

Fair-trade deals provide safety net for Ivorian cocoa producers

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Podcast: A small farmer in Ivory Coast's CAYAT cooperative, which grows fairtrade-certified cocoa. The message on the board reads: "CAYAT says no to child labour"

In Ivory Coast, cocoa once guaranteed farmers a sweet life.

Then the world's number one producer was whacked, as oversupply and falling demand from health-conscious consumers hit prices.

But some producers proudly say they are not only weathering the [cocoa](#) storm but even flourishing.

The thanks, they say, are due to fair-trade deals that demand higher environmental and social standards from producers in exchange for training and a tempting financial bonus.

"Fair trade changed my life," enthused Robert Yao N'Guettia, in the middle of his plantation in Adzope, 100 kilometres (60 miles) east of Ivory Coast's economic capital Abidjan.

He is one of around 2,000 members of CAYAT—the Yakasse-Attobrou Agricultural Cooperative—which has tied up with an organisation called Fairtrade International.

It is one of a growing constellation of organisations which promote developing-country products. They ask consumers to pay a premium for a product that has been grown or made to higher ethical standards.

The products typically come from sectors such as cocoa and coffee, where poverty, [child labour](#) and environmental damage can be a curse.

Under their deal, CAYAT farmers are trained in smarter agriculture, ranging from better use of authorised fertilisers and harvesting techniques to fermentation—a key process that removes tannins from the harvested cacao bean and provides the best chocolate with its signature rich taste.

In 2012, the coop gained certification enabling products containing their cocoa to carry the Freetrade tag. Certification requires farmers to

observe higher standards in the use of chemical inputs, pay decent wages to workers and not use child labour.

In exchange, CAYAT receives an annual premium, which currently runs at about 200 million CFA francs—around 305,000 euros (\$358,000).

"The premium is divided into four equal parts—agricultural inputs, training, social investment and a bonus which goes to the farmers themselves," said Traore Sinan, head of the cooperative.



Shell business: A producer at the CAYAT cooperative gathers eggs from a chicken farm financed by money from fair-trade cocoa.

N'Guettia said the scheme had been transformational. His plantation now produces a tonne of cacao beans per hectare (2.5 acres) today, compared with 300 kilogrammes (660 pounds previously).

He owns a car—a luxury for small farmers—and money from the cooperative has endowed his village with a primary school with solar-powered lighting.

"We can work in the fields while our children go to school," he said. Other villages in the Adzope region now have water pumps and solar panels to provide basic needs for homes, as well as medical clinics, all financed from the Fairtrade bonus.

Reality behind figures

In 2004, only one organisation of cocoa farmers in Ivory Coast had Fairtrade certification. Today, the tally is nearly 200, representing more than 120,000 producers. The volume of Ivorian certified cacao has similarly surged, from 25 tonnes in 2004 to more than 150,000 tonnes in 2017.

Such figures seem huge and suggest a revolution in sustainable development is in full swing.

But the reality is somewhat less dramatic.

By way of comparison, Ivory Coast's cocoa production for the 2017-18 season is expected to be two million tonnes.

The country accounts for 40 percent of worldwide output—of which just 1.2 percent is certified as fair trade.

Out of 3,000 cocoa cooperatives in Ivory Coast, fewer than 200 are

certified. The sector employs around four million people—around one in six of the population and accounts for 10 percent of GDP, according to the World Bank.

Even so, certification is clearly growing in popularity as a means of buffering the impact of a price slump that has hit small farmers worst of all.

"Our dearest wish is for the purchase price to rise to 1,100 CFA francs a kilo, compared to 700 today," producer Vincent Kra Kouame said this month in the runup to the 2018-19 season, which starts in October.

Right now, "fair-trade cacao is our only comfort," he said.

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