

## **Presentation for DevNet conference – 15 mins**

### **Wednesday 6 Dec**

- Introduction
- Methodology
- The theorists and the results

### **Introduction**

#### **First slide:**

My name is Michelia Ward, and I am the Development Manager for Trade Aid, which is obviously important for you to know as it could easily skew the conclusions made in this research. I have been with Trade Aid since 2004. I completed a Master of Indigenous Studies in early 2012, working on it part time over two years.

#### **Slide two: Trade Aid and Minka**

My interest with this research was to compare Trade Aid's work, specifically the theory and practice of their trading partnerships, with indigenous theories of power and indigenous development, and seek to analyse the value of this fair trade relationship on the indigenous producer. Trade Aid is a fair trade buying organisation, and after visiting and staying with indigenous Quechua producers in Peru in May 2010, through Trade Aid's partner MINKA, I chose to use MINKA's relationship with Trade Aid specifically for this research.

#### **Slide three: International development and indigenous peoples**

Indigenous cultures have unique traditions, histories and knowledge, yet many indigenous cultures have for centuries been forced to operate within a

mainstream, colonialist culture, which does not place value on indigenous knowledge or lifestyles. The lack of recognition and acceptance of the value of indigenous culture has had a serious impact on the economic and cultural development of most indigenous peoples around the world.

International Development efforts focus on supporting the economic and social development of communities in poverty around the world. These efforts include projects designed for many indigenous communities suffering from situations of poverty.

Fair trade is one of these development mechanisms that aims to support food and craft producers around the world to improve their lives through trade. Many indigenous communities are producers of craft or food products such as woven textiles and coffee, and have engaged in fair trade relationships selling mainly to Western consumers. Fair trade organisations have universal principles that provide guarantees to consumers about working conditions, fair payment and trading relations with producer groups.

This research project focused on whether a universal framework designed to bring development to disadvantaged and marginalized producers can work for unique indigenous cultures across multiple continents. Indigenous theorists place large value on local beliefs and knowledge systems and local solutions to local problems. At the heart of this research is the question, “is fair trade one of these local solutions, or just another solution imposed from the outside upon indigenous producers?”

There is a great deal of literature available which is critical of the development industry and often takes the view that the industry is based upon domination

by a powerful group over the less powerful. This concern is real and has merit, given the unequal financial situation of donor and beneficiary.

This scepticism is echoed by an increasing body of literature critical of the recent growth of fair trade and its move into mainstream markets, sceptical as to its development potential when entrenched within a neo-liberal framework. This criticism in general focuses on the divergence within the fair trade industry, and the emergence of a product label from Fair Trade Labelling Organizations primarily for food products, which has made it easier for non-fair trade businesses to trade in fair trade products.

#### **Slide four: Methodology**

The method I used to gather the main data required to answer my research question was via interviews. For these interviews I chose two staff members each from MINKA and Trade Aid. Interviews with MINKA staff were via skype or telephone, and interviews with Trade Aid staff were face to face.

These interviews required carefully considered methods and methodology for a number of reasons including: cross cultural and language differences; analysis of the MINKA interviews by a researcher with a different worldview from the participants'; the power imbalances inherent in the researcher/interviewee relationship; using qualitative interviews as the main source of information; and the potential for vested interests of the researcher in the results of the research.

Analysing the relevant material from interviews with the four participants and using a framework based on five theorists, I sought to determine what the conditions for liberation might look like within the context of fair trade

relationships, particularly for Quechua producers in Peru, and whether the reality of the MINKA-Trade Aid relationship aligned with these theories.

### **Slide five: The theorists**

To evaluate this research question, I looked at several theoretical models, which approach from different perspectives, the idea of power within relationships, questioning who determines the dominant world view of the development processes designed for indigenous peoples, and whether the relationship in question perpetuates the power imbalance or restores its equality along the trading chain.

This is particularly important because the balance of power determines who chooses what is best for self, which for Quechua, power within the fair trade relationship would mean the ability to progress their own, not others', aspirations.

