

Fairtrade Research Ethics Policy

Version August 2024

Objective

This policy is mandatory for all studies led by or contributed to by Fairtrade International Global Impact, including but not limited to commissioned studies or studies done in partnership with academic institutions. For other studies done with the Fairtrade system (whether NFOs, FMOs, PNs, or other units inside of Fairtrade International) it is highly recommended. The extent to which the policy is binding upon these other studies depends upon the ultimate requirements of the relevant unit or Fairtrade organization and where necessary Fairtrade International's Global Impact unit can be contacted to assist with suggestions on altering the policy to make it more applicable for specific contexts. It is envisioned that in the future this policy would be applicable to all Fairtrade-System¹ studies. The objectives of this Fairtrade Research Ethics policy are fourfold:

1. To ensure that researchers², working on studies with Fairtrade, uphold high ethical standards in their research;
2. To ensure that the participants in research by Fairtrade- studies are treated fairly and ethically, having no harm come to them and benefit from the research;
3. To have an aligned approach on research ethics within the global Fairtrade system, allowing Fairtrade staff commissioning research to rely on one universal model resulting in saved time and resources during early research and procurement, and
4. To demonstrate to external accountability organizations, governments, and the public that Fairtrade aspires to live up to the highest ethical standards in research.

Principles

The following principles are at the heart of this policy and should be adhered to in Fairtrade research:

- *Benefit to Fairtrade producers and workers:* Fairtrade is a voluntary sustainability standard setting and certification scheme that operates for the benefit of producers, including small-scale producers and workers in hired labor settings. Given this, the research commissioned by Fairtrade should be done primarily to benefit these same producers targeted by Fairtrade, either directly or indirectly. This implies that research will be developed to respond to needs and opportunities for improving Fairtrade Certified producers and workers conditions, Fairtrade interventions, generate evidence and close knowledge gaps for the system. These needs should not only be identified on the behalf of producers by Fairtrade, but producers' interests and voices should be expressed in defining and responding to these needs to establish their legitimacy.
- *Ensure no harm:* the rights and interests of research subjects must be primary. The researchers shall produce a risk identification and mitigation plan in their inception report where possible harms to subjects of the research are identified as well as factors or actions that can mitigate these potential harms.
- *Adhere to applicable Fairtrade policies:* Researchers shall, without compromising anonymity or confidentiality, demonstrate adherence to all applicable Fairtrade policies referred to in the contract, including (but not limited to) the Act to Protect Policy and the Anti-Fraud and Conflict of Interest Policy, as well any applicable regulations including the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR - if personal data refers to or is stored in the European Union).
- *Collaboration and coordination:* Due to the fact that Fairtrade is a membership organization where different National Fairtrade Organizations and Producer Networks are the primary contacts with commercial partners or producer organizations, researchers must always coordinate the research activities with the relevant Fairtrade organization. This can take varying lengths of time, therefore research should factor in additional weeks for communication in this regard, as this is key to obtaining informed consent in many cases.
- *Absolute Right of Refusal:* Research participants have the absolute right to refuse to participate in Fairtrade-commissioned research or withdraw consent after participation, without any negative consequences being attached to this. Research participants should both feel free to not participate in the study at all and be given the explicit opportunity to skip any individual questions without justification.
- *Data confidentiality:* In principle confidentiality of all collected data and anonymity of research participants (including Fairtrade staff) is the norm, unless this is explicitly agreed otherwise (in writing) by research participants.
- *Transparency:* Research participants have a right to know what the objectives of the research are and understand the findings relevant to (at a minimum) their field site/community/producer organization as well as those globally-applicable. Researchers must be transparent about their processes, hypotheses, and intentions, towards Fairtrade and towards research participants, in a language understood by research participants.
- *Utilization focus:* Research for Fairtrade should always be shared back with participants and results should be used to inform learning for the Fairtrade system. Special care shall be taken to assure that all research participants, including for example female participants, vulnerable groups, and handicapped people (if applicable) are given special consideration to ensure inclusion in communication. Each research should have a dissemination and learning plan that details how the study will be used. Recommendations shall be as actionable and specific as possible and be proposed by stakeholder group to assure it is clear to whom the recommendation is addressed and to facilitate the development of related action plans.

