QuIP IN ACTION

COMMISSIONER: FAIRTRADE

COUNTRY: CÔTE D'IVOIRE

SAMPLE SIZE: 42 RESPONDENTS

YEARS OF STUDY: 2021-22

PROJECT: EXPLORATORY RESEARCH INTO IMPACT OF FAIRTRADE COCOA COOPERATIVES

Fairtrade work with cocoa farmers in the Côte d'Ivoire with the primary aims of increasing their income and resilience to climate change. To achieve these goals Fairtrade work with cooperatives and provide a range of interventions such as agricultural training. In 2021 Fairtrade commissioned On Our Radar and Bath SDR to undertake an impact evaluation of these activities over the past two years.

QuIP studies usually collect data through face-to-face semi-structured interviews but in this case feedback was collected via SMS text messaging using FairVoice. FairVoice is a qualitative data collection tool designed and developed by Fairtrade in partnership with On Our Radar. On Our Radar are a specialist group of journalists, technologists, digital storytellers and development practitioners who work with reporter networks and technology to tell people's stories and boost connectivity. Participants are trained to go into their community and gather stories, alongside their own, and then share these reports via text messages and audio clips.

WHY QUIP:

Bath Social Development Research (Bath SDR) were contracted to support Fairtrade and On Our Radar to use the QuIP approach to data analysis to evaluate stories collected about the impact of Fairtrade cooperatives on cocoa farmers in Côte d'Ivoire.

Fairtrade wanted an accurate portrayal of everything that was affecting farmers within these cooperatives to help inform organisation and program decisions. By asking farmers about any changes in their lives, rather than focusing directly on the project, QuIP was able to frame Fairtrade's interventions in the wider context of factors such as climate change and market forces. The study confirmed that climate change was driving negative change for many farmers, reinforcing the decision to focus on climate adaptation training.

APPROACH:

Over four months 42 respondents were sent a series of questions related to the domains of interest and encouraged to share their insights and experiences. These respondents also acted as reporters by reaching out to their communities to collect their stories and share these through FairVoice's dashboard system. Farmers' stories were submitted via mobile and could be in the form of written answers, videos or audio files. These reports were sent to a toll-free number and were pulled into a content dashboard which could receive, manage and send messages. A trained dashboard manager then responded to participants with any clarifying or follow-up questions. For each successful week of reporting, reporters received a credit top-up on their mobile phone to cover their costs. All personal information was anonymous and confidential and dashboard managers monitored for any safeguarding risks during the process.

Although not a traditional QuIP study, the same principles were used for the questionnaire design. Individuals were asked a series of open-ended, non-project specific questions about any changes in their lives and livelihoods over the last two years, covering the four key domains relevant to Fairtrade's theory of change:

1. Improving cocoa incomes
2. Environmental protection
3. Diversification of income
4. Fairtrade cooperatives

QuIP uses a purposive approach to sampling and in this case only beneficiaries of Fairtrade were contacted. The study was promoted through existing Fairtrade committees, posters and key staff members, and farmers nominated themselves to take part. The sample was split by the cooperative that farmers belonged to. The respondents' age and gender were also noted so we could compare the stories between these groups.

Table 1: Case selection for respondents

	Copaza cooperative		Cobadi cooperative		Total
	Male	**Female**	Male	**Female**	
Adult	5*	0	9*	1*	15
Youth	9	4*	11	0	24
N/A	0	0	3	0	3
Total	14	4	23	1	42

* These groups had one mentor in the sample. Mentors are self-selected workers on the farm, who work to help motivate other respondents as they send reports from their community and troubleshoot any issues.

During June 2022, the preliminary findings were presented to the Cobadi reporters in a sense-making workshop. The reporters were then encouraged to reflect and expand on these findings to provide more in-depth insights. This workshop reinforced emerging stories of change as well as adding additional further detail about the drivers and outcomes initially collected via FairVoice.

FINDINGS:

It was clear that climate change was the main driver of negative changes, such as reduced crop yields; the orange links in the map below indicate a negative effect on the outcome at the end of the link. Fairtrade cooperatives were the primary driver of positive change such as increased yield and income, and general (sometimes unspecified) improvements in their lives and livelihoods. The map below shows the overview of change, showing links where 4 or more different people cited that link.

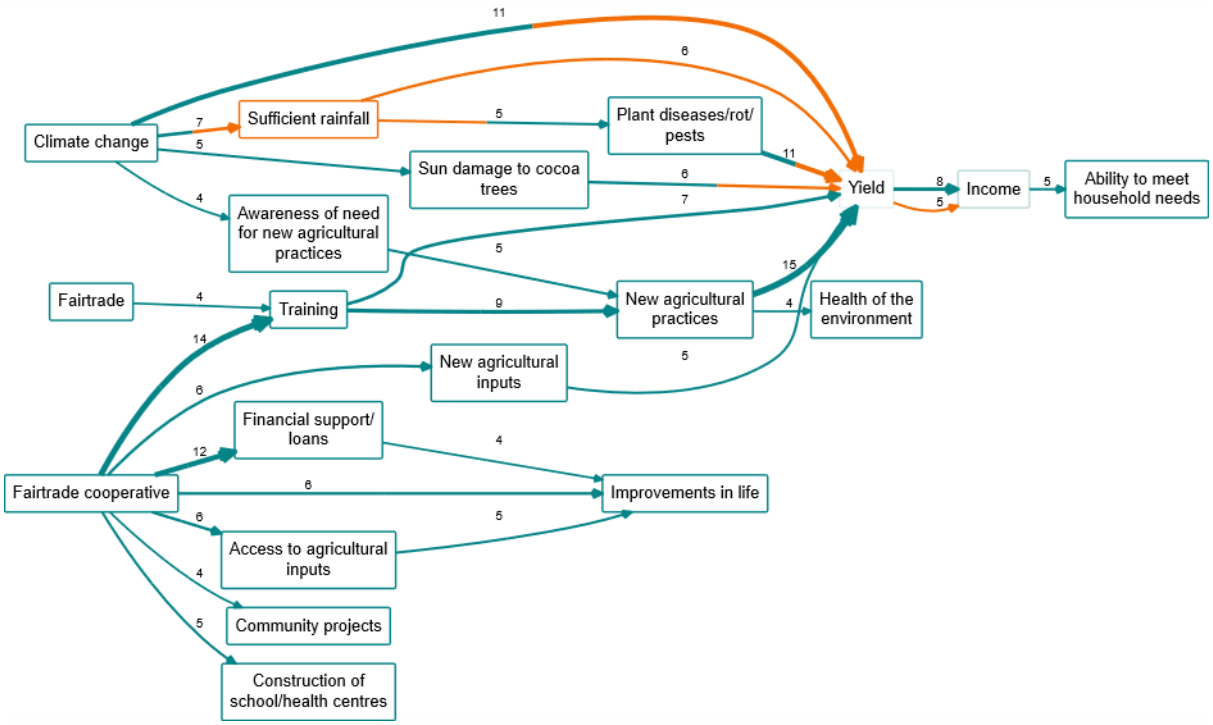

Figure 1: Overview map

Improving cocoa incomes

Cocoa production increased for the majority of respondents. The two main and opposing drivers of change are climate change and new agricultural practices, facilitated by training and new agricultural inputs. Climate change is creating challenges for farmers through unpredictable weather, poor rainfall and an increase in pests and diseases. This is decreasing cocoa crop yield, however new agricultural practices are allowing more efficient and effective growth of cocoa. This increase in crop yield can be, in part, attributed to trainings and access to agricultural inputs facilitated by Fairtrade cooperatives.

Despite an increase in cocoa yield, income from cocoa production has reportedly decreased. Income has been affected by factors such as the high costs of agricultural inputs which has made it harder for farmers to meet their basic needs.

Environmental protection

Overall respondents saw the health of their local environment decreasing, due to climate change and deforestation which is reinforced through poor agricultural practices. However, new agricultural practices were being adopted which discouraged the clearing of trees for farmland and encouraged the planting of shade trees to protect cocoa plants. These new practices were promoted through trainings, often facilitated by the Fairtrade cooperatives, and gave some respondents hope that the health of their local environment would improve in the future.

Diversification of incomes

In the final round of questions respondents were asked explicitly about Fairtrade's Transform B intervention which aims to increase and diversify income through supporting the establishment of new farms or businesses such as laying farms or attiéké businesses. A few respondents reported they or members in their community had benefitted from this project and a reduced reliance on cocoa production income.

There were some reports of crop diversification which was seen as a positive change by the majority of respondents as it resulted in increased income and reduced dependence on income from cocoa production. There was no clear driver of crop diversification, a range of factors were mentioned in relation to the decision to plant different crops.

Strong supportive cooperatives

The majority of respondents reported that the way the Fairtrade cooperative worked had improved over the last two years and they spoke positively about the services they had received. These services included financial support, support for community projects and agricultural training and inputs. Agricultural training and access to inputs were major positive drivers of change.

REFLECTIONS FROM FAIRTRADE:

These findings highlight the significance that farmers place on training as a main driver as change; Fairtrade should continue and expand this in projects moving forward, focussing on agricultural practices, financial management and climate adaptation. The rising costs of living and cost of inputs as a negative driver on progress towards improvements in income is also a significant factor to consider, and existing projects that aim to provide lower cost fertiliser could play an important role here.