

# **GENDER INEQUALITY IN THE FAIRTRADE SYSTEM: INTERACTION BETWEEN GLOBAL STRATEGIES AND LOCAL ACTION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Where previous literature is highly critical on the social regulation internationally operating Fairtrade organisations imposes on farmer communities in the Global South, this study showed that the agency of these communities is equally important to understand why policies do not always work the way they are intended. To understand how international gender policies resonate with local experiences with gender inequality, the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach by Carol Bacchi (2009) has been applied in two ways. It has first guided a policy analysis of the Gender Strategy (Fairtrade International, 2016) developed by Fairtrade International which made evident that gender inequality is problematized as a lack of female income production and individual responsibility. Secondly, it has guided an additional investigation of the experience of communities in three Ugandan coffee cooperatives. This showed that they adapted the problematization of gender inequality to the local context. They kept the focus on increasing female production, yet approach it as a way to contribute to the collective. Working on gender equality is thereby seen as a way to increase income for the entire family. This amendment, however, adds to the workload for women as they are now equally responsible for household and income. Moreover, it has negative implications for those who are not able to produce an income for coffee and those who do not have a family. They are excluded from the problematization of gender inequality and are therefore neglected by the policy interventions. It does not only further weaken their position, it also contributes to a broader devaluation of activities that do not generate an income.

### 1 INTRODUCTION

Fairtrade has emerged over recent years as a social movement that operates within global markets, particularly in the agricultural sector (Raynolds, 2012). Its basic premise is that the international trade system disproportionately allocates costs and benefits to consumers and producers. This inequality unfolds spatially along the Global North, Global South divide. Consumers in the Northern countries consume in high volumes at low prices at the cost of living standards of producers and workers in the Global South. Fairtrade has been established as a fair, sustainable and ethical alternative to the regular international market and seeks to eradicate poverty, insecurity and deprivation in the Global South (Jaffee, 2014).

The system, which is mainly managed by umbrella organization Fairtrade international, is twofold ("Fairtrade International (FLO): What is Fairtrade?", 2018). On the one hand, the Fairtrade system draws upon consumers' ethical and moral conscience by asking them to pay a higher, and thus fairer price for goods. This surplus is used to provide producers with a fixed minimum price to stabilize what is otherwise a volatile market. This is called the Fairtrade Minimum Price. At the end of the season, producer organizations receive an additional sum of money, called the Fairtrade Premium. It can be used to invest in community projects, organizational development or quality increase. Besides setting the Fairtrade minimum price and premium, Fairtrade International is also responsible for providing development support to producer organizations to improve living conditions in general. They do so by creating global strategies to improve the Fairtrade system, and by implementing development programmes.

The benefits from Fairtrade International are not unconditional, however. To be eligible to sell products against the Fairtrade price, producer organizations must adhere to a certain set of standards that guarantee a minimal standard of living for the producers and a minimum standard of quality for their product. Compliance with the standards is rewarded with a certification label, that is used by consumers to recognize Fairtrade products. Fairtrade has become a representation of responsible and ethical consumption and production, as it directs effort towards the improvement of the lives of producers (Jaffee, 2014; Gendron, Bisailon & Rance, 2009).

However, this philanthropist approach to trade has also costed the Fairtrade movement a lot of criticism. Although the argument behind the certification schemes is the need to guarantee a minimum standard for production practices, such Fairtrade policies have been scrutinized for being a covered attempt to westernize and modernize agricultural communities in the Global South (Cramer et al., 2017; Fridell, 2014; Hussey & Curnow, 2013; Robbins, 2013). It is a concern not uncommon for development organisations.

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Especially development work on gender equality has been found problematic over the years. It carves out emancipation and change from the perspective of the Global North, neglecting local understandings. It thereby achieves little change at best, and entrenches gendered power relations at worst (Hutchens, 2010; Mare, 2008; Rice, 2008).

Nevertheless, it did not stop Fairtrade International from developing a Gender Strategy 2016-2020 (Fairtrade International, 2016). In this strategy, Fairtrade International describes their vision on gender, and the objectives they have for their own organisation, producer networks and producer organisations. The overall document serves to inform 1411 producer organization in more than 73 countries to reach their vision of *“a world in which all producers can enjoy secure and sustainable livelihoods, fulfil their potential and decide on their futures”* (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.4). Fairtrade International thereby aims to go beyond earlier attempts and provides a Gender Strategy that draws upon more aspects than simply economic ones.

Considering the vast amount of critical literature concerning gender development, it is worth investigating whether the adapted approach in the Gender Strategy can bring about more gender equality in producer communities. To go beyond a critical analysis of the Gender Strategy and study the effects of this strategy, additional fieldwork has been done at three Fairtrade coffee unions in Uganda. These unions have been Fairtrade certified for multiple years and have years of experience in working on gender inequality. To see how Fairtrade International global strategies are interacting with the experience in producer communities in Uganda, this study aims to answer three questions:

*1: How does the Gender Strategy 2016-2020 from Fairtrade International define and intervene in gender inequality?*

*2: How do farmers in the Fairtrade Ugandan coffee unions define and experience gender inequality?*

*3: In what way does the Gender Strategy 2016-2020 interact with the definition and experience of farmers at Fairtrade coffee unions in Uganda?*

The research is guided by Carol Bacchi’s “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach (2009). This approach is different from other policy analyses as it looks more specific into the way a problem is framed. Rather than seeking whether the proposed policy interventions are addressing inequality effectively, she argues that the discrepancies between a policy’s objectives and achievements should be sought in the way the problem is framed. Key is not to assess whether the proposed policy interventions are effective or not, but to understand how the Gender Strategy constructs the problem of gender inequality and how this problematization interacts with the way gender inequality is experienced on the ground.

