

Fairtrade International

Streamlining Global Monitoring & Evaluation for Ethical
Trade and Sustainable Development

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SUMMARY

CLIENT	FAIRTRADE INTERNATIONAL
SECTORS	AGRICULTURE & CONSUMER GOODS
DURATION	2023 - PRESENT
REGIONS	AFRICA, THE MIDDLE EAST, ASIA, PACIFIC, LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



MORE THAN 2 MILLION FARMERS & WORKERS ARE INVOLVED IN FAIRTRADE WORLDWIDE



FARMERS & WORKERS CO-OWN FAIRTRADE AND HAVE A 50% VOTE IN THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY



THERE ARE 1,896 PRODUCERS ACROSS 67 COUNTRIES INVOLVED IN FAIRTRADE

Fairtrade International is a global non-profit organisation dedicated to promoting ethical trade, better working conditions, and sustainable livelihoods for farmers and workers. Operating within a complex agricultural landscape marked by poverty, exploitation, and climate change, Fairtrade supports more than two million farmers and workers. This is done through a structure of regional producer networks and national Fairtrade organisations that are members of Fairtrade International and work together to build awareness and markets for Fairtrade products.

This case study explores Fairtrade's transition to TolaData, a digital tool for monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL). Such digital tools are helping to address previous challenges with decentralised data collection and management as well as enable standardised and more efficient data collection and reporting. By streamlining MEL processes, Fairtrade aims to enhance its aggregate reporting, improve transparency, and advance its commitment to sustainable development.

“For monitoring projects, managing indicators, data collection, and reporting, TolaData is incredibly useful, allowing us to have all our data in one place.”

Ana Lilia Hernández Espinosa, MEL Coordinator at CLAC (the Fairtrade producer network in Latin America and the Caribbean).

OPERATIONAL CONTEXT

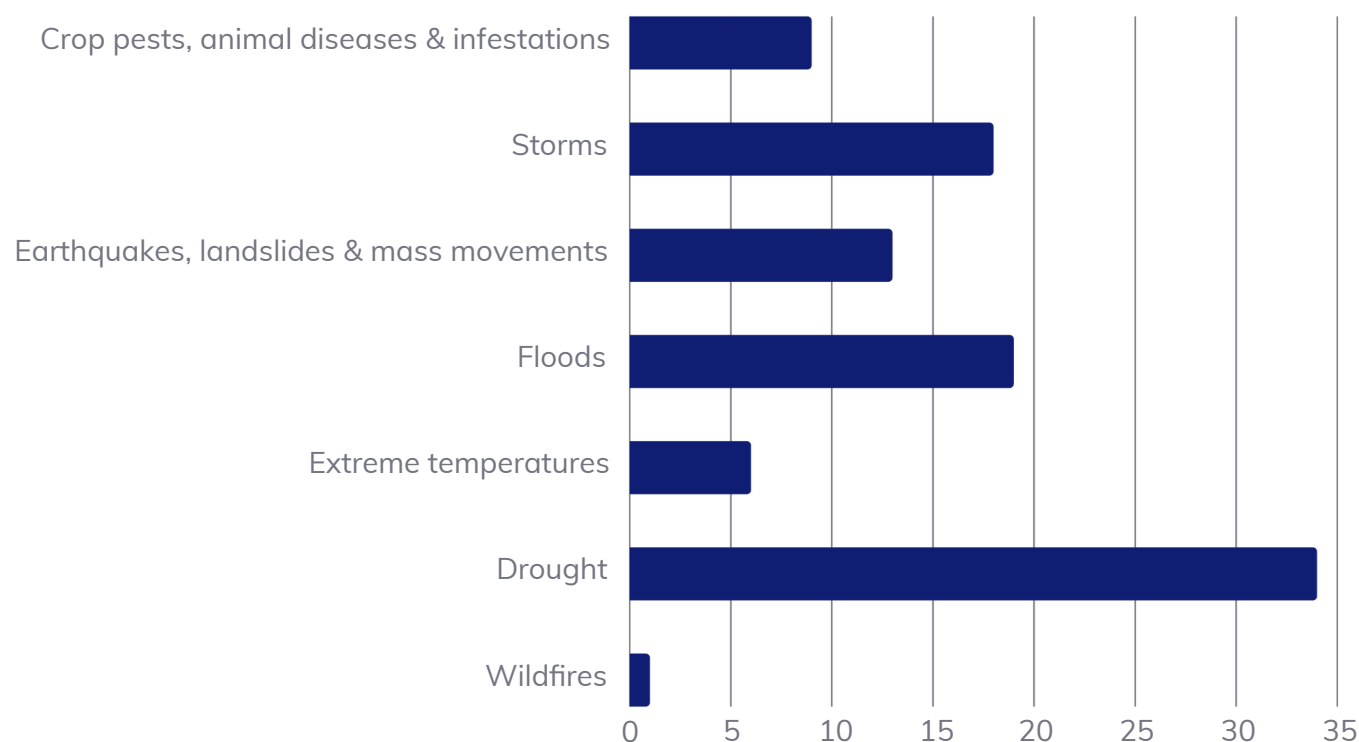
Fairtrade operates within a challenging global agricultural landscape that highlights the necessity of its mission. The realities faced by smallholder farmers and agricultural workers include significant inequalities, such as poverty and unstable incomes. These inequalities are compounded by exploitation within global supply chains and environmental degradation, both of which disproportionately impact vulnerable populations, especially women and children.

