

WOMEN'S ACCESS, EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT: PROGRESS AND UPTAKE OF THE FAIRTRADE GENDER STRATEGY 2016-2020

Response from the commissioning and overseeing organizations: Fairtrade Germany, Fairtrade International and Max Havelaar France

THE STUDY AT A GLANCE

INTRODUCTION

This report has been commissioned by Fairtrade Germany, Fairtrade International and Max Havelaar France to assess progress on the Fairtrade Gender Strategy 2016-2020; articulating pathways of change on gender-related dimensions within Fairtrade Producer Networks (PNs), hired labour organizations (HLOs), and smallholder producer organizations (SPOs). The study examines how Fairtrade through its standards, strategies, programmes and capacity-building workstreams contributes to gendered outcomes; and whether Fairtrade further generates benefits for Fairtrade farmers, workers and their communities regarding non-discrimination and the empowerment of women and girls. The study was conducted by CIFOR in 2019-2020, the CGIAR Center for International Forestry Research.

STUDY OBJECTIVE(S)

The principal objective of this study is to analyse 'if and how' Fairtrade enables pathways of change on gender-related dimensions, clearly articulating the enabling and hindering factors for women's empowerment and challenges in the process. The study analyzed results against the *Fairtrade Gender Strategy*, which was introduced to set a clear direction and approach for Fairtrade's global work on gender for 2016-2020 and established three targets for 2020:

1. **Access and inclusion:** Significantly increase the active and equal participation of women in Fairtrade certified smallholder and hired labour organizations;
2. **Empowerment and Equity:** Empower more women and girls with opportunities to access equitably the benefits of Fairtrade; and
3. **Gender transformative change:** Address systemic issues that hamper the realization of greater gender equality in Fairtrade supply chains.

*The goal of the Fairtrade Gender Strategy is to increase gender equality and empowerment of women and girls through systematic mainstreaming of gender throughout Fairtrade operations, from standards to producer initiatives, business partnerships, awareness-raising and advocacy.
– Fairtrade Gender Strategy 2016-2020, p. 14*

Findings from this study are intended to inform Fairtrade’s key stakeholders about gender-related activities, outputs, and outcomes; generate valuable learning on effective ways of supporting producers in deepening their impacts on gender-related dimensions and provide recommendations to Fairtrade.

STUDY METHODS

The first phase of the research involved a document review, which was followed by key informant interviews conducted at the desk study stage with Fairtrade staff located at Fairtrade International and the three regional Fairtrade Producer Networks. In the second phase of the research, one major gender intervention programme from each Producer Network was selected for in-depth field study based on recommendations from key informants within the Fairtrade system. Criteria for selection required that the project or programme be (1) embedded in the global or Producer Network’s gender strategy; (2) initiated by Fairtrade at the Producer Network, Regional, or National Coordination levels, and (3) replicable and scalable with adaptations to local contexts.

The selected case studies included six coffee producer organizations from Indonesia, Guatemala and Kenya. In Guatemala, the researchers studied the Women’s School of Leadership and an innovative curriculum for building women’s sense of self-efficacy to assume leadership positions, building women’s capacities to implement good agricultural practices (GAP), and at the same time training men and women to recognize gendered norms which constrain women’s participation in coffee value chains. In Indonesia a similar gender training curriculum was studied which included the Gender Responsive Governance and Women’s Leadership and Training of Trainers for scaling out to fellow SPO members. In Kenya, the researchers visited the Growing Women in Coffee project which has focused more programmatically on value chain interventions which directly target specific barriers to women’s entry and benefit sharing by adopting affirmative action policies for board membership, coffee bush transfers from husband to wife to resolve land tenure constraints, and climate-smart biogas stoves to reduce women’s labor burden on fuelwood collection.

SPO profiles were constructed for each case and intra-household surveys were conducted. For the household surveys 60 households were selected for each case study: 30 households from the SPO participating in the gender project and 30 comparator households from the non-participating SPO.¹ Surveys were conducted with the primary male and female for the majority of households, or the unmarried household head. The data collection phase ended with the research team returning to each of the SPO case study sites to share and validate the results with male and female SPO members through a half-day validation and learning workshop.

	Key aspects of SPO profiles*			
	Membership (% women)	Gender Policy	Women in governance	Gender programming
Guatemala				
ASOBAGRI	1278 (25%)	Adopted in 2013 (Women’s Policy)	3 Board members, including Vice President	Women’s School of Leadership training of trainers in El Salvador and replica training (20 participants total)
Guaya’b	727 (17%)	Awaiting approval	2 Board members, including Treasurer; members of Fairtrade	Women’s School of Leadership training of trainers in El Salvador

¹ The exception was Guatemala, where both case studies included participants from the Women’s School of Leadership.