This study thereby contributes to the literature on the way gender policies produced by internationally operating organisations in the Global North interact with the experiences of gender inequality by the communities that are addressed in the policies. It thereby does not only shed light on possible discrepancies between problematization and the “real life” experience, but also lays out the consequences for the social organization of societies where these policies are implemented.

## **2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **2.1 FAIRTRADE**

Over the last decades, Fairtrade has become the moral alternative in a world economy in which fast and cheap mass production has become the norm. Based on the idea that trade should not involve the oppression and exploitation of farmers in the Global South, Fairtrade has generated an increasing body of support over the last decades. It has now outgrown its status as a social movement and has become an institutionalized practice of consumption, production and trade. It operates on a global scale and exacerbates influence over the lives of people in many producer communities (Jaffee, 2014; Reynolds, 2012). It is grounded in the idea that trade is a more effective and sustainable method to tackle poverty and deprivation than development aid. The argument is that development often leaves people depending on others for resources. Trade enables them to gratify opportunities and make choices more autonomously and independently, as they can improve their living conditions by themselves (Fridell, 2004; Redfern & Snedker, 2002).

Contradictory it is that Fairtrade organizations are still concerned with providing development support. Fairtrade International has drafted multiple development programmes to guide farmer communities towards more sustainable livelihoods. Additionally, the certification schemes that producer organizations must follow in order to receive the benefits from Fairtrade also imply a certain amount of social regulation and control (Jaffee, 2014). Without compliance to standards that have been set by Fairtrade International, operating from Germany, there is no access to any of the Fairtrade benefits. This conditional participation of Fairtrade organizations was criticised for its neo-colonial objectives. Fairtrade organizations were blamed for continuing a system that seeks to establish spheres of influence in the Global South, more than being intrinsically motivated to equalize the value chain (Barrientos, Conroy & Jones, 2007; Goodman, 2004). Although Fairtrade Organizations propagate to bring about balance through paying a fairer price, their interventions have a significantly influence on the social organization of these farmers communities as well.

### 2.2 FAIRTRADE GENDER DEVELOPMENT

One of the areas where Fairtrade is prominently involved in is gender inequality. In general is stated that women are overrepresented among the global poor, and face constraints in access to resources, capital, education and information. Besides a disadvantage concerning those material and non-material assets, women in general experience less freedom to make personal life choices and fulfil their needs. For these reasons, Fairtrade International has developed special gender programmes (Fairtrade.net, 2018).

The shape these programmes take as well as their effects vary largely across the Fairtrade sector (Mare, 2008). However, there is a substantial focus on the economic position women have in the Fairtrade sector. The possibilities trade offers to improve living conditions in farmer communities, must also be realized for women, even though they are less likely to own land. It is argued that the financial emancipation of women is a suitable starting point to improve women's socioeconomic position (FAO, 2011).

However, on a global level Fairtrade is said to improve little about gendered power relations. Women are likely to produce handicrafts good that are hardly certified. A high percentage of the female population can therefore not even be reached with Fairtrade (Mare, 2008). Additionally, using economic empowerment as the starting point for emancipation of women also provided ambiguous results. Only providing women with more income is not enough, since in many agricultural communities there are many constraints that are rooted in patriarchal structures in society. These structures are still pervasive in Uganda as well (Godfrey, 2010). Although Uganda brings several Fairtrade cooperatives forward, studies have not yet seen much improvement there as well (Meier zu Selhausen, 2016; Kasente, 2012)

One of the main objections to this approach is that gender policies have the tendency to focus exclusively on women. Gender issues equated women's issues, rather than an issue of interrelated power mechanisms and social expectations about what it means to be born female or male. A paradigm shift followed, after which more holistic approaches were adopted to tackle gender gaps in agricultural communities. Not only men were included in policies, but also differentiating factors such as age, race and education were considered to ensure that gender policies tackle the relations between people that keep power mechanisms in place (Razavi & Miller, 1995). Yet, even with this recognition, one of the most pervasive issues remains that gender policy interventions are still not adequate in addressing gendered gaps. Albeit in land, resources, information, education, income, autonomy, independence or decision-making, there is little evidence that Fairtrade brought substantial change in this respect.

### 2.3 “WHAT’S THE PROBLEM REPRESENTED TO BE?” APPROACH

The continuous discrepancies between the objectives of gender policies and their actual outcomes should not only be sought in the effectiveness of policy interventions. Policy analyses are often concerned with these processes. They tend to identify and investigate whether policies reached their desired objectives. It follows a linear thought where a problem is identified, after which is sought out whether policies have addressed the problem. Carol Bacchi (2009) takes a step back. Rather than focusing on policy interventions, she looks at the way a problem comes into being.

According to her, policies often fail to solve the problem they seek to address because of the way a problem is framed. Her central argument does not concern the study of policy as a solution to the problem, but she argues for a study into the way a problem came into being in the first place. According to her, problems are not out there to be found but actively constructed as such. It does not mean that there is no such thing as a problem, but that an explanation or definition necessarily cannot encompass the whole set of problematic social conditions that it entails. It means that whenever one speaks of a problem, albeit in a policy document, it is always a partial representation of an issue. These representations take their shape and form in particular contexts. No issue is a problem by nature and is therefore not something that can be found. Phenomena are not intrinsically problematic. Something becomes a problem, only because it is made so. It means that problems are social constructions that vary across time and space. Bacchi (2009) calls them problematizations.