A decent standard of living, one that meets basic needs and ensures human dignity, is a fundamental human right. However, approximately 736 million people live in extreme poverty worldwide, with 80 percent based in rural areas and relying on agriculture for survival. Despite being integral to supply chains worth billions, small-scale farmers often find themselves

living in poverty and relying on unstable incomes due to their lack of power in setting prices. This leaves them even more vulnerable to market fluctuations.

The global environmental crisis poses severe threats to agricultural communities. The increased frequency and severity of weather events, such as droughts, floods, and crop diseases, disrupt the livelihoods and food security of over 500 million small-scale farming families worldwide. Figure 1 depicts the total crop and livestock production loss per disaster type in US dollars (billions) over a ten year period. During this time, roughly \$108.5 billion was lost in LDCs (least developed countries) and LMICs (low- and middle-income countries). These disasters compound the hardships faced by farmers who experience a direct economic loss, which in turn impacts their communities and ripples through the value chain.

Figure 1: Total crop and livestock production loss per disaster type, LDCs and LMICs, 2008-2018¹

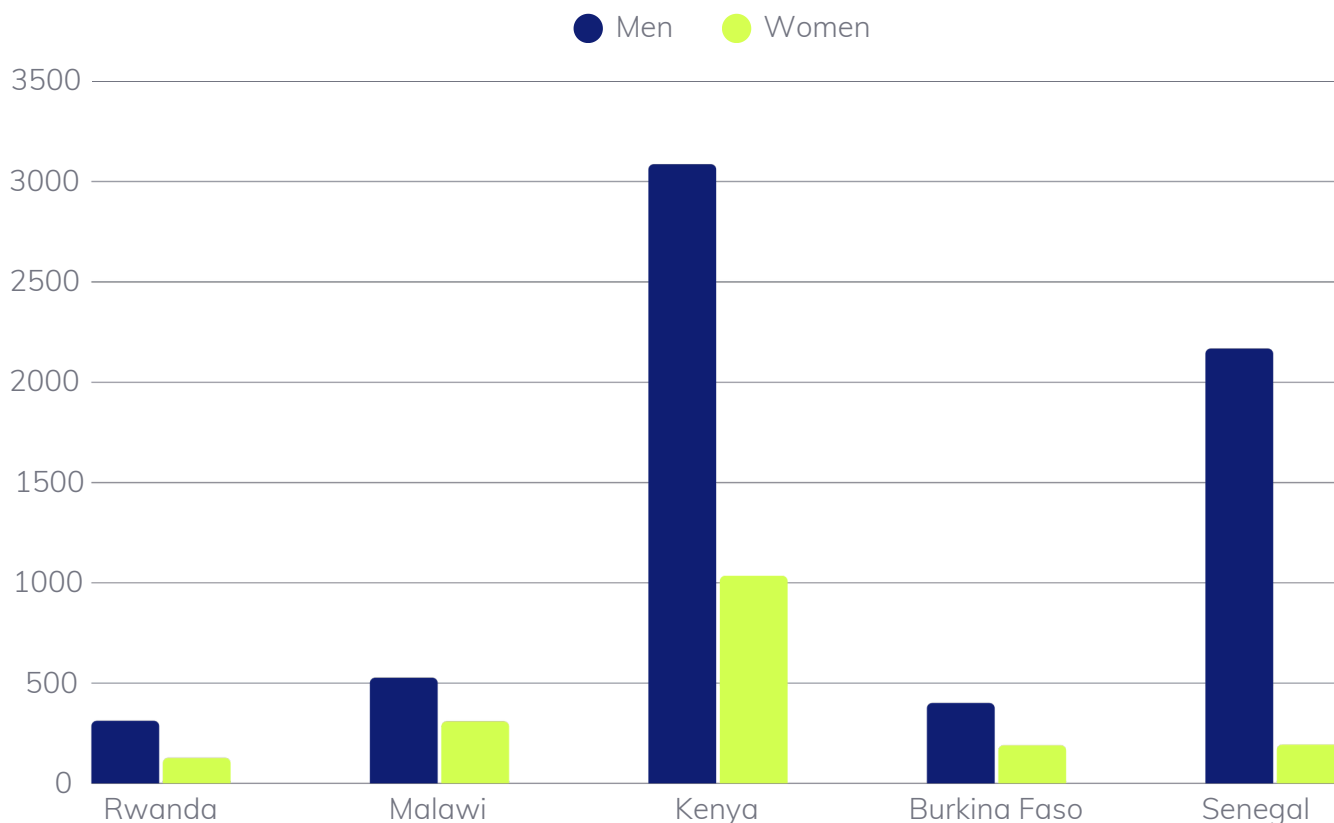


¹ Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO). *Disasters in Agriculture*. Rome: FAO, 2023. <https://www.fao.org/interactive/disasters-in-agriculture/en/>

Within these complexities, women and children working in the agriculture sector often find themselves exploited. Women grow between 60 - 80 percent of the world's food but very few own their own land and most have limited access to resources. Data from Fairtrade International