The five theorists listed here are included in the research however I included only aspects of the first three theorists and chose to focus more strongly on the work of Paulo Freire and Emmanuel Levinas, which given the time constraints we face here are the only two theorists I will cover very briefly today.

### **Slide six: What they have to say:**

In short, the theories I focused on in this paper consider that indigenous peoples require others to understand that they have a different worldview and therefore, different solutions to their own problems; that these worldviews should not be made static through others defining what they are; that truth is contextual not universal, but that it is possible to create a space for discussion

on a universal level that allows for different worldviews to interact and find similarities in ways of working; that conquest is necessary for liberation, and cannot be gifted; that love must be at the heart of real solidarity with the oppressed; and that ethical behaviour towards another comes not through our own understanding of the other, but through seeing them as 'other' and therefore worthy of our love.

### **Slide seven: The theory of Paulo Freire**

Paulo Freire was a Brazilian educator and influential theorist of critical pedagogy, who introduced the problem of power as one created by hierarchy. Following Freire's theory, for fair trade to successfully support producers to be humanised through trade, it is up to the producers themselves to seek to regain their own humanity; it cannot be done for them, "Freedom is acquired by conquest, not by gift."<sup>1</sup> This begs the question: can fair trade relationships put enough power back into producers' hands for them to seek and create their own liberation?

From interviews with Trade Aid's co-founder, Vi Cottrell, this theory appeared to mirror the ideas discussed and grappled with by early Trade Aid members, when striving to set up an organisation that would provide a model for the poor to liberate themselves from economic oppression. Trade Aid members were seeking to set up a process that the producers 'owned,' to create real change to their lives following a history of poverty and — at least for Quechua — discrimination in the hands of a harsh colonising society. The mantra, "listening to the poor" and "responding," was described by Vi as at the heart of how Trade Aid understood it had to act in order to be successful. This is - at the most basic level - the way Trade Aid created an environment where an outside

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<sup>1</sup> Freire. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. P29.

culture was not deciding what the producers' aspirations for development would look like. Vi recalls, "At Trade Aid the idea of partnership — implying equality — and the acknowledgement that partners wherever they are, are the ones who know what needs to change and who develop strategies to bring those changes about, has always been part of our philosophy."

Freire says that real liberation is an act of love, which is in stark contrast to viewing trade INjustice as an opportunity for participation and profit within a niche market or added value for public relations; a scenario definitely occurring within the fair trade industry today, particularly as an increasing number of multi-nationals enter fair trade markets.

From the perspective of a hierarchy of needs, there is no denying that indigenous producers suffer disadvantage in a multitude of areas in addition to the initial gaining of income that they must strive towards and fight for. Fair trade helps producers work towards this hierarchy of needs by realising that trade may only be the first step to achieving change, an idea consistent with Freire's ideas on the dangers of adhesion between Oppressor and Oppressed. From interviews with MINKA and Trade Aid participants, both were acutely aware that the main goal has never been to produce more and better products for New Zealand and global markets, instead the goal is for producers to be able to use the income, the strength from organising democratically, and the training and confidence gained, for poverty alleviation that will lead to better choices and opportunities — thereby taking producers further up the hierarchy of needs. Norma, the founder of Minka, confirmed that the end goal never lay in trading, "We never thought that through exporting we could solve the life of the poorest people but we knew that it could help to find ways to solve the

problems of those people, and that was really, what we proved with our work.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Slide eight: The theory of Emmanuel Levinas**

Emmanuel Levinas was a French philosopher and religious thinker. His platform of wisdom as love (not the love of wisdom) provided me with a unique view for assessing the trading partnership. Levinas viewed Western society and history as consumed by the comprehension of ‘being,’ an internal perspective that transferred the understanding of ‘being’ onto the outside world, thereby causing a reduction of other cultures as they are viewed through the other’s lens (or worldview). He calls this ‘Totalization’ - a denial of the other, characterised by when the other is limited to a set of rational categories, be they racial, sexual, or otherwise, the idea that we already know what the other is about before the other has spoken.