Although problematizations are a form of problem making, it does not mean their formulation is deliberately manipulated nor intentionally strategic. More often problems are made unconsciously through taken for granted assumptions. Problems, like gender inequality, tend to feel natural and resonates with a common understanding of the way the world works and should work. According to Bacchi (2009), this is because problems are rooted in discourses. Discourses are systems of representation people use to communicate and understand the world around them. This system does not only consist of text and language, but includes a whole array of symbols, gestures, visuals, materials and all other forms of representation that is used to describe certain phenomena. They acquire meaning when they are used and reproduced in a social, religious, ideological, cultural, historical, economic context. Discourse thereby informs the kind of categories and concepts people use to comprehend an issue, and also which of those gain more salience in describing an issue. It is through this mechanism that issues become problematized in certain policies.

According to Bacchi (2009), the influence of discourse is important to integrate into a policy analysis. Discourses are highly embedded into society and its components are therefore hardly ever tested. Looking at the issue of gender inequality, it has become a problem so widely recognized that it is hardly ever contested. Policies barely provide an explicit definition of gender inequality

Unfortunately, this type of reflection is often skipped in the process of policy making. However, when adopting a particular perspective on a problem— a problematisation – it is important to critically examine what kind of effects this problematisation will have, and whether the problem definition aligns with the way the issue is experienced on the ground.

### 2.4 ANALYTICAL QUESTIONS

To structure the analysis of policy problematizations and the discourses that inform them, Bacchi (2009) incorporated a set of analytical questions in her “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach. She first asks *what is the problem represented to be?* To incorporate the way discourse influences this problem representation, she follows up by asking *what assumptions underlie this problematization* and *under what conditions did this representation come into being*. It broadens the scope of the policy analysis and demonstrates how context matters to policy makers. These questions address the way governing bodies produce ‘problems’, and how these problematizations legitimate the type of intervention that is proposed.

Additionally, as the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach is not to discern who is talking about the ‘real problem’, but to understand the consequences of the way ‘problems’ are talked about, Bacchi (2009) added three additional questions to the framework. After identifying the construction of a problematization, the next question who is left out in this perspective. As emphasized before, policies inevitably cannot encapsulate an entire reality, so it is important to uncover *who is silenced in this problematization and which groups benefit from the particular problematization*. The salience of specific elements of a policy can favour one actor over the other. This differentiation a problematization makes, can also have lived effects in groups or areas where policies are implemented.

Although Bacchi (2009) does not always incorporate an empirically grounded answer to this question in her own analyses, the “What’s the Problem represented to be?” approach does provide ample opportunity to do so in this stage of the study. It requires more data than written policy documents, but empirical evidence of the lived effects of policies can attribute significantly to evidence on the claim that well intended policies can cause unintended and undesirable effects for people whose perspective is silenced in the policies. To gain more insight into the characteristics of these lived effects, Bacchi (2009) last question concerns *the production, dissemination and defence of the problematization*. This is where the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach refers again to the question of discourse, and where and who perpetuate this problematization. It brings about the important and influential stakeholders who holds powerful positions that maintain the salience of concepts and categories that make an issue into the problem that is represented to be in the policy.

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The “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach do not only stimulate researchers to dig deeper into policy material but also to elaborate on the pre-existing patterns that constitute the conditions under which policies and their effects take rise. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, the questions also challenge the researcher to think about opposition and agency. Although Bacchi (2009) emphasizes that discourse leads to an uncritical absorption of certain problematizations, it must not be thought of as a prefixed structure that is determinant. Discourses are shaping and constructing the way people understand problems, but it also implies that contestation can be shaped and constructed as well. The idea that multiple and opposing discourses coexist and interact with each other is particularly important in this study. Gender inequality problems that are shaped and created in discourses that are dominant in Global North, and strongly advocated for globally can be altered through active engagement and opposition in the Global South. In general, this is perceived as a positive development, as contextualization is seen as an improvement to the effectiveness of policies. Especially considering previous criticism on Fairtrade for being normative and western oriented. From these points and Bacchi’s (2009) line of argument, sensitizing problematizations to the perspectives of farmer communities is beneficial as it might decrease discrepancies between an inaccurate problematization and undesired effects. It is therefore important to also incorporate contesting discourse and problematizations in the analysis.

### **3 METHODOLOGY**

For this research a qualitative approach has been applied to study the problem representation of gender inequality in policies of Fairtrade organizations and their lived effects in farmer communities. The policy analysis concerns the Gender Strategy as published by Fair Trade International. Fairtrade International, also known as Fairtrade Labelling Organizations International (FLO), is an umbrella organization that operates in many countries and a large number of value chains. They oversee the certification schemes and the corresponding standards that producers must comply with. They also work on more general strategy documents that provide a framework for Fairtrade trading companies, consumer organisations, labour organisations, producer organisations and their communities. The Gender Strategy have been retrieved from the website of Fairtrade International that is looked upon as a main resource for policy development by the Ugandan coffee unions.

The Gender Strategy is considered a building block from which more concrete policies and interventions can be developed. It means that the Gender Strategy itself does not specify tangible steps and actions that can be applied by producer organisations, but they nevertheless provide the larger framework for all gender work within the Fairtrade system. It is therefore also the basis from

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which the gender policies at the Ugandan coffee unions have been developed. These policies have been acquired from three Fair Trade coffee cooperatives in Uganda:

### **Ankole Coffee Producers' Co-operative Union (ACPCU):**

ACPCU is located in the Ankole region, south-west Uganda, close to the village of Bushenyi. The cooperative is Fairtrade certified since 2009 and produces especially organic coffee. 30% of its 10,000 members are female. They produce Robusta coffee and have a gender officer.

### **Bukonzo Joint Cooperative Union (BJCU):**

Bukonzo Joint is located in Kyarumba, in the Rwenzori Mountains, in West-Uganda close by Kasese. The union consists of more than 80% female farmers, with a total of 4,272 members. The union was founded in 1999 and is Fairtrade certified since 2010.

### **Bukonzo Organic Farmers Cooperative Union (BOCU):**

Bukonzo Organic has started in the town of Kasese, but moved to Bwera recently. The union is Fairtrade certified and approximately 37% of its 3,000 members are female. The cooperative union is the youngest of the three unions.

These policy documents have been written for internal use and are not publicly published.

Nonetheless are the documents shared with visitors and certification officers to demonstrate the efforts made towards the improvement of gender inequality.

To understand how policy makers at the union level interact with the definition of gender inequality in the Gender Strategy, the first three questions of Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" approach have been tested against these documents:

1. *What is the problem represented to be in the policy?*
2. *What assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?*
  - a. *What conceptual logic underpins gender inequality?*
3. *How has this representation come about?*
  - a. *Under which conditions did gender inequality take shape?*
  - b. *How did the representation of gender inequality assume dominance?*

The last three questions are used to map the experiences of farmer communities in the Ugandan coffee unions. Data was gathered in a multi-method approach by a team of four researchers. For five weeks, in which each union was visited separately, participatory drawing exercises, focus groups, interviews and field visits were conducted. The aim was to speak with people of all levels in the organizations.

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There has been actively sought for a balance in female and male respondents, as well as people in high positions and people in low positions in the organizations.

The participatory drawing exercises were mostly used to talk about farmers and board members on what their day looks like and which activities they undertake on a regular day. This was followed up by a group discussion on what their favourite and least favourite thing to do is. The role of the researcher did not extend beyond the role of facilitator, which opened up space for the participants to bring in their own thoughts and ideas. Through this exercise, data was gathered on possible difference between schedules of men and women, and how they feel about their own tasks. Such an activity provides several advantages for the collection of data. First of all, drawing depends less on literacy skills. Additionally, the drawing exercise will produce several points of reference. Not only the drawing itself are important to generate data on the individual perceptions of the cooperative and their role in it, but also the group formulations and the interactions that go along the exercise will provide insight in the social processes that underlie the making of gender policies and their effect.

Additionally, focus groups and interviews were organised to create a setting in which farmers, board members, staff members and community members could elaborate on their work and experiences with gender. Focus groups were organised in homogeneous groups to stimulate everyone to speak up in a safe environment, and yet to see the interactions in these groups. Whenever more in-depth information was needed, interviews were requested.

This data was then used for the analysis that was guided by the last three questions of the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach.

4. *What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?*
  - a. *Which perspective is silenced by this particular representation of gender inequality?*
5. *What effects are produced by this problem representation?*
  - a. *Who is likely to benefit from this representation of gender inequality and who is not?*
  - b. *What is likely to change from these policies and what is not?*
6. *Where is this problem representation produced, disseminated and defended?*
  - a. *Where does this representation of gender inequality gain legitimacy?*
  - b. *Where is this legitimacy contested?*

All six questions are guidelines rather than a step-by-step approach. The questions relate, interact and exchange which is why the analysis will continuously move between the data and the questions that are proposed by Bacchi (2009).

### 4 RESULTS

Conducting research on the Gender Strategy from Fairtrade International was followed up by a field study at three Ugandan Fairtrade coffee cooperatives. The results have been analysed through the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach (Bacchi, 2009). The questions proposed in this approach will structure the results section. First, it will describe how the gender inequality is problematized by Fairtrade International and what assumptions are underpinning this problematization. It will take a step back in the process of developing such a strategy and seek what discourses have informed the definition of gender inequality and the kind of interventions that need to be put into place to improve it accordingly.

To demonstrate that the Gender Strategy is not simply injected as such into producer organizations, their gender policies will be looked at in the same way. How do they problematize gender, and what kind of measurements do they seem fit to improve gender inequality? These results are particularly important to understand how these international development policies can interact with different parts over the world and are therefore also subject to change. There is a form of interaction visible between what Fairtrade International these union policies, that demonstrates how local policy makers are able to navigate between international standards and local standards. Subsequently, the personal experiences and stories from farmers in these three unions demonstrate how their perception of gender is different. Again, applying Bacchi (2009)’s questions on whose perspective is silenced, and what the lived effects of these policies are data from the fieldwork serve to provide an understanding of where Fairtrade policy and local experience do not necessarily match. Moreover, this mismatch on gender inequality in some areas even serves the masculine norm, instead of challenging it.

In the last part, this finding will be put in the broader context of the problematization of gender on international and community level, and how the “What’s the problem represented to be?” approach is useful for applying the necessary reflection before drafting measurements that influence daily social organization in these producer unions.

#### 4.1 IN NEED OF A GENDER PROGRAMME

Fairtrade International is one of the most influential organisations within the Fairtrade system. They set the standards, the minimum price and the premium. They also own FLOCERT, the company responsible for checking and giving out certification. Being the umbrella organisation, Fairtrade International also develops global strategies on how to improve the trading system and they provide support to producer organisations. This support takes on the form of multiple development programmes. Although they operate internationally, and meet a large variety of contexts and

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situations, there are some issues that affect farmers and workers across all value chains. Gender is one of those topics.

According to FTI, gender inequality is one of the biggest barriers to human development. Work on gender has been done before, but to guide their efforts in a more systematic way the organisation has developed the Gender Strategy. Although the document has been drawn up to tackle gender inequality, it does not provide a clear definition of it. It illustrates Bacchi's (2009) observation that commonly policy makers take problems for granted, without clearly defining what it means. Also, in the Gender Strategy, one must read between the lines to understand how gender inequality is understood by Fair Trade International.

Performing such a read of the document, resulted in multiple accounts of gender inequality, that sometimes even contradict. The Gender Strategy starts by giving a definition of gender equality, from which a definition of gender inequality can be deduced. According to the Gender Strategy, gender equality is defined as *"...all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. It does not mean that women and men and girls and boys have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female."* (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.9). According to this definition, social expectations should ultimately become disconnected from physical appearances to enable each individual to make choices and enact those. It inevitably makes gender inequality the reverse. Men and women are still captured by stereotypes and face multiple challenges to break through the constraints that come along with it. Through this understanding, gender inequality seems to be a rather abstract problem of social structures, whereby traditional patterns of thoughts must be unrooted.

However, analysing the rest of the document shows a different approach and also a different problematisation of gender inequality. As the written gender policies do not indicate anything about the system (for example, the role of men in legislation is hardly ever mentioned here) and put a focus on training women's skills and increasing women's capacities to do more in the producer organization, it implicitly makes gender inequality a problem of individual productivity, but does not challenge the feminine and masculine roles. Women need to be trained to have skills to increase production, but men do not need skills to take over household chores for example. This focus on women and productivity creates a perception that traditional women's tasks do not require a skill that people need to be trained in and that eventually profit-making is prioritized over all other activities.

### **4.2 PRODUCTIVE PARTICIPATION**

Throughout the Gender Strategy, it becomes evident that for Fairtrade International gender inequality is not so much about the stereotypes and gender roles that are attributed to being male or female,

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but about a participation and productivity gap. The rationale for the Gender Strategy states for example that “Women’s role in agriculture has increased over time for various reasons including migration, conflict and the incidence of HIV/AIDS. However, women have less access to productive resources such as land, inputs, information, credit and technical assistance – resulting in the ‘gender gap’ in agriculture.” (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.4). Throughout the document inequality is talked about in terms of female unproductivity and non-participation. By unproductive is meant that women commonly do not generate incomes, and by non-participation is meant that they are not joining activities of the producer organisation. Gender inequality thereby acquires a rather financial character in which money seems to be a tool of empowerment. It makes income productivity one of the pillars on which the Gender Strategy is build.

### **4.3 INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY**

To accomplish this rise in income, the Gender Strategy appoints mainly women as the responsible actors. Although the Strategy mentions the role of men a couple of times, it nevertheless highly emphasizes that women need to get on their feet to improve their capacities and skills. It is written that *“the Fairtrade approach seeks to tackle unequal power relations in order to promote gender equality and women’s empowerment. This will be achieved by strengthening women’s human, social, financial, and physical capital”* (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.1). This quote illustrates how gender inequality and unequal power relations can be tackled by addressing women’s capacity and skills. Describing gender inequality in such categories represents it as an individual problem that can only be solved by improving individual qualities. It is underpinned by a continuous focus on the need to train women.

The Gender Strategy generates a problem definition that appoints women as the main responsible actors to close the gap, and make sure they can participate in income-generating activities. Although their objectives seem to need change in social structures and perceptions of what it means to be a man or a woman, it appears that Fairtrade International clearly sets boundaries to their scope of intervention. Even though the document mentions that the roles and responsibilities you have should not be determined by your gender at birth, the policy only encapsulates the limitations that are set for women and not so much for men. It problematizes gender inequality as women behind ‘behind’ men in terms of financial strength. The Strategy thereby becomes an advocate for smoothing out differences until each and everyone produces income and participates in union practices.

### **4.4 UNDERLYING ASSUMPTIONS: MODERN SELF-MADE HUMAN**

What underpins such a problematization of gender is the assumption that gender inequality is essentially an individual issue and financial issue. By stressing factors such as productivity, income,

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access to resources, ownership, the Gender Strategy defines inequality by materialistic standards and therefore assumes that an approach that focuses on these materialistic conditions will be most effective in establishing gender equality. Added to this, the strategy recognizes the structural component of gender inequality but nevertheless emphasizes the role of women specifically in challenging this. Instead of a policy that addresses institutional structures and societal structures, the strategy focuses on individual agency to challenge inequality. It draws upon individual capacity and responsibility to transform the relation between men and women.

These assumptions on financial emancipation and individual responsibility come from a Western/Northern discourse. The Northern consumer projects the image of modern neoliberal citizens who can modify their lives as they are fully capable and free to reach whatever goal they set for themselves on the Southern producer (Goodman, 2004). It is the modern self-made human, for whom boundaries do not exist. The crux of becoming such an independent autonomous citizen is the development of individual capabilities that turn them into superhumans who can have every job they want, participate in all activities and consume whatever they desire. It underpins a system in which increasing individual economic productivity is the right pathway to become empowered, free and autonomous (Dolan, 2010).

These assumptions have become part of Western culture, and over the years have become more institutionalized globally through corporate global expansion and Fairtrade as well (Goodman, 2004). However, this dominance should not be mistaken for universality. It has been demonstrated in literature before, that the modern citizen as defined in most of the Western countries does not align well with many of the contexts in which development programmes, such as the gender programme, are implemented in.

### **4.5 FAIRTRADE'S LEGITIMIZATION OF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES**

Placing the Gender Strategy into the broader scope of Fairtrade International, one explanation could be that their position between producers and consumers constructs their problematization of gender. The main goal of Fairtrade is to create a value chain that does not disproportionately disadvantages the producers (Redfern & Snedker, 2002).

However, Fairtrade organisations do not simply just pay more money to the farmers. They also ask a higher price to consumers. To convince consumer to pay this higher price, they offer in return a system of certification standards and development support that helps the producers raise the quality of their products and their living standards. It is a business model that seems to work, as it gives consumer a direct opportunity to contribute to a fairer and more ethical world (Wilkinson, 2007).

However, this business model also seems to rest on a political economy in which interventions in other countries are accepted only when it occurs on “Western” terms (Dolan, 2010).

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To market Fairtrade's activities, their plans, programmes and standards must make sense to the consumers for them to decide to invest in them. As Fairtrade International is depending on consumers to maintain the Fairtrade system, it is not likely they will draft a gender programme that does not resonate with their customers. It plays into the normative assumptions that inform people in the Northern and Western countries on what good development actually is (Goodman, 2004).

### **4.6 INTERACTION WITH UNION POLICY MAKERS**

It would be short-sighted however, to assume that the components of the Gender Strategy 2016-2018 will be uncritically incorporated into the producer organizations. Fairtrade International is indeed one of the main sources of consultation for producer organisation when it comes to policy making, as confirmed by one of the policymakers at BJC. The idea that gender inequality entails a gap between productivity and participation is clearly traced back into these local policy documents. Solutions and interventions are also built to increase female's financial assets and do not divert largely from the Gender Strategy.

However, the policies also show a level of opposition by emphasizing in their gender policies that it also the role of men and the structure of society plays a role in maintaining constraints for women. It is mentioned a few times in their written policies, but it became clearer once the field was visited. The unions pay far more attention to the role of the collective. For them, community-based approaches, rather than training individual skills and capacities, are more effective and relevant. Thus, the gender policies on the union level often draw upon social ties and collaboration between different people in the community to communicate how gender inequality should be tackled.

Although it can be rather positive that union staff members have the agency to interact with both the Gender Strategy and the context in which they find themselves. However, this interaction does not necessarily imply the contextualization of international development policies to make in fit into the daily realities of people in producer organizations. Rather, this interaction can also allow for a policy construction that also harm the community, and in this case, women.

### **4.7 EXPERIENCING GENDER INEQUALITY IN UGANDA COMMUNITIES**

To explain how the interaction between a Gender Strategy, developed to operate internationally, and a local gender policy, contextualize to fit into the daily reality of farmers, can also become problematic it is necessary to take a closer look at the situation of the communities at the Ugandan coffee unions.

There is a paradox between the way the Ugandan communities and the Gender Strategy problematizes gender inequality. As mentioned before, the Gender Strategy is built on two pillars: productive participation and individual responsibility. These pillars are both perpetuated and opposed in the coffee unions.

### 4.8 COLLABORATION

On the one hand, productive participation remains an important area of intervention for the unions. On the other hand, the individualism that is clearly visible in the Gender Strategy is replaced by a sense of collectivism and community-based thinking. Across all unions, gender was understood as collaboration, joint effort and working together in the household. Gender thereby almost becomes an activity. If you do not work together as a family, you do not have gender. This perspective genuinely uproots the kind of objectives the Gender Strategy envisioned. Focusing on women to earn a higher income was proposed to also increase women's independence and autonomy. Producing and participating in income generating activities would empower them step over the constraints and challenges they currently face. However, this aspect gets lost in translation in a context where much more emphasis is put on collaborating. It means that any effort of women is invested in the entire family, or even in the farmer community, and does not necessarily mean that woman has more freedom to make personal choices. It leads to an increased workload for women as they are now responsible for income and the family at the same time.

It may seem contradictory that this collaborative character of the communities does not include a collaboration within the household. If men and women are ought to work together on the coffee plantation, why do they not divide the household tasks? The explanation for this is simply because the policies tend to neglect the role division in the household. In a few instances, the union provided awareness trainings in which both men and wife had to fill in a timeline of their day, demonstrating that women work far more hours than men. Beyond these efforts, little was done to also include household tasks as a part of collaboration.

Asking for an explanation on why this was not incorporated into gender policies was that collaboration as such is not an easy thing to achieve. It takes time and effort from the families to sit together, and plan together. According to executive staff, increased income is a motivation to do so, while household tasks not so much. Therefore, these community-based thinking and collaboration on gender is currently only advocated for under the idea of increasing income and assets. This resonates with financial pillar on which the problematization of gender inequality is built in the Gender Strategy. It makes coffee production practices, rather than household division the core of gender inequality.