Specific Policy Requirements

The following are specific requirements of the policy during each stage of the research process.

During procurement (when researchers respond to Fairtrade RfP or ToR for consultancies and studies)

- Researchers should be given this policy as part of the application process, and the designs and project plans they submit must demonstrate alignment with this policy.

During Research Design

- Fairtrade (specifically Fairtrade International's Global Impact team, in collaboration with the relevant study manager) must provide training to the researcher/research team on all relevant documents and policies which the researcher/s need to adhere to. Such trainings may take the form of online webinars, or self-training videos followed by shorter interactive sessions with a trainer, in addition to documents which the researcher/s must read and agree to.
- Researchers must write an inception report that outlines the following:
 - research questions,
 - a detailed methodology,

¹ The Fairtrade system includes all NFO, FMOs, Producer Networks and all units in Fairtrade International. In case of co-operations with external research partners the Fairtrade Research Ethics Policy applies at least to the amount of research done or commissioned by any member of the Fairtrade System.

² Researchers are understood in the broadest sense, as any party commissioned by Fairtrade to conduct a study of any form (from desk study to impact evaluations or any other type of research), whether consultants or researchers, irrespective of their academic degrees.

- the sampling approach, including participant recruitment / selection processes with special consideration to assure sufficient female participants (and other vulnerable groups, as applicable) in the study. Forms of compensation for research participants have to be made explicit and discussed in advance with the Fairtrade organization. Financial compensation for participants is not recommended by Fairtrade, but refunding of costs made by research participants (e.g. for transportation) and offering meals or snacks during meetings would be encouraged.
- procedures for assuring informed consent for all data collection tools, including photographs/video,
- if applicable, data protection (if applicable GDPR) and other agreed policies (such as the Fairtrade protection policy, for which an orientation from Fairtrade is required),
- benefits for participants,
- risks and hazards and reflections on power dynamics in each context (with special consideration for women and vulnerable groups), as per the risk identification and mitigation plan referred to earlier,
- method of partnering with Fairtrade organizations (roles and responsibilities),
- and project plan.
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- This inception report must be shared with those Fairtrade organizations involved in coordinating the research and the research team must be open to adaptations³ which reflect the reality of working within the Fairtrade system.
- Researchers must create protocols for documenting informed consent from research participants. These protocols must also be approved by Fairtrade before implementation and, without compromising anonymity and confidentiality, monitored to ensure they were implemented. These forms/other documentation must, at a minimum, explain to the research participants the (1) purpose of the research, (2) what data will be collected from them, (3) the expected benefit and any potential harms that could come to them from participating in the research, (4) how their research data will be used and stored, (5) that they have an absolute right to refuse to participate in the research, (6) a right to be anonymous, (7) and a right to request their data is deleted after participation, and (8) whom to contact for additional questions or follow up regarding their research data (9) right to confidentiality. These forms should be written in language that is appropriate for the educational level of the research participants and (to assist in the cases of non-literate participants) amenable to being delivered orally, while in all cases offering a real option for participants to withdraw consent and request the deletion of their records.

During Entry to the Field

- Researchers must coordinate with the relevant Fairtrade organization before contacting research participants within commercial partners or producer organizations.⁴ In general (unless agreed otherwise with the relevant Fairtrade organization), researchers must not contact the research participants until the final consent and detailed project plan has been agreed with the respective Fairtrade organization, and research participants have been properly informed and consulted about their availability and interest to participate in the research.
- Researchers must maintain a cadence of reporting and communicating with the relevant Fairtrade organization. This should be formally agreed to and documented as part of the research design phase of any research.
- Researchers should collect and be willing to share appropriate documentation that proves, through a paper-trail, that this Ethics Policy has been followed.
- Researchers must inform their commissioning/collaborating organization at Fairtrade of any unforeseen circumstances that may change the implementation plans or affect the results of the study in order for collaboration in finding the best alternative to address the situation.

