be. It suggests that network-wide

strategies to share learning and knowledge with potential buyers, combined with appropriate upgrading support for Fair Trade fashion enterprises, and the development of direct retail opportunities might all serve to reduce and counteract the negative impacts of arms length relationships whilst simultaneously encouraging collaborative ones.