			National Coordination – Women’s Group	and replica training (22 participants total)
Indonesia				
KSU Ariganata	2165 (16%)	No policy	Secretary, Treasurer	Training programmes; Women’s Leadership training of trainers and training at SPO; establishment of Women’s Forum
KSU Sara Ate	1056 (11.8%)	No policy	Treasurer	Selected but did not participate in Fairtrade gender project
Kenya				
Kabng’etuny FCS	1196 (27.6%)	Not yet adopted	2 Board members; 2 committee members; 1 rep to Women in Coffee Assn	Growing Women in Coffee; Big K Lottery Biogas project; Nafasi Coffee and Maize
Kibukwo FCS	672 (40%)	Adopted 2017	2 Board members; 3 committee members; 9 members of Women in Coffee Committee	Women in Coffee

* Status at the time of data collection

FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

FINDINGS

The researchers noted findings for each of the three gender strategy targets.

Access and inclusion: Women are involved in governance and leadership of all six participating producer organizations, to a varying degree. Women’s membership ranges from 12% in one of the Indonesian SPOs, to 40% in one of the Kenyan SPOs.

Fairtrade certified SPOs do better than non-certified SPOs in women’s representation in leadership positions. Some SPOs and HLOs have adopted more proactive recruitment strategies to further address structural barriers to entry (i.e., coffee bush transfer from husbands to wives in the Kenya cases; relaxing land tenure requirements for Women’s Hands Coffee in Guatemala), as well as other gender-specific barriers to full and equitable participation.

While progress has been made, certain barriers to women’s full and equitable participation remain. Women’s roles in governance remains low. Women from the six case studies tended to have less knowledge about their SPO and Fairtrade, were less likely to attend meetings, and were less likely to participate in Fairtrade Premium decisions. Some of the key barriers to women’s inclusion and participation in SPOs are:

- **Membership requirements** such as land ownership disadvantaged women in all six case studies;
- **Lack of technical knowledge and access to services**, such as organic production requirements;
- **Gender norms related to household work and childcare**, and the associated lack of time to participate in SPO meetings or other activities;
- **Lack of access to capital.**

Women themselves cite greater benefits from POs which are more gender responsive, with a defined gender strategy or equivalent gender programming. Female members become more motivated and

champions of gender equality in POs with active gender programmes and policies. The quality of women's participation is further improved where women are organized into committees to coordinate and advocate for women's interests (training needs, access credit to credit, micro-enterprise projects, etc).

Furthermore, the researchers also bring attention to the need for alternative membership models for the invisible women, the spouses and family of member farmers, who also provide productive labor for Fairtrade production. The Fairtrade Standard for SPOs added some additional protections for transient workers in 2019.

Empowerment and Equity: In terms of **social empowerment and social equity**, best practices link training and programming (on GAP, leadership, technical and business skills, livelihood diversification, health and safety, gender equality concepts) to productive activities that target specific barriers to women's access, inclusion and participation.

Gender awareness training has become standard curriculum for the Producer Networks, alongside GAP and other skills trainings.

Leadership training builds human assets as well as collective social assets. While women who have participated in leadership training report higher levels of confidence in their knowledge and abilities, this study finds that they are still less inclined to participate in decision-making within the SPO. These kinds of trainings should be combined with gender-responsive approaches to address women's real-world constraints and ability to challenge gendered norms.

Fairtrade does influence structural inequalities within SPOs through standards, and builds human and social capital through training and programmes. Inequalities embedded in cultural and institutional norms remain, such as household and agricultural roles and responsibilities, land and resource tenure, control and decision-making over intra-household economies, and acceptable practices for men and women in the public sphere. Gendered demands on the reproductive labor (domestic, household and caregiving responsibilities) of women also continues to be a major disincentive to active participation in SPOs, formal membership and training opportunities.

Occupational health and safety is an area where Fairtrade has been very effective in both HLO and SPO settings. SPO members cited substantive changes in the quality of their home and SPO factory operations as a result of Fairtrade in terms of basic hygiene and safety precautions, as well as gender-sensitive requirements for pregnant and breastfeeding women.

In terms of **economic empowerment and economic equity**, best practices include relaxing membership criteria; providing access to direct credit or farm inputs; direct depositing payments into women's accounts; investing in value chain development for women; and developing alternative income-generating projects. SPOs which have adopted gender-specific approaches to give women access and control over some portion of their economic output have found that women's motivation and production has improved. In Kenya, women worked deliberately to reverse the gender yield gap and change the gender narratives which had previously excluded them from owning coffee bushes or managing the family farm budget. The women in Kabnge'tuny have exceeded men's expectations, with some husbands now transferring more than 300 bushes to their wives. Fairtrade approaches are increasingly engaging men as allies to support women and champion fair and equitable labor distribution and benefit sharing.

The Fairtrade Premium is perhaps the most direct approach for HLOs and SPOs to redistribute the benefits of the Fairtrade membership to the broader communities in which they are embedded. Gender-responsive projects which have been supported by the Fairtrade Premium include facilities specifically for women and mothers (maternity wards, lactation stations, childcare facilities, private washrooms), technologies to reduce women's labor burden, alternative income-generating projects (small livestock, maize mill), and

interventions to support school-aged girls (scholarships and school fees, provision of menstrual pads and private washrooms).

