FAIRTRADE REPORTS ON PROGRAMME TO STRENGTHEN WEST AFRICA COCOA COOPERATIVES

When farmer cooperatives are better managed and member-focused, they are more sustainable business partners and farmers’ incomes rise. This is the theory behind an intensive programme for Fairtrade cocoa cooperatives in Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire, the initial results of which are being released today by Fairtrade International.

The Fairtrade West Africa Cocoa Programme was launched in mid-2016 with an aim to strengthen Fairtrade cocoa cooperatives as membership organizations and business partners, leading to long-term trading relationships and, ultimately, living incomes for farmers. The inaugural report describes findings based on Fairtrade audit data, as well as cooperative management and farmer member surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019.

“We are pleased to share this report, as part of our continued commitment to transparency both in terms of the efforts we are undertaking with this programme, as well as the results that farmers and cooperatives have reported so far,” said Edward Akapire, Head of the West Africa region for Fairtrade Africa, which implements the programme. “The feedback the report provides is essential for us in seeing where cooperatives are getting stronger, and where we need to focus more attention, whether at the level of training, consultation, advocacy, and more.”

The West Africa Cocoa Programme provides training, coaching and advisory support to Fairtrade certified cocoa cooperatives and their farmer members. In 2019, there were more than 34,000 training attendances, a 32 percent increase from the year before. All cooperatives receive training on the Fairtrade Standards, including areas such as democratic decision-making for using the Fairtrade Premium, fair contracts, and more. The report also includes data from a sub-set of around 30 Ivorian cooperatives that receive an intensive and individualized package of services based on their specific needs, including additional trainings on governance, financial management, good agricultural practices, occupational health and safety, gender rights, income or crop diversification, and more.

Key findings of the report include:

- Fairtrade cocoa cooperatives in Côte d’Ivoire that participated in the intensive sub-set sold both a higher volume of Fairtrade cocoa and had a higher percentage of sales on Fairtrade terms than other Fairtrade cocoa cooperatives. Fairtrade terms include the financial benefits of the Fairtrade Minimum Price when it is above market price, and the non-negotiable Fairtrade Premium on top of selling price.
- Cooperative managers reported a high level of knowledge in five key dimensions including good governance and management, and ensuring members adhere to Fairtrade Standards (with the aggregate score increasing from 88% in 2018 to 93% in 2019).
- 74% of cooperative farmer members reported that their cooperative had a good to excellent understanding of their priorities.
• Almost 9 out of 10 cooperatives report taking at least one action following trainings they received through the programme, such as rolling out a training for their own members, developing a strategic plan, or strengthening their management systems.

The report relates these findings to the premise of the West Africa Cocoa Programme: producer organizations that are stronger in the areas of management, participatory good governance, and the ability to respond to the needs of their farmer members are more resilient and better trading partners. This in turn expands their Fairtrade sales and enables farmers to progress toward earning a living income.

Several findings in the report also highlight areas of ongoing challenges, both for Fairtrade and for the cocoa sector as a whole, including the need to increase economic impact for farmers and to continue working towards expanding equality for women in cooperatives and in the community.

Fairtrade Africa is using such findings to improve the programme, by convening participants each year to share individualized reports, review results and chart the training focus for the coming year. Chocolate brands have also been part of the dialogue, receiving tailored reports on their own supply chains and having the opportunity to do a deep-dive into the data together with the cooperatives supplying their cocoa. A second annual in-person meeting in Abidjan planned for last month was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A mid-term evaluation of the programme is also underway.

“The West Africa Cocoa Programme aims to enable stronger cooperatives, and also stronger trading partnerships, so everyone can work together toward shared goals,” said Jon Walker, Fairtrade International’s Senior Advisor for Cocoa. “These report contains early detailed monitoring results, but we welcome other entities, from commercial partners to other NGOs, to build on these findings, or work with us to improve our collective impact for farmers.”