indicates that women represent only about 25 percent of smallholder farmers and workers directly involved in Fairtrade and many women's contributions go unrecognised in traditional economic systems. Available data on the earnings of women in the agriculture sector depict a disparity in earnings (Figure 2). This graph shows men earn a higher monthly income from sales of agrifood products than women in selected countries. This study also found that women trade in less profitable commodities, such as fruits and vegetables, whereas men are more likely to have a larger share of more profitable animal products.

Child labour remains a critical issue in the agriculture sector. There are an estimated 160 million children engaged in labour worldwide, 70 percent of whom are working in farming. These children often miss out on schooling, suffer from poor nutrition, and are at risk from hazardous working conditions. The underlying causes of child labour are rooted in poverty, lack of access to quality education, and economic insecurity. When families struggle to make a decent living, children are often compelled to work, perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage. Fairtrade is working to address the systemic inequalities and challenges faced by producers and workers in the agriculture sector by advocating for change and promoting fairer trading practices.

Figure 2: Gender Disparity in Monthly Income from Agrifood Sales (Adjusted to 2021 US Dollars, Using Purchasing Power Parities)



2 Food and Agriculture organization of the United Nations (FAO). *The Status of Women in Agrifood Systems*. Rome: FAO, 2023. <https://openknowledge.fao.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/317db554-c763-4654-a0d3-24a8488bbc3a/content/status-women-agrifood-systems-2023/gender-work-agrifood-systems.html>