A few problems arise from this, however. First, such a policy tends to neglect that household and work are highly intertwined as homes and plantation are located on the same plot of land. In agricultural communities, such as those at the Ugandan coffee unions, it means that changes in work division in the family, also reflects on the organization of the household. When policies emphasize productive participation and silence households, even when they are about working together, the responsibility of the women for these tasks remains the same. Although both the Gender Strategy and

the union policies are aiming to relieve women of their high work burden, it only increases with the extra responsibility for coffee production.

### **4.9 INCREASED WORKLOAD**

The results from the fieldwork shown that women are becoming more integrated into male dominated areas and take over their tasks and responsibilities, but men do not necessarily integrate traditionally female tasks into their daily activities. According to one of the board members, it is necessary “to bring women up to the level of men”. It illustrates how in general there is a perception that women are behind and lacking in skills and knowledge on coffee production, rather than men also needing to take responsibility over the household.

This is rather contradicting in a society that is focused on collaboration and joint effort but can be explained by the heightened value on income-generating activities to reach gender equality. The “all hands on deck” thus limits itself to financial security, which means that the household remains a female domain.

This was demonstrated during many of the participatory drawings in which women were asked to draw their daily activities. Whenever they drew a coffee garden, they would draw both husband and wife, but when they would go and collect firewood or fetch water, they would only draw themselves. But there is more to the situation than simply the task division. Whenever they were asked to circle their most favourite and least favourite part of the day, basically every woman indicated that the coffee garden as their favourite and collecting water and firewood as their least favourite. This difference was strikingly consistent across all three unions. These findings illustrate one of the silences in the Gender Strategy. Drawing women to income, but men out of the household even increases the gap.

### **4.10 EXCLUSIONARY MECHANISM**

Additionally, it does not only silence household tasks, but also those who do not operate within a household that owns a coffee plantation. The combination of productive participation and collaboration implies that one has to be able to produce and be part of some form of a collective. However, single-headed households, the elderly, those who do not own land, wage workers are all categories that have trouble fulfilling at least one of these conditions. They do not have a husband or wife, or children, and/or also do not own land where they can grow coffee.

The situation of handpicking ladies in the unions is illustrative for the way the gender policies exclude certain groups. When the dried coffee beans are delivered to the union, handpicking ladies perform an extra quality check whereby the beans that are too dark, too light, too small or too damaged are taken out of the bags. Although men are not excluded from this job, it would always be women sitting on the floor with heaps of coffee besides them. Almost none of the gender policies

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apply to these women, as they are not producers of coffee and therefore not members of the union. They are seasonal workers, and although they are part of the coffee production process, they are not eligible for the premium, nor are they considered for trainings or decision-making positions. Problematizing gender inequality as a problem of productive participation does not apply to the situation of these women, as they are wage labourers. They are one of the largest blind spots in the producer organisations and Fairtrade International alike.

Although the handpicking ladies are the most striking example, this silence counts for all community members who have smaller plots of land, who are ill and cannot work, who are not productive according to the policy standards. This exclusion unfolds most clearly along the lines of age. Especially elderly expressed their difficulties within the unions. Those who had enough resources would build up fences equipped with broken glass pins around their plots of land to protect themselves. It illustrates a vulnerability, especially for elderly women, that is currently not addressed in the policies of the union.

Additionally, savings and credit groups support people to bring in a certain amount of cash to save and to occasionally loan from this group capital. Also here, the savings and credits groups are collectives through which women can support each other. The amount of savings had to be kept deliberately low to ensure that also elderly women could join. They received no additional support for this from the unions. Moreover, applying for a loan requires a statement from the board members to verify that enough income is made from bringing coffee to the union to ensure that the loan will be repaid. However, production numbers for the elderly are much lower in general since they have less capacity to work on the land. Even though they are not denied access to the benefits of savings & credit group from the union, their age is a complicating factor to make use of these policies.

### 4.11 LIVED EFFECTS

The fieldwork has demonstrated that the interaction between union policies and the Gender Strategy has resulted in a contextualization of the problematization of gender inequality. Where the Gender Strategy saw it as an issue of productive participation gaps and individual capacities, the unions saw it as an issue of productive participation and collaboration and joint efforts. However, this mix of elements from the global strategy and local perception has led to difficulties in the implementation of the policies and more specifically, in the effects it produces among the farmers communities.

Going back to the initial definition of gender equality in the Gender Strategy - *“...all human beings are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles, or prejudices. It does not mean that women and men and girls and boys have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female.”* (Fairtrade International, 2016, p.9) – the results show that this has not

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been achieved nor seen much improvement. The objective of the Gender Strategy to generate more freedom to make choices and develop personal abilities has been lost in translation. Reaching a certain amount of independence and autonomy for especially women has been transformed into an additional workload that comes with shared responsibilities for the production practices of coffee through the emphasis that the unions have put on collaboration in favour of income generation. Women must be involved more in income generating activities, and take some of the tasks of men's shoulders, without the expectation this will also happen vice versa in the household. The approach is often defended by stating that increasing income and individual capacity-building are only meant as an entrance to change the power relations between men and women. "We have to start somewhere".

