

Fairtrade South Africa: Global Models and National Realities

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I conducted my pre-dissertation field research from June to August 2009 in the Western and Northern Cape Provinces of South Africa, dividing my time between the Fairtrade South Africa (FTSA) headquarters in Cape Town and numerous Fairtrade certified farms throughout the two provinces. I met with a range of actors engaged with the Fairtrade system and discussed issues of certification, governance, and varying empowerment strategies. During this research I observed three primary issues.

First, although Fairtrade is an international initiative that aims to empower marginalized producers across the global South through the promotion of equitable production, distribution and consumption practices, it is often not as fair or transparent as it aims to be. In South Africa, white commercial producers remain privileged over their black smallholder counterparts due to the former's established relationships with supermarkets, seed and fertilizer companies and other strategic trading partners.

Secondly, FTSA is going through a period of adjustment where it is rethinking its requirements for certification, moving away from a model based on land redistribution and towards one that focuses instead on adherence to the Black Economic

Empowerment (BEE) scorecard, a model that focuses on diversity in management and labor practices rather than land ownership. BEE is a South African governmental initiative that focuses on development of previously disadvantaged peoples and contributing to transformation in the post-apartheid state through employment incentives, preferential procurement, skills training and ownership. This heavily contentious transition has been applauded by some as a more practical and efficient approach to empowerment in South Africa while others lament that it detracts from the core principal of Fairtrade—empowering marginalized producers, specifically smallholders.

Finally FTSA is in the process of launching a new South-South ethical trade regime that markets Fairtrade



certified goods locally. This new policy direction will allow FTSA control over all of the value-added throughout the supply chain, thus benefiting as many sectors of the South African economy as possible. This new form of governance is in contrast to the established Fairtrade model of developing states marketing their goods in the global North, thus benefiting Northern consumers and corporations more than the producing countries. FTSA's new model is the culmination of a multi-year power struggle with Fairtrade International that numerous producer nations have watched closely.

I plan to continue researching these issues when I return to Cape Town in October 2009 for the FTSA Annual General Meetings.

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