



A Woman's Place

Aim

to explore how globalisation of trade has led to the exploitation of women in developing countries.

Age

12 years and over

Time

45 minutes

Materials

Role cards

Free Trade Zones

- Free Trade Zones allow employers to import materials to be worked on and to export them again without paying tax.
- Free Trade Zones first appeared in Shannon in the 1960's;
- Zones are sealed off, often behind high fences, to avoid smuggling;
- Governments attract companies by subsidising factory buildings, providing telecommunications and guaranteeing a cheap, uncomplaining labour force;
- Most of the workers in the Free Trade Zones are women.

What you need to do

Form three equal groups. Give one of the role cards to each group. Explain that a large transnational clothing company has recently set up a factory in Globalia in a Free Trade Zone. Because of previous bad press, they are very image conscious. A recent series of reports have questioned the treatment of workers in their factories and so they have asked for a meeting with a representative of the government of Globalia. They have also requested that a workers' representative is present. Read out the explanation of free trade zones. Give the groups 10 minutes to read their cards and to discuss whether free trade zones exploit workers and what should be done. Bring the groups together and ask them to introduce themselves. Ask the question, should free trade zones be more closely controlled by Governments? The groups should justify their positions. The other groups can ask questions. After 20 minutes, end the game and get the groups to derole.

Discuss the following

How did it feel to be the worker, the manager or the government during the game? What do you think about free trade zones? How are certain groups exploited in free trade zones? Are there similar work situations at home? How can governments guarantee a cheap uncomplaining workforce?

Note to Leader

This activity looks at a situation where women in particular are exploited. If the group is large, split it in two or three. Give out the role cards and run the activity in each of the groups. At the end, bring the groups together and ask if the outcomes were similar.





Role Cards

Marketing and Public Relations Manager, 'Cool Clothes'

- You are a large multinational company working in textiles and garment production, with bases in Europe, the USA, Asia and Central America;
- The company has worked very hard on its public image and uses the slogan 'Everybody Matters' in its advertising;
- You have recently developed a company code of practice which you enforce yourself;
- You don't permit trade unions;
- By locating your factories in poor countries, you provide sorely needed jobs for local people and income for the host country.

Worker in the Export Processing Zone in Globalia

- You are Rosa Maria Mendoza and work stitching clothes for 'Cool Clothes';
- The work is hard, you have to meet a quota each day and it's very repetitive;
- The light is poor in the factory and when you have to work overtime, your eyes get very sore;
- Jobs are scarce in the area and you badly need the money to feed your family, though the pay is bad;
- Over the past five years, your workload has almost doubled but pay has remained almost the same;
- When you are sick, you have to turn up anyway or you will be fired;
- You rarely speak to the supervisors, who stand around to make sure you are working as hard as you can;
- You get two breaks a day to go to the toilet and lunch is often eaten at your work station;
- Some of the other women have been talking about forming a trade union but you are scared that you would be sacked if the supervisors found out.

Minister for Trade, Government of Globalia

- You are proud of the companies you have attracted to your country;
- There are now almost 100 companies in Free Trade Zones in Globalia providing much needed jobs;
- As a poor country you must do all you can to attract foreign investment;
- There is a lot of competition from neighbouring countries to attract the companies;
- You offer special tax incentives and excellent communication lines;
- A job in a Free Trade Zone is highly sought after and there are many people trying to work there;
- Most of the workers are young women, as they are the quickest and easiest to manage;
- Once the Free Trade Zone has been set up, you let the company run itself and don't interfere;
- The alternative to Free Trade Zones is a return to mass unemployment.

Source: ICTU (2000). *Global Solidarity: a Development Education Resource for Irish Trade Unions*