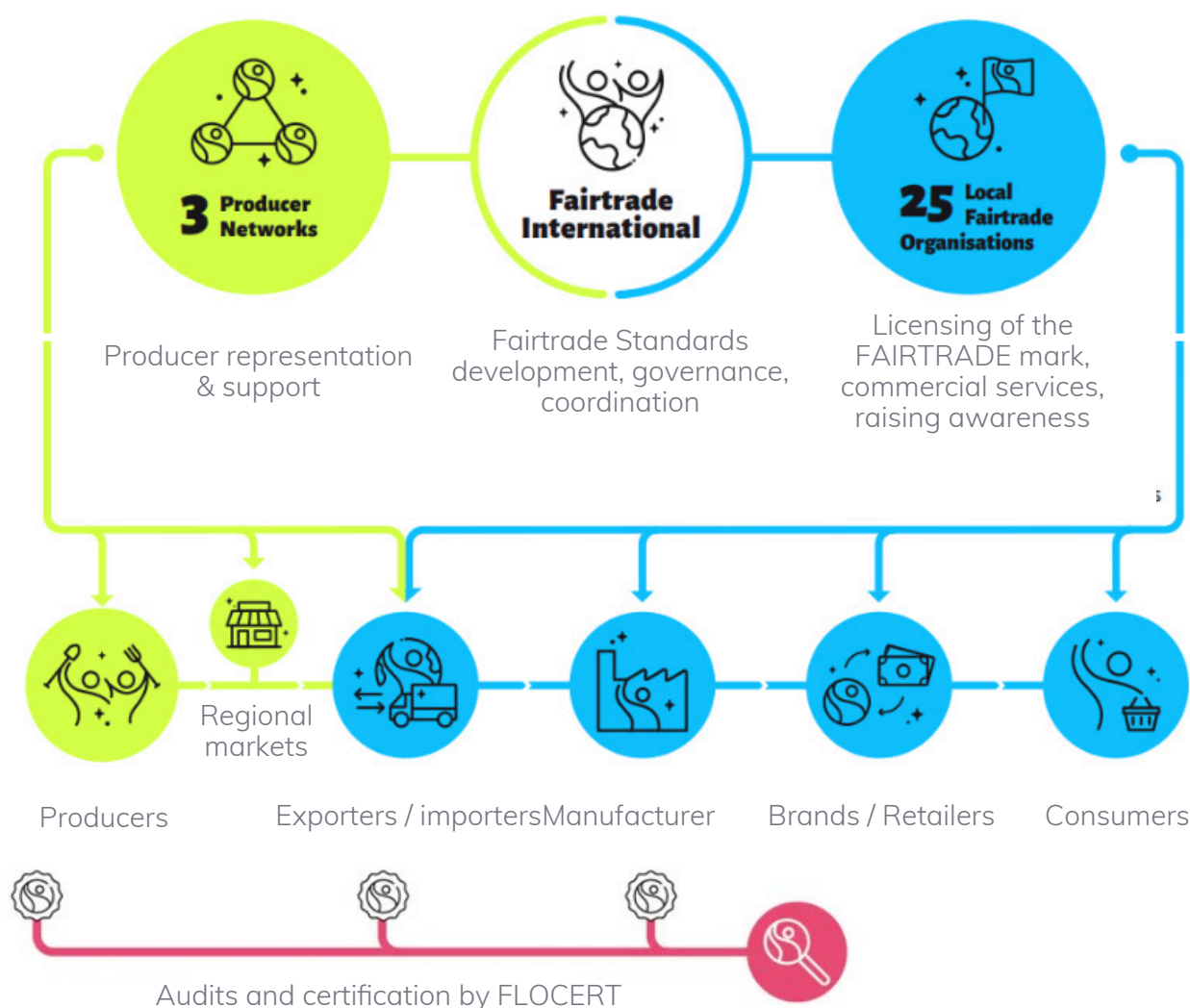
THE ORGANISATION

The Fairtrade system operates as a multi-stakeholder collaborative network and comprises of three main elements: Fairtrade International, regional producer networks, and national Fairtrade organisations (NFOs). The independent and accredited certification body, FLOCERT, certifies and audits Fairtrade supply chains, from producer organisations through to manufactured products. An overview of The Fairtrade System can be seen in Figure 3. Fairtrade's influence extends across the globe, supporting producers in Africa, the Middle East, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Asia Pacific, while maintaining a strong consumer presence in European and North American markets.

Fairtrade International

Fairtrade International coordinates the activities of its member organisations and ensures consistency in the Fairtrade Standards, certification, and advocacy. By owning the FAIRTRADE Mark, a registered trademark that appears on over 37,000 products, Fairtrade International raises awareness about ethical trade. The organisation employs nearly 100 staff members at its headquarters in Bonn, Germany, and actively involves all members and certified producer organisations in its decision making processes through representation on its Board of Directors at the Fairtrade General Assembly.