Totalization lies in contrast to proximity, where a real connection is created to the other. Proximity is an important concept when looking at a fair trading model and at the heart of fair trade is the aim of bringing two worlds closer together which are separated by geographical location, culture and wealth. But to what extent is this really possible and whose worldview is really being presented through fair trade promotion?

This is particularly important given the powerful relationship between representation and the ability for producers to build their own autonomy. Accurate representation supports identity and self-image, crucial elements of the journey towards believing in, and fulfilling, aspirations.

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<sup>2</sup> Norma Velasquez, 19/10/2011

Trade Aid is consciously aware of the idea of proximity between producers and consumers and it forms one of the cornerstones of Trade Aid's marketing and education programmes. In addition to senior Trade Aid staff visiting all partners on a regular basis, Trade Aid runs education tours for staff and volunteers throughout the Movement so that they can meet the producers in their own environment. Similarly, MINKA's fair trade tourism programme, open to both fair trade organisation staff and the touring public, is viewed as an important aspect of the intangible benefits, that MINKA can bring to its producers.

Trade Aid works to mitigate the inherent dangers in its producer representation. For example the sharing of information with partners, particularly the information that Trade Aid collects and holds on its partners for promotional and educational use. An extensive IT project that Trade Aid has recently completed facilitates this by providing the same access to partners (that our educators have) to the central database where all information is held on them, giving them the opportunity to comment on its tone, and edit inaccuracies. Geoff adds, "The fair trade principle of transparency is there to ensure we do this as part of the way we operate."

Levinas' philosophy would say it is our empathy, not our rational thought that should dictate our behaviour towards others. I believe this quote from Trade Aid's general manager, Geoff White, sums this up: "I think when it boils down to it, it's just you have to be nice to people. You know, you've got to look after people and that's the message of fairness that comes through quite clearly, and it's becoming apparent to everybody that conventional trade is simply not fair."

**Slide ten: A brief word on all the theories covered**

Viewed through the lens of Smith, Foucault, Bhabha, Freire and Levinas, I believe Trade Aid and MINKA's relationship demonstrates the behaviours and desire consistent with:

- acknowledging different world views;
- building partnerships and networks which enhance commonality yet allow diversity;
- seeking real liberation through producer empowerment;
- providing opportunities for producers to choose and create their own development and direction;
- and fairly and ethically working to understand and to portray the other as they would seek to portray themselves.

### **And finally, to finish**

Quechua producers are an indigenous group with aspirations for their families, communities and their culture. This research did not explore what these aspirations were, and I would not consider through this micro-research project to attempt to judge whether these aspirations are being met through the fair trade relationships they are engaged in. What I have attempted to do here, is to look at whether the conditions for Quechua to meet their aspirations through their fair trade relationship with MINKA and Trade Aid are present. I attempted to answer how fair trade, as practised by MINKA and Trade Aid, can contribute to the aspirations of Quechua producers in Peru when analysed against indigenous theory for development and liberation from oppression.

Through this research I have come to believe that it is possible for fair trade to contribute to the aspirations of Quechua producers. This is because my research indicates that both MINKA and Trade Aid understand that Quechua

aspirations, ways of working, thinking, and their local knowledge are unique, and that neither MINKA nor Trade Aid claims a universal truth for Quechua that should be followed for development to occur.

This research included assessing the alignment with indigenous theory of the ten principles that make up the basis for World Fair Trade Organization membership, which I haven't had time to cover in today's session. However I concluded that there is a tight alignment between the WFTO principles and indigenous theory, which allows contextual truths to be applied and to encompass a variety of worldviews and the contexts producers live and work in. Should all other WFTO members adhere to the ten principles within their trading partnerships, it would be possible to conclude that WFTO members' work in general contributes towards meeting indigenous producers' aspirations.

What is obvious about fair trade is that because of its growth and the split within the industry, it has become increasingly difficult for consumers to know what impact they are having when they choose to vote with their dollar. My hope is that this research provides at least a sliver of hope for those who care about supporting trade that produces a greater global good.

**Flick over final slide and thank audience.**