

Fair trade becomes a brand

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THE Fair Trade India brand was launched on 14 May to mark World Fair Trade Day. The Indha Shop at Sushant Towers in Sector 56 Gurgaon, together with five other shops in Kolkata, Bangalore and Ooty will be the first in an expanding chain to stock products with the new logo.

Fair Trade stands for sustainable and environmentally sound practices. It seeks to give dignity to small producers, helping them connect with markets and get higher prices for their products.

The Fair Trade India brand will bestow on shops the identity of being socially clean. Goods with the brand are produced by artisans and farmers who have been adequately compensated and not milked by middlemen. Consumers will now know that the money they pay is going back to people at the grassroots.

Ithya Mallikarjuna, executive director of Fair Trade Forum-India spoke to *Civil Society* on the new branding initiative and plans for expanding the market for Fair Trade products in India.

How extensive is the national network for fair trade?

Fair Trade Forum India (FTF-I) is a pan India network which is spread across 16 states with 86 NGOs and civil society groups. There are 100,000 grassroots producers, artisans and farmers involved in this movement. It is a global effort to provide a fair price and respectable income free from exploitation. Fair Trade India acts as a country office of World Fair Trade Organization in Asia.

How have you been creating awareness about this forum and the concept of fair trade?

The awareness about this forum is growing through the help of our NGO members. There are states, like in the northeast, which are rich in handicrafts and the awareness is increasing slowly there now. Other than that we have college outreach programmes in business schools, design schools and colleges where we organize workshops and live interactions between producers and students. There are capacity-building programmes where we directly interact with the producers.

What does it aim to do for small traders and producers?



Fair Trade signifies goods which are socially and environmentally clean



Ithya Mallikarjuna

The main aim is to find ways to link small groups with the market. These groups lack the resources to promote their products and directly reach customers. The fair trade movement gives them a better opportunity to compete and get more remunerative prices for their products.

What is the symbolism of the logo which was recently launched?

The logo signifies creating a brand, so in using the same brand on all the products the promotion of the products is uniformed. For example there are over 40 retail chains in the country handled by our member NGOs. The logo will be India's first umbrella fair trade brand. The branding has two phases. The first phase will involve bringing all the products under one umbrella brand and in the second phase we will go in for franchising. Another part of the branding effort will involve online retailing. We have plans of starting a fair trade helpline. So, apart from the exporting of these products we are now trying to expand the domestic market slowly.

Apart from creating awareness, how do you plan

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to popularize this concept so people opt for products under fair trade logo?

First, by using the social media extensively and talking about the brand story, success stories, case studies and involving student groups, the youth, who constitute a large group. Another plan is to pro-

vide corporate gifting. It is a huge opportunity. Can't the corporate houses be linked with fair trade products? We regularly organize fair trade tourism initiatives where we provide the opportunity for students to interact directly with the producers and witness the making of handicrafts. In fact every year a few international students visit us for this purpose.

What are the hurdles to scaling up?

It is tough to suddenly meet a bulk order because the products are handmade and take time to produce. There are inherent challenges in the production of our kind of products. Secondly, there isn't as yet here a policy environment for fair trade. If we want to broaden our scope we need to be supported through policy initiatives at various levels.