Figure 3: Overview of the Fairtrade system



Producer networks

The three producer networks are regional associations that Fairtrade certified producer organisations may join. These networks represent small-scale producers, workers, and other stakeholders across Africa and the Middle East, Asia-Pacific, and Latin America and the Caribbean. Collectively, almost 1,900 certified producer organisations, representing more than two million farmers and workers, are members of the three producer networks. The producer networks are democratically organised and encourage engagement, as outlined in the various Fairtrade Standards. This framework allows diverse entities, from cooperatives and smallholder associations to plantations and factories, to participate in Fairtrade certification. The producer networks wield significant influence within the system. They hold 50 percent of the voting power at the Fairtrade General Assembly, thus ensuring that producer perspectives are prioritised in the decision making processes.

National Fairtrade organisations (NFOs)

NFOs represent the Fairtrade system in various countries, and act as key links between consumers, businesses, and producer organisations. These local entities help consumers find Fairtrade products, assist businesses in becoming licensees, organise and promote Fairtrade events and engage in advocacy and lobbying. Primarily based in the EU and North America, NFOs work at both ends of the supply chain, implementing and managing projects in co-operation with the producer networks as well as working with supermarkets on product distribution. Fairtrade organisations often come together to collaborate on a single project. For instance, a project based in Africa might be funded by Fairtrade Finland and Fairtrade Max Havelaar Switzerland, and managed by Fairtrade Africa, illustrating the interconnected nature of the system. An example of this can be seen in Figure 4.

Fairtrade's MEL system

Each project within Fairtrade retains the autonomy to implement its own MEL practices. However, Fairtrade organisations are encouraged to align with Fairtrade International's overarching global strategy. Within the global strategy, projects can consult and draw from a list of standardised organisational indicators - known as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) - and integrate them into their own project logframes. This flexibility allows local Fairtrade organisations and producer networks to tailor their MEL practices to their own specific needs.

“Each organisation within Fairtrade has the freedom to approach monitoring and evaluation in its own way, yet they are united by Fairtrade International’s overarching global strategy. This strategy encourages alignment and growth through monitoring, evaluation, and learning at both local and global levels.”

Dr Baba Adam,
Impact Portfolio
Manager

THE CHALLENGE

As a multi-stakeholder organisation implementing a growing number of projects across regions, Fairtrade has encountered challenges in its monitoring and evaluation processes. Ideally, project and programme monitoring indicators would align with Fairtrade's global KPIs, impact metrics, and thematic frameworks to clearly demonstrate how interventions benefit producer organisations and their members. This alignment would allow the organisation to generate meaningful evidence to refine the Fairtrade standards, enhance producer support, and ultimately increase impact.

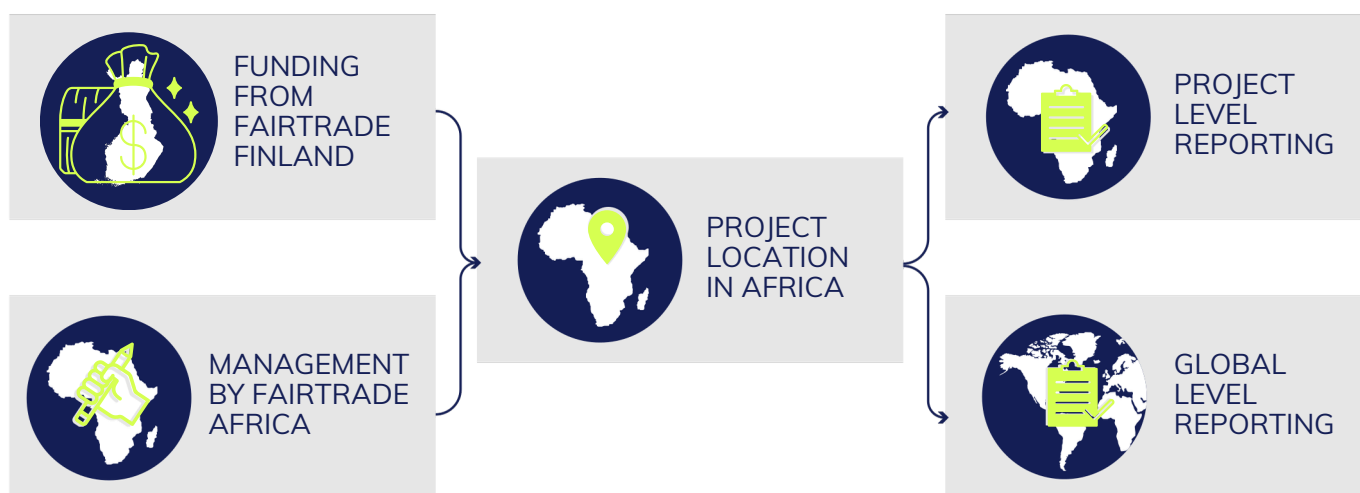
However, the reality on the ground presented three key challenges. First, many projects operate with their own MEL frameworks, often shaped by specific donor requirements, which only partially align with global KPIs. Second, the absence of standardised metrics for measuring similar impacts made it difficult to compare and aggregate results across regions. Third, the continued reliance on traditional tools like Excel and Word for data management meant that critical information was siloed, often stored locally on staff computers. This not only complicated data analysis but also posed risks to data security and reduced overall operational efficiency.

