

## Summary of Session 2: Role of Cooperatives to Drive Change: Farmer perspectives on income improvement programs

Moderator: Anne-Marie Yao ([Fairtrade Africa](#))

### Session narrative & objective:

This session brought together key representatives of farmer organizations to discuss the concept of living income from an implementation perspective. The representatives showcased initiatives that positively impacted the livelihoods of farmers and discussed critical success factors as well as the challenges they run into. They also shared their views on producer ownership and shared responsibility to implement strategies to attain living incomes.

Key points raised by each representative are as follows:

**Kone Siaka, Coobadi** (a FT-certified cooperative consisting 1,250 members, including 50 women, with an estimated production of 4,000 tons) discussed what a living income means and key challenges faced:

- **A living income** for COOBADI is a net annual income that is necessary for a household to function properly. To achieve this income, we need a fair price for cocoa. This is fundamental, that the price of cocoa should be raised and well raised at a reasonable price and would be welcome
- **Role of cooperative members** (and as individual producers)
  - to monitor producers, train them on good farming practices and in good management practices so that their income and orchard return increase. Producers need to be committed and follow the recommendations made by the cooperative to improve their returns in order to reach these necessary revenues.
- **Challenges faced:**
  - Current price of cocoa does not allow to have this living income for the producer.
  - Need for long-term contracts that could be signed with the cooperatives (E.g; contractual obligation for 5-10 years)
  - lack of interest of young people in cocoa farming.

**Aminata Bamba, Ecookim** (a union with 29 Cooperatives comprising more than 30,000 producers) shared key success factors for effective implementation.

- **Professional producer organization**
  - A professional farmer organization needs a skillful director, a competent team with which he can manage the cooperative and committed members.
  - Members should be at the center of all the decisions of the cooperative. It means that they feel involved. They need to see that the cooperative is working for the good of its members. So, for us it is important to link these three components in order to have a professional organization.

➤ **Long term committed partners**

- Farmer organizations need to long term committed partners.
- We must link the members and partners as an organization. This is done through periodic meetings, needs identification, general assemblies, discussion with partners to see ensure alignment on vision and expectations.
- This on-going communication helps generate ideas and enable us to be able to measure the impact of their partnership with us. That's a very important point, it allows partners to know that they are working with people who are professionals.
- Communication is fundamental to collaboration.

Aminate also discussed the Living income differential (LID) and the role of partners to support achieving a living income.

- **For the living income strategy**, we are talking about income management, we are also talking about the return that the producers must have as an income from their plantation. And today, when we look at all these different aspects, already at the level of Côte d'Ivoire, there are producers who do not reach that size.
- **Need for additional income to the cocoa income.** Producers need support to manage this income and trained to enable them to increase the return of their plantations. There is a need for business partners who work with cooperatives over the long term, because that reassures those cooperatives and allows to have a vision, an objective to work on. Producer also have a role at the producer level as well as at the cooperative level. All these four entities together will be able to achieve an improvement of the income of producers.

**Guede Meguy Genevieve, Women School of Leadership, [ECAM Meagui](#)** (a cooperative created in 2004 and today comprising 2,113 members) shared her opinion on the role of women in this long march towards living income.

- Alongside men, woman are **able to generate alternate sources of income** -that have the potential to be profitable (*and able to supplement an inconsistent primary income*)
- Women play a role to take care of the family and are also **accepted to make decisions** within the cooperative and within the community. Women in leadership positions exemplify this for others.
- **Being part of a cooperative**, receiving advice, training, awareness has helped her to achieve and manage her household income.
- From personal experience, she now helps the women in leadership school trainings to see the value of participating and engaging to enable them to achieve their goals and be autonomous (not always dependent on men).

Meguy also shared her appreciation to share her views and be heard on what works and what more can be done.

**Samuel Adimado, [Kuapa Kokoo](#) Cooperative** then presented Living Income development approaches. 2 main approaches were presented

1. **Based on members/Union development needs/plans**
2. **Based on Partners sustainability plans/requirements**

He presented several factors to balance the needs of members with union development demands and partners requirements. This included conducting needs assessment to inform decision making for projects/programmes implementation which should then be considered in proposals to partners. Proposals should also align with union' development plans. He further stressed the need for innovative and new project ideas from partners that propose to address the needs of members to be considered for implementation.

### **Challenges faced with piloted living income projects**

- **Farmers seen as project beneficiaries** rather than partners in development to trigger investment. This affects project sustainability
- **Lack of long –term relationship/project.**
  - Power play. No level playing field (Flexibility of dialoguing is minimal)

He then presented critical issues in achieving living income in Ghanaian context through advocacy and highlighted and presented ways of working effectively with distance collaborators/partners

**Critical issues in achieving living income in Ghanaian context through advocacy**

- ❑ Ensuring project alignment within the sector by stakeholders/government institutions.
- ❑ Promote reports synchronization and data sharing
- ❑ Advocate for the acceptance of the Living Income Differential (LID) by development institutions and the industry to enhance farm gate price
- ❑ Deliberate attempt to have farmer associations/cooperatives to have formidable farmer front by also encouraging the youth to take up cocoa farming as a business

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**Ways of Working effectively with distance collaborators/partners**

- ❑ Using virtual meetings
- ❑ Effective and regular reporting and data sharing
- ❑ Engaging local experts/consultants to provide project monitoring and reporting on behalf of partners



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