

International Women's Day 8 March 2022 -

To celebrate International Women's Day 2022, Oxford Fair Trade Coalition is profiling remarkable women leaders from all over the world.

She leads the way!

Roopa Mehta

President of the World Fair Trade Organisation and CEO of the Sasha Association for Craft Producers, Kolkata, India

is the first woman President of the World Fair Trade Organisation and CEO of the Sasha Association for Craft Producers based in Kolkata, India.

Back in 1977, Roopa was introduced to a woman social entrepreneur and activist called Subhashini Kohli ¹ who had a vision of a better, fairer, sustainable future for marginalised craft groups in India. Shabbi said to Roopa: "We are starting something, will you come? We can work together." And that was the beginning!

Working with more than 100 producer groups, many of them women's groups, Sasha today puts the Fair Trade standards of equity, transparency, capacity building, empowerment, social security and environmental sustainability at the heart of its business, selling beautiful crafts and textiles in the domestic market and into markets all over the world.

Roopa not only has worked at Sasha for more than 4 decades, she has served on the Boards of Fair Trade Forum India and the Asia Fair Trade Forum. She was on the Board of the WFTO for 8 years before being elected President in 2019.

She is a woman who leads the way! Check out the Sasha website for products <https://sashaworld.com>



Left: Shabbi and Roopa late 1970s. Right: Roopa today

¹ Shabbi, sadly, passed away in 2003

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Meera Bhattarai

Founder and Executive Director, Association of Craft Producers, Nepal



Meera has been working to improve the living conditions of grassroots producers, primarily women for over three decades.

The Association for Craft Producers (ACP) is a professional non-profit Fair Trade organization providing the full cycle of services - design, technical, management and marketing - to low income craft producers in general and women craft producers in particular- that results in regular adequate wages to supplement family income and improve the overall standard of living.

ACP was initiated with 38 producers and five full time staff in a rented building. Today, ACP is providing services to over 800 artisans (women constituting 90%) from 12 districts of Nepal in 22 skill categories, has 50 full time staff members and a permanent facility of 43,000-sq. ft. area.

For ACP producers, the income earned from craft makes a substantial contribution to their household income. A number of women are entirely dependent on their earnings from ACP to support their family. Apart from becoming economically self sufficient, the cash income has also brought other major changes in the lives of ACP producers. They have gained more self-confidence and have been able to command a greater degree of respect from other members of their family - especially husbands and in-laws. The majority of women are now involved in decisions concerning their income and many of them now make their own decisions. This is a clear indication of women's empowerment in the patriarchal social system that is prevalent in Nepal.

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ACP has environmental concern. It is the first handicraft based NGO in Nepal to install a waste water treatment plant. It has changed from using kerosene based dye to water based dyes, substituting acetic acid with hydrochloric acid in dyeing. The steam from the boiler in dyeing is harnessed to heat the hot water required for felting. The ceramic kiln has been converted into electric based firing from kerosene based firing. ACP is also harnessing solar energy. The raw materials used are mainly clay, soft wood, cotton, bamboo, wool, and recycled paper which are sustainable and biodegradable.

Ms. Bhattarai has been crusading for Fair Trade since 1975. Under her leadership 'Fair Trade Group Nepal'- the national level fair trade body - was established and she served this organization for almost a decade as the Founder Chair. She is still active member of FTG Nepal on her capacity of Advisor. She is also the founder member of Asia Fair Trade Forum and she has served as co-opted committee member in the WFTO (then known as IFAT) Executive Committee from 1997 to 1999. She is a catalyst for transformation and Leads the Way!

Check out the ACP website for products: <https://www.acp.org.np>

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Basma Barham

Director of International Relations, The Holyland Handicraft Cooperative Society, Palestine



I am responsible for international public relations at the Holy Land Handicraft Cooperative Society (HLHCS). I joined HLHCS in 2012, to realize their mission to decrease emigration resulting from the political situation, and to sustain the Palestinian artisans, promote their products, and improve their standard of living. I believe in the need to spread Fair Trade principles. Fair Trade is a symbol for peace and a tool to achieve our aspirations. One of the WFTO principles is: "Commitment to Non-Discrimination, Gender Equality, and Freedom of Association". We are glad to be part of this movement and to promote this principle in Palestine.

In Palestine it is not easy to change traditions. We have to be careful to let women know their rights without creating social issues. To do this we need to demonstrate to men the impact and changes that the women can bring about at home and in the community when they are active. Palestinian women have to tread a delicate path between tradition, religion, peace-building, the political situation and their obligations within their families. "Equality for women = prosperity for all" <https://www.hlhcs.org/en/>. This is our inspiration.

Climate change is a global threat, solutions involve a superhuman level of sacrifice and awareness, and this requires us all to work together. People here think about their priorities. They are worried about where their next meal is coming from, or whether they can send their kids to school. HLHCS is working very hard to highlight the challenge of climate change for all

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of us and what each of us can do but it requires so much effort. It is a priority for the future of our children. We are the only organization in Palestine improving working conditions inside and outside the workshops and this includes caring for the environment .

The Corona Virus Covid-19 outbreak is destroying our economy. There has been lockdown in Palestine since 5 March 2020. This has brought about terrible consequences for the region where tourism represents 85% of the economy but is now completely blocked. At HLHCS we are inspired to keep going no matter what circumstances we are facing. I give my time, effort and energy towards achieving my life goals. I have a passion to help others, seeing the change made to people's lives. I love my people and country. This inspires me to support economic growth and improve living standards.

Check out the HLHCS website for products: <https://www.hlhcs.org>



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María Susana Ortiz Geoffroy

Executive Director, Chol-Chol Foundation, Chile



Maria Susana is in the middle of the front row

I have been working with the Chol-Chol Foundation and the Fair Trade movement for 13 years. My specialist knowledge is indigenous craftsmanship and this has allowed me to lead a committed team which has established direct links with the Mapuche people, mostly women, living far from urban areas. Our main aim is the socio-economic empowerment of the artisans. We work on projects that seek to value and rescue the ancient heritage of the Mapuche.

Indigenous artisans in Chile are in a vulnerable situation considering their lack of access to social security and health care. Living in rural areas affects their economic situation too. Fair Trade has become an important bridge to the establishment of long-term relationships of trust that improve their life circumstances.

Our organization has been developing a workspace based on collaborative design. This allows female artisan weavers to propose new product lines that break away from the traditional ones and adapt to current market demands, offering both the traditional and new as a way of improving business opportunities.

Weavers are given the opportunity to travel to other locations to promote their work, forging quality lifetime experiences and enabling participation in both national and international fairs. This helps to promote and spread their ancient knowledge, as well as inspiring them to develop

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new textile designs. Another recent incorporation to our business practice is the usage of a QR code, included with each product label. Through a link, it gives credit to the creator of the product.

The artisans use local, natural, raw materials in their work. We provide information about good practices in raw material extraction and the responsible use of water, a resource especially important in rural areas. Natural dyeing is a vital line of work directly related to the flora, fruits and minerals present in rural areas. Soil degradation brought about by lack of water due to the rise of monoculture forest plantations has caused a decline in the availability of the plants and minerals needed for the natural dyes. We work with forestry companies to reduce the negative impact of their presence.

The work of the Foundation results in the self-employment and empowerment of indigenous women artisans, using their artistic heritage to generate income and dignify their role as owners of a textile tradition with which they feel historically committed.

Check out the Chol-Chol website for products at [https://:www.cholchol.org](https://www.cholchol.org)

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Catalina Sosa

Executive Director, Fundacion Sinchi Sacha, Ecuador



I am a founder and the current Executive Director of Sinchi Sacha, a 30 year old Fair Trade Organization. When we started our work in the Ecuadorian Amazon, we understood that to keep craft traditions alive it was essential to build a bridge between indigenous populations in the Amazon and urban populations. This is why Sinchi Sacha decided to expand its research from oral traditions to work on Fair Trade. We then decided to develop markets for products that came from the tropical rain forest. Dazzled, we saw how the exuberant nature of the tropical forest was dyed red, white, black in the geometric strokes painted by the hands of the Quichua women, portraying the Earth and its creatures. The forest is portrayed in the lianas, bark, dyes, fibers, seeds that the rainforest people used to make for daily life: the outfits and artifacts embedded in culture heritage.

When we became a member of the global Fair Trade movement, the World Fair Trade Organisation, we adopted social, ecological and cultural standards that govern our commercial transactions.

The commercial model of the Fair Trade movement was based on the production in countries of the South and the sale in the markets of the countries of the North; We believed too that the activation of local markets would open up new opportunities for small producers. We launched Fair Trade stores in Ecuador, with products from the Amazon as well as from other regions of Ecuador.

Impact of the Sinchi Sacha Foundation's work on small artisan producers:

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We strongly promote the sale of local handicrafts with identity as part of the enhancement of the intangible heritage of Ecuador's traditional knowledge, embedded in our crafts.

Empowerment of women: Women provide income which is a great contribution to the wellbeing of their families and to improvements in community relationships.

Climate change: Sinchi Sacha supports Amazonian communities to maintain traditions, protect their habitat -the tropical rainforest- and strengthens them. These communities are the keepers of the planet, day by day by living a sustainable life, producing their own food and using natural resources properly. They are aiming to coexist peacefully and closely with the living beings, the "spirits" of the forest. These guide their daily activities, such as the manga allpa mama who taught women to weave the mukawa, a container where they drink chicha of cassava daily.

Mukawa, a piece entirely hand-woven and painted with mineral and vegetable dyes, with brushes made from her own hair.



Artisan: Estela Dagua, Quichua Canelo

Check out the Sinchi Sacha website for other products: <https://www.sinchisacha.org>