To address these challenges, Fairtrade International recognised the need for a centralised digital solution that could unify MEL processes across the system while preserving flexibility at the project level.

“Introducing new digital tools always comes with its challenges, but over time, you reach a turning point where the workload decreases and the rewarding aspects take over.”

*Dr Baba Adam,
Impact Portfolio
Manager*

Figure 4: Example Flow of a Fairtrade Project



THE SOLUTION

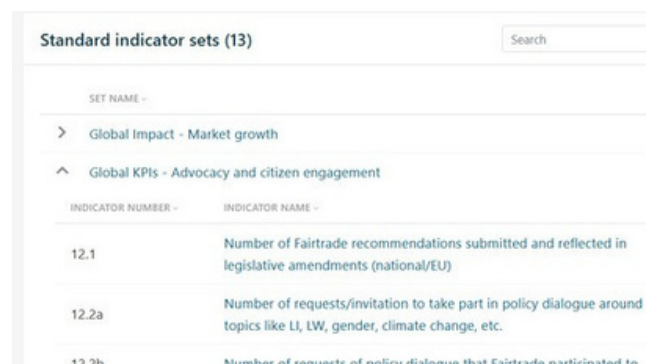
TolaData was selected to help further streamline Fairtrade's digital MEL efforts. It was chosen primarily due to its user-friendly interface and competitive pricing. Another compelling factor was TolaData's commitment to collaborate with Fairtrade International in developing a customised feature known as the Global Indicator Library. This feature would house the Global Fairtrade Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that projects could browse and select to use in their individual project logframes. It would facilitate standardised data collection and reporting across all levels of the organisation.

The Global Indicator Library

In March 2023, Fairtrade International highlighted its vision for a centralized hub on the TolaData platform where standardized indicators could be stored and accessed by project leads. The goal was for Fairtrade International to define sets of general standard indicators. These indicators would then be made available to projects across the platform. Project admins could then browse these general standard indicators, as seen in Figure 6, and integrate relevant ones into their specific projects. Using a list of detailed requirements provided by Fairtrade, the