However, the implications of using productive participation and collaboration as an entry point have far reaching effects into the farmer communities and actually entrench current power relations. Although the literature on Fairtrade policies advocates for contextualization of policies rather than adopting policies that are developed in a Western context, the results showed a different side to this. There are more dynamics in constructing and shaping a policy that is transferred from one context into another, which in this case concerns taking over the income pillar from the Gender Strategy but leaving the independency and autonomy as it is. The agency that the union policy makers demonstrate is interacting with global stakeholders can be lauded, but the problematization becomes a mix and match of different elements that neither adhere entirely to Fairtrade principles, nor to the situation of the farmers. For the farmers, the gender policies become more aligned with their experiences, yet more problematic for their social organization at the same time.

Defining the scope of a gender policy as the collective productive participation in income generating activities does not only add to the workload of women, it also leads a devaluation of activities that do not provide an income. The elderly and wage workers are an example of this. Their activities are silenced in the policies and therefore do not seem to be a priority of the unions. It thereby lowers the status of household work and wage labour and of the people that do these activities. It means that the policies do not only affect women, but also men, children and the elderly who are not able to produce an income or participate in activities for the union. It shows how the problematization that is partially adjusted to the context of the Ugandan communities and partially adheres to the Gender Strategy fails to address gendered power relations. It only rewards people that can be productive, strong, healthy and who can make use of resources to contribute to a collective. It fuels the idea that gender inequality can be solved through families that start collaborating to increase production and quality of coffee. Through this problematization of gender inequality, the relation about men and women is not so much about freeing individuals from gendered stereotypes and becoming a self-made individual, but rather about working on individual capacities to benefit the

collective in which gendered division in the household continue to exist and even undergo a devaluation.

### **5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This study has yielded several insights into the processes of transnational policymaking. Where previous literature is highly critical on the social regulation Fairtrade imposes on farmer communities around the world, this study showed that the role of local agency is equally important to understand why policies do not work the way they are intended. The Gender Strategy as developed by Fairtrade International is rooted in a Western discourse that builds on the normative assumptions on what kind of emancipation is needed to reach gender equality in agricultural communities. It draws upon the neoliberal ideas of a self-made human who is free to make any possible choice in the world and to enact this choice successfully. Hard work, education and taking responsibility of the individual will inevitably bring an independent and autonomous life. This ideal is underpinned with the assumptions that there are no structural limits to what someone can achieve, and it is within one's own hands to realize it.

It has led to a Gender Strategy that is built upon the realization of financial opportunities by addressing women's capacity to generate an income. Increased incomes then pave the way for women to free themselves from gendered roles and tasks and supports their empowerment and emancipation as such. However, policy makers in the Ugandan coffee unions argue that this approach will not achieve any results as such because supporting individual freedom and autonomy for women will be met with too much resistance in the communities. They have therefore amended the Gender Strategy and argue that women's participation in income generating activities should be increased to benefit the family as a whole. The idea of independence and autonomy is moved to the background and replaced by the idea that women should be enabled to produce and earn more on coffee as a common goal of the household. This adjustment is legitimized by the argument that it fits better with local motivations to work on gender inequality for profit than equality as a goal. People, more specifically men, are more likely to invest in women if it means that it benefits the family, instead of just women. The problematization of gender inequality thereby becomes an issue of collective productive participation.

As heard and observed during the fieldwork, this problematization excludes people who cannot produce, such as people who do not own land, who are not able to work on their land and wage labourers. Additionally, it also excludes those who do not necessarily operate within a collective, such as single-headed households and younger people who have not yet started a family. Besides these silences, the problematization also leads to policy interventions that are not concerned with

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gendered relations in areas that are not providing an income. This neglect leads to a devaluation of such tasks, as if it would not be important to also consider how gendered relations play out in such areas. Especially in agricultural societies, where work and private life are highly interrelated, it is important to consider these areas in policy making as well.

These implications demonstrate a different side to the ineffectiveness of Fairtrade policies than has been previously discussed in literature on this topic. It shows that there is a more complex dynamic involved in the way Westernized policies of gender inequality are implemented. Changed by local policy makers, policies adhere to a problematization of gender inequality that neither reflects internationally drafted policies nor the situation of farmers at hand. This fragmentation can exacerbate existing gendered patterns and their subsequent power relations, as the mix and match of approaches to gender inequality and the lived effects it might have are not well thought through. On a more theoretical level, the study demonstrates the strength of Bacchi's (2009) "What's the problem represented to be?" approach to critically unfold the processes and conditions of policy-making. Due to their open end, the questions leave space to incorporate opposition, contestation and congruence in problematization and therefore is useful to apply to an analysis of policies that are implemented in a system that connects the Global North to the Global South. It sheds light on the complexities of policy making by accounting for underlying assumptions and the discourses they are rooted in.

Beyond connecting problematizations to discourses, the research is also an example of the way the "What's the problem represented to be?" approach can structure fieldwork. Although Bacchi (2009) coined it as an analytical tool for policy analysis, the questions can also answer with data other than policies, particularly for getting a better understanding of the lived effects. Although the fieldwork at the Ugandan coffee unions has provided much insight into the gaps and silences of the current gender policies, there are still aspects that need further investigation. The discussion on the elderly showed that gender inequality unfolds along age, but the perspectives of the youth have not been incorporated in this study. Many of the union policy makers indicated that there is a large group of young people, between 18 and 25 years old, that is difficult to reach. Considering the scope and topic of this study, it is not possible to do further research into the problematization of youth inequality and the gendered issues in this group, but it is an interesting contribution to make on the already existing literature.

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