
Local Fair Trade for Creative Value of Intangible Cultural Heritage

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On behalf of my organization WEAVE, I would like to share our work and how we contribute to the creative value of the intangible cultural heritage of the indigenous communities of creative artisans on the Thai- Myanmar border.



For more than 20 years now, I work with WEAVE, a Foundation with a Fair Trade Enterprise subsidiary, that is a Guaranteed Fair Trade of the World Fair Trade Organization. WEAVE is an inspiring refugee-powered women's

organization founded in 1990 and is dedicated to saving lives, protecting rights, empowering and building strong, resilient and self-sustaining refugee and indigenous women and their communities, including the Karenni indigenous group.



The refugee crisis is one of the defining challenges of our time. On the Thai-Myanmar, there are now over 92,000 stateless refugees displaced for more than 30 years with no foresight of the future. Refugees often leave their most valuable possessions and livelihoods when fleeing war and violence. What they carry are their timeless traditions, skills, knowledge and craftsmanship, which they once used to earn a living. In their host communities, they often find themselves exposed and vulnerable, without rights, they become particularly prone to exploitation and discrimination and with restrictive regulations, including not being allowed to work, refugees face great challenge in generating opportunities and in rebuilding their lives with dignity.



But is there hope? On the Thai-Myanmar border, WEAVE works in collaboration with appropriate stakeholders through multisector ecosystems approach to support inclusion of refugees in the recovery, development efforts and global economy that we found are amongst the most powerful and lasting solutions available.



WEAVE's projects offer innovative solutions to address the priorities within the framework of three goals: humanitarian and relief, development and women's economic empowerment through Fair Trade. Dedicated to gender equality and the empowerment of women and their communities, WEAVE extends education and support community initiatives that protect and promote status of children and women. This is premised on the belief that quality education is the single most effective means of reducing poverty and key to their empowerment. Applying the social enterprise model with Fair Trade at the heart of the business is the key, which has been the inspiration and concentration of WEAVE since its inception more than 25 years ago.



From the time-honored tradition, indigenous knowledge, practices and artisanal craftwomanship of the Karenni, WEAVE facilitates ways and means for the refugee women to express, promote and sustain artistic traditions and preserve their intangible cultural heritage. Senior women passed on the indigenous weaving, hand-stitching, natural dyeing disciplines, techniques and practices to younger women. Designs are drawn from the cultural inspirations

of the women artisans and products are co-created with WEAVE. Through WEAVE Fair Trade, the artisanal skills of women are harnessed to produce captivating products for the global market, a critical means that enables them to add value to their host communities and to secure their future.



WEAVE products are not just beautifully and lovingly handcrafted by the artisans. There is a healing power in these processes which radiates and display the real essence of humanity. The products give compelling narrative and significant stories of overcoming and how refugees and indigenous women can rebuild their future, and in so doing, act as significant and powerful contributors to the world economy.



WEAVE as Guarantee Fair Trade ensures that its enterprise is truly mission-practicing and that it works and adheres to Fair Trade compliance standards including; offering fair wage payments, ensuring decent working conditions, no child labour, and it is addressing environmental concerns, among others. The Fair Trade 10 Principles are designed to deal with harsh environments where power disparities and marginalization make mainstream business and trade unable to empower and support vulnerable artisans. By practicing Fair Trade within the refugee context, WEAVE ensures that it offers protection to refugees while also encouraging safe and fair livelihood opportunities.

The Fair Trade work of WEAVE is a living example of how Fair Trade can truly cement opportunities for refugees to become self-reliant and alleviate poverty at the households and their communities through their craftwomanship and expertise in accordance to their intangible cultural heritage. From providing refugee women living in conflict situation to improve their lives and their

families one weaving at a time, to preserving their time-honored cultural heritage through their handcrafted products inspired by the mountains in their home country, WEAVE bring together an enchanting collection where the artisanal skills and self-development of refugees play a central role.

I hope that I have enlightened you about our work. I strongly believe that we are part of a proof of concept that a better way of addressing refugee concerns through education and Fair Trade is possible. This is our story at WEAVE. We hope to inspire a broader transformation.