



Enhancing Education Access with The Fair Trade Model





Firmly embedded in the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, education is recognized as a lynchpin to solving the most pressing challenges faced by society.



As a result, notable strides have been made towards increased access to education and gender equity in recent years. However, even prior to COVID-19, 53% of children in low- and middle-income countries could not read and understand a simple text by the end of primary school. The pandemic has exacerbated existing education inequalities in unparalleled ways; children from disadvantaged households, disabled students, and girls in particular encountered barriers to accessing remote learning.

Fair Trade USA recognizes these disparities and works with its partners to drive system-wide impact goals related to resilient and sustainable communities, prosperity, mutually beneficial trade, and conscious consumption. This means that the farmers, workers, and fishers participating in fair trade, along with their families and communities, are prosperous, resilient and thriving. Fair Trade USA’s vision and these goals cannot be achieved without addressing the inextricable link between poverty and education.





METHODOLOGY

Over the course of three years, Fair Trade USA carried out a mixed methods study with 3,857 participants in nine countries and across seven commodities in order to quantify and qualify the impact of its Community Development Funds (CDFs). These funds are accrued through the Fair Trade Premium – an additional sum paid for products purchased on fair trade terms. Unlike other economic development programs, this model results in workers subsequently voting on how to spend the funds accrued through their fair trade agreements to address the most pressing needs of their community.

Through qualitative surveys, Fair Trade USA gauged participants’ levels of engagement by measuring voting rates and levels of satisfaction with these CDF investments. In interviews and focus groups, Fair Trade USA listened to participants’ stories of what they experienced as the most significant changes in their lives due to participation in fair trade. In some instances, responses are anonymized and in others, workers are happy to have their names shared along with their stories. Fair Trade USA analyzed the data to understand the impacts of the different types of CDF investments on workers.

How Fair Trade Certified Helps Communities

The Fair Trade Certified program was found to be effective in ensuring that smallholder farmers, fishers, and hired laborers were able to meet their basic needs, withstand shocks (like the pandemic), deal with emergencies, enhance their communities, and provide for their families. Among other well-being outcomes, CDF investments were found to be drivers of increased education. A variety of education-related initiatives resulted from these investments, including scholarships for participants’ children, the provision of school supplies, as well as infrastructural development for schools.

Access to Education

In Ivory Coast villages, the CDFs supported the building of schools, meaning that more children were able to go to school locally and avoid long treks to distant locations. In both Colombia and Ivory Coast, fair trade’s CDF projects made significant impact on expanding education. A CABA cooperative member in Bahe–Sebon district said:

“(the cooperative) does us good in our village. They have built schools for us; our children are going to school. It’s a good project.”



One of the Coffee farmers from the COMSA cooperative in Honduras was very happy that, with the help of the Fair Trade CDF, his daughter had access to more quality education. In his words:

“I think the biggest impact in my life is my daughter, I have her in the international school and I have seen the change, she has learned English, their philosophy is very good, I like it a lot, that has been the biggest impact in my life.”



Tuition Fees

Some participants credit the CDF with being able to afford their children’s school fees, as this was not the case prior to becoming fair trade participants. Adakpada Pascal, a treasurer on the Fair Trade Committee in Minore in the Ivory Coast shared that:

“After the crop season, they give us the cash payout. Honestly, the cash payout saved me. For the back-to-school period last year, it’s only thanks to the cash payout that I’ve been able to send my kids to school. Therefore, it’s really good.”

One participant, a hired laborer on a tomato farm in the Agropark cluster in Mexico, used the additional income to help her sisters with school bills:

“Yes, it is extra money for me. I also have two sisters in school. It is the same with them; the money is useful to help them.”

A coffee farmer from the Cadefihuila cooperative in Honduras shared that:

“The thing that was very good and very useful was the school subsidy. They’ve given me the subsidy and it’s been good, thank God. At that time, I had my children studying and it felt like a blessing because the children studying at school always need that one thing or another.”

School Supplies

Most of the countries that were sampled in the study had projects that provided school supplies for the children of hired laborers and smallholder farmers. Some of the participants appreciated the school supplies because it saved them money that they



Norma Pacheco, a coconut farmer for the Franklin Baker company in the Philippines saw fair trade membership as ***“a blessing for me (because) I received school supplies.”***

would have otherwise had to spend. Another hired laborer in Mexico said:

“Many have two or three children, and they get help with that. They distribute it because school supplies are expensive.”

Furthermore, a female participant from Ivory Coast talked about how the provision of school supplies encouraged school attendance.

“Even to have chalk, was difficult but when the children went to school they got kits, they were really happy because these are things they weren’t used to having so we pay them. The children were marked. It encouraged them to go to school.”

Another participant, also from the Agropark cluster in Mexico, was able to pay for his own education from the cash payout:

“Besides here, I take a course. Every month and almost at the end of every time we get the bonus, I have to pay the monthly tuition. From there I pay my monthly tuition and any materials or things I need.”



Scholarships & Grants

Reports of receiving scholarships came from Honduras, Colombia and the Philippines. In most cases, farmers expressed gratitude for being able to send their children to tertiary education institutions.

One participant in Colombia noted that “for the children of the members, if they want to study, they also have very good aid.” Another Colombian participant who was both an employee of the COMSA cooperative in La Paz and a farmer added:

“...the scholarships are excellent; they are working with children from a young age, this stands out because they develop the brain from a young age and they can learn, those children, it’s admirable...”

Coconut farmers in the Philippines also gave out scholarships. A male participant from the Philippines confirmed that “some of our projects are the scholarship that benefited three high school students.”

In Honduras, one participant with the Cadefihuila cooperative got a university scholarship for his daughter:

“... and the student scholarships. Yes, of course, I had help for a daughter who was studying and finishing university ... that’s a big help.”

Empowerment Through Training

Smallholder farmers or fishers often credited cooperatives with their experiences of empowerment, regarding them as structures that members can turn to for trainings that build professional capacity or financial literacy, so they can improve their businesses or finances.

In addition to bettering the lives of their families by facilitating access to schooling for their children, participants indicated that formal trainings on topics like financial management, organic farming practices, and child labor led to skill development and empowerment for participants themselves.

One of the participants from the CABA cooperative in Ivory Coast stated that the financial education he received through fair trade trainings taught him “how to keep money.” Participants also received trainings on better farming techniques. A coffee farmer stated that he “liked the training sessions” because “we became experts”.



“...my daughter received some (financial) support, the cooperative gave me some money to send her to college in Abidjan. If I wasn’t a member of the cooperative, where could I find the money (to send my daughter to college)? Nowhere. So that’s good for me.”

Zate Virginie, a cocoa farmer in Oume in the Ivory Coast with the Coopatesa cooperative, reported receiving a scholarship for her daughter.



Summary of Findings

Across all countries, genders, and labor types, findings indicate that all Community Development Fund projects, regardless of their form, contributed to workers' ability to meet their basic needs, including access to education. Cash payouts assisted with managing education expenses, while in-kind goods like school supplies allowed workers and farmers to save their earnings for other things. Beyond individual and family benefits, these investment in development projects helped communities increase access to infrastructure in the form of schools.

It is clear from the positioning of education among the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG #4, Quality Education) that it is seen as a primary requirement in creating an equitable and sustainable world. Contributions like those presented here to the Sustainable Development Goals are core to the fair trade mission and an important that, along with our partners, we are able to quantify our contributions to global efforts toward a world that provides opportunity to all.



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