Gender transformative change: Gender transformative change sets high expectations for disrupting structural inequalities, but the gender impact pathways in the Fairtrade Theory of Change are not clear about what role (if any) Fairtrade should play in intervening in the social construction of gender norms more systemically at the level of value chains, POs, or member households.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations that follow from this study challenge Fairtrade International to reevaluate the gender impact pathways within the Fairtrade Theory of Change against the *Fairtrade Gender Strategy 2016-2020* to reassess the scope and commitments of a revised gender strategy within the bounds of core Fairtrade principles. This process should define and operationalize (1) different types of empowerment relevant for the Fairtrade context; and (2) gender-equitable benefit sharing for SPO farmer members in the Fairtrade context to parallel but not mirror what has worked in HLO settings.

Regarding **access and inclusion**, this and other studies demonstrate the value of clearly-articulated gender policies and projects to enhance the quality of women's participation. The researchers recommend that Fairtrade provide more guidance to SPOs in drafting their gender policies. The study further recommends to design standards that provide more protections for casual labor in SPO situations, including the labor of non-member women who are active producers within member or non-member households.

In terms of **social empowerment and equity**, the researchers suggest that Fairtrade Producer Network gender experts systematize Fairtrade curriculum and support to women's organizations into modules for further piloting, revisioning and scaling. Interviews with Producer Networks identified a need to develop training curricula for gender transformative approaches within value chains, specifically addressing gendered labour norms at different nodes. Related to gendered labour, and access and inclusion of nonmember women, there is a need to clarify strategies and PO guidelines for supporting women producers within member households. Several POs in this study have adopted gender affirmative policies that either allow for the full membership of women within member households or a proxy membership that allows for some level of participation in training events and meetings.

Additional recommendations for **economic empowerment and economic equity** follow the examples from CLAC and FTA case studies to support SPOs and value chain partners to develop supply chain services (segregated post-harvest processing and milling, traceability systems) and market linkages for women's grown coffee. The researchers recommend that Producer Networks gender experts work with liaison officers to develop gender-sensitive approaches to asset management that benefit the PO as well as women specifically. Relatedly, the Fairtrade Premium database should be revisited and recorded to better capture gender-neutral projects (those which may not clearly be defined as benefitting women only) which allow women to build human, financial, and physical capital with fellow PO members through reinvesting in member services.

Finally, with regards to **gender transformative change**, the researchers' core recommendation is to clearly identify the bounds and scope of Fairtrade's gender transformative agenda. Masculinities training must also accompany training around women's gender norms to better understand context-specific gender stereotypes that reinforce gender roles within Fairtrade value chains. The researchers further recommend that Producer Network gender experts identify innovative and successful gender transformative actions in practice (whether through Fairtrade or other efforts), and develop communities of learning to share approaches. Gender transformation beyond the project level requires that such gender transformative activities be scaled up and out to normalize changes in gendered practices across POs.

FAIRTRADE'S RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS

We are encouraged at the positive progress of implementing our gender strategy, and the success of the gender interventions included in the study. The findings on expanding access and inclusion, as well as empowerment and equity, are useful to anyone seeking to support women's development in agricultural settings.

While Fairtrade does not address all structural and cultural barriers for women in society, we are motivated by the progress captured in this study and others. For example, a [recent independent study](#) on gender equity, labor rights, and women's empowerment on Ecuadorian flower plantations found that Fairtrade's interventions address women's well-being and rights as well as built their capacity as individuals and in the collective. More needs to be done, including to recognize that women's needs require additional focus outside of traditional labour rights, given the obligations they have outside the workplace.

REFLECTIONS & NEXT STEPS

Fairtrade has already shared the results of this study in several forums within the Fairtrade system, including with Producer Networks and with the team responsible for coordinating reviews and updates to the Fairtrade Standards. Gender continues to be an important priority for Fairtrade, including in the realm of advocacy. One example is an [advocacy paper developed by Fairtrade Germany and other partners](#), that aims to address systematic issues hampering gender equality in global supply chains.

Furthermore, key findings of this study informed Fairtrade's recent strategy development process for the next five years, in which gender equity will continue to play a role. We are looking closely at how to measure impact, as well as share learnings and best practices across our system and with partners.

We have also already taken action on some of the recommendations in this report. We have conducted an analysis of workers in SPOs, to better understand the various context and issues they face and to inform interventions. The Fairtrade Standard for SPOs was updated in 2019 to include requirements on having a gender policy, and taking action on gender-based violence. We are considering additional (non-prescriptive) guidance for SPOs on what is expected of gender policies, as part of the next review of the SPO Standard. Fairtrade will continue to aim for striking the right balance between our gender goals and the empowerment of small-scale producer organizations to focus on the gender-related goals most important to them.

For any questions on the study and Fairtrade's response, please contact impact@fairtrade.net.