During the Fieldwork

- Researchers must use the aforementioned informed consent protocols with research participants. It must be clear to research participants what participation involves, including the total amount of time participants are asked to invest.
- All applicable policies (fairtrade Ethics Policy, Act to Protect Policy, GDPR Policy, Anti-Fraud Policy, and Conflict of Interest Policy) , have to be adhered to in full.
- Researchers must take all good-faith efforts to reduce the time-impact of the research on research participants. This generally means to abide by agreed timelines as well as interview research participants at times that are most convenient to the participants and agreed to by them, accounting for possible differences between participant groups based on, for example, gender. All efforts must be made to avoid potential harm to research participants emanating from interview scheduling (for example, interviews during working hours for workers on plantations, which may lead to a cut of their take-home pay).

After the Fieldwork

- Researchers must have a workshop, even if informal so as not to lead to negative budgetary implications, immediately after the fieldwork to share initial results back with research participants. This workshop is both for data validation and for learning, as well as to affirm with the participants that their data is being used. It should be held in a place convenient and affordable for the different groups of research participants (including minorities, women, handicapped people, etc.) to attend and be kept as short and practically relevant as possible to respect time of participants.
- Researchers must share the (relevant) draft reports with Fairtrade organizations for comments, and (in some cases, as determined by Fairtrade), with research participants themselves. Researchers must be open to adaptation on the basis of these comments and the period for commenting must be long enough⁵ to present a real opportunity. This is *not* intended to provide an opportunity to adjust the results or slant the reports in favor of Fairtrade, but rather to clarify any outstanding questions and correct any misinterpretations of the data from all stakeholders.
- For any direct quotations from an interview in a report, researchers must inform the relevant research participant that they will be using their direct quotation and allow for it to be reviewed by them, including the context in which the quotation will be used. This is to allow the participant an opportunity to clarify whether or not their quotation is being interpreted correctly. Without an affirmative response from the research participant, quotation is not allowed.
- If not done so by Fairtrade organizations, researchers must share the final report(s) with research informants, while ensuring anonymity. Research publication and dissemination is to be carried out following discussions and agreement with Fairtrade.

³ 'Open to adaptations' does not mean that the researcher must always take the recommendations (especially if they judge it affects the rigor of the research methods); rather, it means that all recommendations must be seriously considered and discussed in a transparent and open manner.

⁴ 'Coordination' means to keep the organization up to date on the expected time of contact with the research participants and to jointly create a work-plan and timeline for access.

⁵ The length can vary from case to case and depending on the period (e.g. longer in a holiday period), but would have to be a few weeks (no less than 2 weeks) at minimum to allow all relevant stakeholders to comment.

Data Protection

- Researchers must store all data securely and in line with best data protection practices, regardless of whether personal data is collected. “Best data protection practices” includes, at a minimum, password-protection of the computers storing research data and ideally of the files themselves. If anonymity has been promised to research participants, steps must be taken to ensure this (e.g. removing all identifying information from participant data, including IP addresses in case of online surveys).
- If personal data on residents of the European Union is collected, or personal data is managed in the European Union, it must also be stored in line with GDPR regulations.
- If confidentiality has been promised to research participants, steps likewise must be taken to ensure this (e.g. keeping the identifiers of participants in a separate file from the main data). Any release of non-aggregated data of an identifiable organization or individual shall be approved by a C2R released signed by the organization or the concerned individual. Any organization and individual has the full right not to sign a C2R and to ensure confidentiality.
- *Dissemination and learning:* Research for Fairtrade should always be shared back with participants (in a way in which different groups, e.g. women, handicapped people, minorities, other disadvantaged groups all have a real opportunity to participate) and results should be used to inform learning for the Fairtrade system. Each research must have an updated dissemination and learning plan that details how the study are planned to be used. Recommendations shall be as actionable and specific as possible and be proposed by stakeholder group to assure it is clear to whom each recommendation is addressed. Stakeholders shall be informed of recommendations given to them.

Contact

In case of any questions on this policy, please contact the Research Task Force lead, or Fairtrade International’s Global Impact team by email (impact@fairtrade.net).

Signature (of the lead researcher)

I affirm I have been oriented as per this policy and will abide by all its components.

Signed: _____

Printed Name:

Date:

Place: