



FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL

MONITORING EVALUATION AND LEARNING PROGRAMME

ISEAL IMPACTS CODE PUBLIC SYSTEM REPORT – JUNE 2019

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1. SCOPE AND BOUNDARIES OF THE M&E SYSTEM

The Fairtrade Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) programme collects regular monitoring data from all producer organizations holding Fairtrade certification. As such, regular monitoring covers all products and all countries where certified producer organizations are present. In addition to this, household and community level data collection for a sample of producers has been integrated into the regular monitoring system. Evaluation data are collected for a subset of certified organizations, and usually for the major Fairtrade products. Market progress is monitored by the marketing-facing organizations present in countries where Fairtrade is sold; market data is shared with and consolidated by Fairtrade International on an annual basis.

The focus of global monitoring is on essential output indicators with all certified organizations and the monitoring of key outcome/impact indicators with a sample of producers. However, many of the outcomes and impacts of Fairtrade can only be assessed through in-depth research. For that reason we maintain ongoing commitment to engage with outcome and impact evaluations, as well as other types of in-depth research, to complement the monitoring programme.

2. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Fairtrade MEL programme has had dedicated staffing and annual expenditure budget since 2008, to give an example, in 2016, 990,000 Euro were invested in MEL, while in 2017, 985,000 Euro. For 2018, we had 990,000 Euro available for MEL activities and for 2019 we have 1,018,943 Euros available. The Fairtrade MEL team currently includes staff at Fairtrade International, staff within Fairtrade marketing organizations, and staff within Fairtrade producer networks. This enables the global MEL team to work with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders.

Fairtrade MEL staff members have significant experience in monitoring, evaluation, project management, and research. Current Fairtrade staff positions with full-time focus on MEL work, and responsibility for implementing aspects of the Fairtrade MEL programme globally, are listed *Appendix 1*. The responsibility for overall management and leadership of the Fairtrade MEL Programme lies within the MEL Unit at Fairtrade International.

In addition to these dedicated global MEL posts, experts throughout the Fairtrade system commit time to global Fairtrade MEL work via the Fairtrade MEL Working Group. The MEL Working Group was created in 2006 in order to develop strategy around Fairtrade MEL and to co-ordinate MEL work between Fairtrade International and its member organizations. Its members represent Fairtrade International staff, the Fairtrade International Board, and six of its member organizations. The working group exists in order to give strategic guidance to the Fairtrade MEL programme, to co-ordinate projects between different implementing organizations, and to ensure that learning from MEL work is communicated and disseminated effectively within Fairtrade. The Working Group meets twice a year.

Staff within various other Fairtrade functional teams – including Policy Coherence and Advocacy, IT and data management, the certifier FLOCERT, and Communications – also dedicate time to activities which support the MEL programme.

3. DEFINING THE INTENDED CHANGE

A MEL programme should be situated within and guided by a conceptual framework that explains what an organization's vision for change is, and how its activities and interventions contribute to that change. This is often referred to as a 'Theory of Change' (ToC). By defining more clearly Fairtrade's intended change,



and by capturing understanding of how Fairtrade inputs contribute to change, the Fairtrade ToC provides a framework for identifying appropriate indicators for measuring progress.

The Fairtrade ToC was developed in the first phase between 2011 and 2013, including an extensive process of involvement of stakeholders to help define both intended and unintended changes arising from Fairtrade activities, and to identify the best indicators for capturing these. This initial version focused on the impacts Fairtrade aims to have on workers, farmers and in their communities. In October 2015, a new ToC was approved which includes the changes Fairtrade wishes to see in markets, the 'Make Trade Fair' ToC. Fairtrade's vision, long-term goals, interventions, and detailed ToC are set out in full detail in the Fairtrade ToC paper which is available on the Fairtrade International [website](#).

Fairtrade recognizes that the nature and extent of change brought about by Fairtrade interventions will depend on a range of contextual factors. Contextual factors may work in tandem with Fairtrade to create greater benefits and opportunities for small producers and workers, or they may act as constraints on what Fairtrade can achieve. The ToC acknowledges that **Fairtrade contributes towards change** for small producers and workers, rather than being the sole determinant of change. Fairtrade's vision, goals and approach, and its interactions with context are summarized in *Appendix 2*.

4. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Fairtrade's monitoring system has been implemented since 2007 with the main focus on small producer and worker organizations. We have been collecting monitoring data from producer organizations during every audit process. We now have seven consecutive years of these data and are in the process of cleaning the eighteenth data set.

Until March 2015 the producer data collected was based on a series of monitoring questions developed by the stakeholders in the MEL Working Group and integrated into a Word format for audit data capture. The list of indicators was chosen to balance the need for information in relation to as many as possible of the impact areas of most importance to Fairtrade, with the need for cost-effectiveness and relative simplicity of data capture. These indicators were revised and amended after the approval of the ToC. The full list of monitoring indicators for which data are currently collected is listed in Appendix 3, with linkages to the relevant themes in the ToC.

The monitoring data form a core basis for our understanding of the dynamics of how certification is developing, and how the benefits of Fairtrade are being distributed between products, geographies, and producer organizations. They give us a good idea where the system is performing relatively well and where it is not, which enables decision-makers to plan and focus their interventions. Other aspects of the data are analyzed and shared internally in response to specific questions, or specific stakeholder needs. Relevant data are also shared with key internal stakeholders to enable their own analysis and planning.

In addition to the producer data, Fairtrade collects market monitoring data for a small set of market indicators via the National Fairtrade Organizations and the certifier. These data are also collated, cleaned, and analyzed on an annual basis using a database tool. These data is used primarily for internal analysis and annual reporting operations.

Fairtrade also supports the Producer Networks in better understanding the satisfaction and needs of their Producer Organizations by running, on a yearly basis, a Producer Satisfaction Survey. This survey is conducted online and is targeted towards the management of the Producer Organizations. Data is used to improve Producer Network support services and reflect on strengths and challenges of the past year.



Fairtrade launched in 2013 a project to improve our monitoring system which was designed to deliver improvements over the period 2013-2016. The work focused on improving the tools used at the existing points of contact between the Fairtrade system and the producer groups holding Fairtrade certification. An improved tool for the collection of monitoring data during the audit (CODImpact) was implemented in April 2015. The next phase of the monitoring project focused on improving the tools used to collect data during Fairtrade producer support visits, with revised tools ready for implementation during 2016. The final phase of the monitoring project aimed to develop sample-based procedures for collecting a limited amount of household and community level information.

Going forward, the MEL system includes the following components: (1) global monitoring of essential indicators, (2) monitoring of key outcome/impact indicators with a sample of producers and associated households, within a three-year cycle, (3) project- and programme-based MEL, focusing on five thematic areas, (4) external research and evaluation, (5) promotion of learning through targeted activities within programmes, and (6) continued emphasis on sharing and communicating our results with transparency. These different components are set out in *Appendix 4*.

Project and programme-based MEL (3) supporting other members of the Fairtrade system is a particular component that the Fairtrade MEL system has greatly expanded in the last year. At the moment, Fairtrade MEL is supporting development and implementation of MEL activities for the Fairtrade Finland programme (a multi-country, multi-donor programme with objectives focusing on climate & environment, vulnerable groups, and gender) and the West Africa Cocoa Programme (a Fairtrade Africa training & cooperative strengthening programme in Cote D'Ivoire and Ghana). These support activities include developing bespoke Theories of Change, developing indicators, overseeing data collection, analysing data, producing dissemination products and running learning workshops. It is expected that more project and programmatic MEL efforts will be taken on by Fairtrade MEL in the future.

5. OUTCOME AND IMPACT EVALUATION

An ongoing programme of commissioned research is an important component of the Fairtrade MEL system. In-depth research gives us a detailed picture of what is happening to Fairtrade producers and their communities, and why. It allows us to gather information about farmer and worker experiences and perceptions. Through the general use of mixed method approach and a combination of data collection tools, research brings contextual analysis and explanation that monitoring data cannot yield. For impact and more complex outcome indicators, evaluation and other research is the only effective way to gather relevant data.

The Fairtrade system has been commissioning between one-two outcome/impact evaluations annually. Impact and outcome evaluations are usually focused on major products and programme focus, and are commissioned to external institutions with significant expertise in assessing the sustainability effects of certification. We do not seek to influence the findings of these studies. We believe that commissioned evaluations can be objective where the consultants and the commissioning agency take a professional approach. Positive benefits of commissioning evaluations include being able to ensure that researchers have full and accurate information about Fairtrade data and key stakeholders, being able to ask research questions consistently across products and geographies, having full access to data generated by these evaluations (important for meta-level analysis), and more.

Fairtrade-commissioned evaluations focus primarily on core products and incorporate evaluation of key strategic areas such as hired labour, social compliance, climate change, gender, producer services, or other themes that are important for system stakeholders. Our knowledge about each core product or key theme



will therefore be supported by new research evidence and data every few years. We seek to ensure that impact and outcome evaluations employ mixed methods to generate robust qualitative and quantitative findings. Wherever financially and logistically possible we require researchers to integrate a counterfactual into the evaluation research.

We also value and utilize good quality independent external research that has not been directly commissioned by the Fairtrade system, but which has considerable scope to support internal learning and knowledge about our effectiveness. We welcome interaction and partnership with independent research projects, with a view to ensuring that such research can be as accurate and useful as possible. To this end, we have developed a Fairtrade Research Agenda, in which internal Fairtrade stakeholder have identified research to cover the most crucial research gaps. This agenda is disseminated through the Fairtrade website, at international conferences, and through professional networks so to develop external research partnerships focusing on these topics.

It is Fairtrade's policy to publish full impact evaluations wherever possible. [Evaluations and other research](#) published to date are available on the Fairtrade International website. Information about in-progress evaluations and other Fairtrade research can be accessed [here](#).

6. IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE M&E SYSTEM

The Fairtrade International Board agreed an overarching plan for Fairtrade MEL, 2013-2015 in November 2013. We have implemented this plan and proposed its continuation aligned with the strategy 2016-2020. The completion of the strategy-setting phase required us to look at our MEL plan to consider whether to what extent the MEL plan will need to change to reflect any new dimensions in the Fairtrade strategy. As such, we developed a revised MEL Plan taking into account the new strategy directions, during 2016 (discussed in Section 4).

Fairtrade International is committed to communicating the results of monitoring and evaluation processes internally, and to using relevant findings to influence planning and decision making – both for the MEL system itself but more importantly for programme and strategic decisions. For example:

- Monitoring data and analysis are shared with the Fairtrade International Leadership Team, the Board, and other governance and operational bodies within the Fairtrade system on an annual basis. It is also used as an input into planning and standards setting processes;
- Evaluation results are made publicly available and shared with staff throughout the Fairtrade system. It is Fairtrade International's policy that workshops should be held as part of every evaluation process, where results are shared with relevant stakeholders, and used as the basis for further discussion of findings, recommendations and actions. Since 2014 Fairtrade has worked extensively to promote learning from evaluation and monitoring, including the development of an online tool to house results from research, and the presentation of these results in several workshops;
- The MEL unit has in close collaboration with key system stakeholders developed MEL frameworks for different important products and thematic areas. These frameworks lay out systematically how progress in each area will be measured through monitoring and evaluations over a multi-year period. This will support sound and continuous accountability and learning in key programme areas.

7. OPPORTUNITIES FOR ENGAGEMENT



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Fairtrade International is a member organization, and our members represent key primary stakeholders for all aspects of our work. The members of Fairtrade International include the National Fairtrade Organizations, which have a primary role in marketing and business engagement activities, and the Producer Networks, which represent the interests of Fairtrade producers. The Fairtrade MEL Working Group (which includes participants from both the producer-facing and market-facing members) has been involved in all stages of the development of the Fairtrade MEL programme, ensuring that a wide range of stakeholder views and needs have been incorporated throughout.

In addition, since 2012 Fairtrade International has engaged stakeholders beyond the MEL Working Group in two major processes, the development of the Fairtrade ToC and the development of the Fairtrade MEL Plan. For both of these projects Fairtrade engaged with producers and market-facing organizations through a range of workshops and consultation processes. A report on the Theory of Change process was presented to the ISEAL conference in June 2013.

The [Impact and Research pages](#) contain the links to many pieces of MEL work, including published monitoring reports, published evaluation reports, the Fairtrade ToC, the Impacts Public System Report, results from consultative processes and information about the MEL working group. The contact point for queries in relation to the MEL system is impact@fairtrade.net.