

Shopping for Change

A resource for responsible consumption that affects change.

Every day we make decisions about what we buy to care for ourselves and to support the life we like to lead. Increasingly, personal economic situations and values are making many stop and think about what we are buying and why. Some have taken up the challenge of buying nothing new for a day, a month a year or more. Others focus on buying locally made products and produce, or try to shop at stores that are locally owned to support small business. For some of you, you do all of the above and more!

These are all example of responsible consumerism – stopping before we buy big and small things to consider what impact our purchases can have or could have on us, our community and the world. World Vision wants to encourage Canadians to be more responsible consumers, because we believe that by doing so we all can contribute to a healthier and better lives for ourselves, those around us and the children we work with.

This short document provides you with some information about how you can be an responsible consumer by working to consume ethically.

What is Ethical Consumerism?

When a consumer makes a choice to purchase goods or services that try to address the harmful practices that underlie the production and marketing of those goods and services.

Ethical Consumption Resources:

1. Fairtrade.ca
2. goodguide.com
3. Rankabrand.org
4. ethicalconsumer.org

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How can it reduce child slavery?

Ethical consumerism can play a role in encouraging changes in markets and corporate practices. It's one way for individuals to help address really challenging social and ecological problems. Ethical consumerism is not a perfect solution to challenging issues like child slavery. But it can create change, especially when our act of consumption helps to transform the harmful conditions that produce the things we buy. In fact, creating positive change is more important than simply not buying what is made in harmful conditions, for example through boycotts.

Ethical consumerism is part of a set of solutions to help end child slavery. Other parts of the solution include the actions that governments – Canadian and others – as well as corporations can take to prevent and address the exploitation of children and its root causes. Through **the Help Wanted: End Child Slavery** campaign we will provide opportunities to press governments and corporations to act, which will expand the effect of your ethical consumerism. Go to endchildslavery.ca now to find out about our current action.

What are the different types of ethical consumption?

There are many products that are certified or labeled as ethical in some way. Energy Star, Certified Organic, Forest Stewardship Council, Dolphin Safe and Fairtrade are all well-known examples of certification that address ethical issues like energy use, treatment of animals, the environment and people. All of these certification tools have standards that companies have to meet to use the certification on their products. Each certification tool has limits, but they are helpful tools, for both consumers and producers, to reduce the likelihood of exploitation of people and/or resources.

Tools that World Vision Recommends

There are many resources and tools available to consumers to assist them in being more ethical or at least more informed consumers. World Vision has done some research to identify some simple tools you can use to get started, or to affirm and expand the ethical consumer decisions you have already been making.

As we progress thru the Help Wanted campaign we will share additional ideas and resources to expand your ethical consumer decisions. .

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1) Fairtrade: Certified Fairtrade products labeled through Fairtrade International (FLO) strictly prohibit the use of child labour – work that is hazardous, exploitive or that undermines a child's education or its emotional and physical health. Fairtrade does audits to ensure compliance with child labour laws and standards. And, importantly, if there are incidents of child labour at companies or businesses with Fairtrade certification, rather than immediately decertify the business, FLO tries to work with the business and community to solve the problem, instead of possibly put children further at risk. Go to www.fairtrade.ca to find out more about the certification tool and where there might be Fairtrade products suppliers near you.

2) Good Guide: www.goodguide.com is an impressive website that rates companies and products on environmental and social performance as well as health risks. Each product is given a score out of ten, for Health, Environment and Society. There are additional subcategories for each product that are also scored.

3) Rankabrand.org and ethicalconsumer.org: These are two websites that help filter the social and environmental ratings of a company. These are useful tools to find products that appeal to ethical consumers. The problem is that it might mean supporting either a) a company with a still weak system of labour standards, or b) a company that still supports child labour but which works on issues in other areas. While this is a good learning tool it does highlight that there is much work to be done to address company and government actions to improve the ethics of the manufacturing of goods.

But what about my cell phone?

Cell phones often make the news as connected to child slavery and conflict. However, there are currently no certification tools or widely supported regulations by all of the companies involved in the production of cell phones to ensure that the phone is free from child slavery. The number of people and companies involved in the manufacturing process is significant - from the minerals required to make your phone vibrate (Tungsten) to the final product. There are initiatives under way to try to understand the supply chain that results in the phone in your hand and ideas for action that can be taken to make sure that no child or adult was exploited in the production of the phone. Stay with us as World Vision looks into what can be done.

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