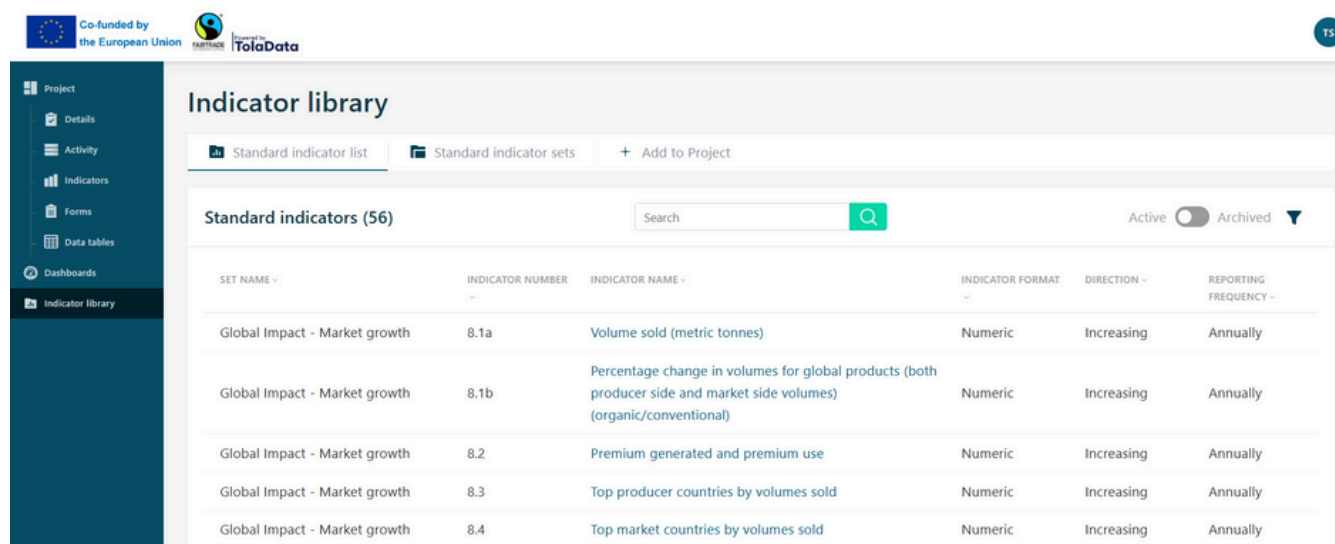
TolaData development team began working on the new Global Indicator Library feature. This feature development is partly financed by the European Commission (EC) through the Financial Framework Partnership Agreement (FFPA) project, which will be presented in the results section of this case study. The first phase of feature development was successfully deployed in January 2024. During this phase, standardised indicator sets were developed to consolidate indicators. An example of such sets can be seen in Figure 5 and 6. To ensure smooth implementation of this new feature, training sessions were held for Fairtrade staff to familiarise them with the new Global Indicator Library.

Figure 5: Screenshot of indicators contained in an indicator set in TolaData



Standard indicator sets (13)	
SET NAME	INDICATOR NAME
Global Impact - Market growth	
Global KPIs - Advocacy and citizen engagement	
12.1	Number of Fairtrade recommendations submitted and reflected in legislative amendments (national/EU)
12.2a	Number of requests/invitation to take part in policy dialogue around topics like LI, LW, gender, climate change, etc.
12.2b	Number of requests of policy dialogue that Fairtrade participated to

Figure 6: Screenshot from TolaData showing a selection of Standard Indicators in the Global Indicator Library



SET NAME	INDICATOR NUMBER	INDICATOR NAME	INDICATOR FORMAT	DIRECTION	REPORTING FREQUENCY
Global Impact - Market growth	8.1a	Volume sold (metric tonnes)	Numeric	Increasing	Annually
Global Impact - Market growth	8.1b	Percentage change in volumes for global products (both producer side and market side volumes) (organic/conventional)	Numeric	Increasing	Annually
Global Impact - Market growth	8.2	Premium generated and premium use	Numeric	Increasing	Annually
Global Impact - Market growth	8.3	Top producer countries by volumes sold	Numeric	Increasing	Annually
Global Impact - Market growth	8.4	Top market countries by volumes sold	Numeric	Increasing	Annually

In May 2024, discussions began on Phase 2 of the Global Indicator Library development, which focused on versioning and simplifying the aggregation process of standard indicators. The versioning feature allows users to make changes to standard indicators at the Global Indicator Library level and track these changes over time through saved versions. This ensures that projects always use the most up-to-date version of the global indicators, as shown in Figure 7.

The second aspect of Phase 2 focused on improving the aggregation process across all projects using standard indicators. When aggregating data, project leads can easily see which projects have applied specific indicators and which versions they are using. This makes it easier to ensure that the correct versions of indicators are aggregated across all projects, as demonstrated in Figure 8.

Figure 7: View of the Version Comparison tab inside a standard indicator in TolaData, where changes between each version can be tracked.

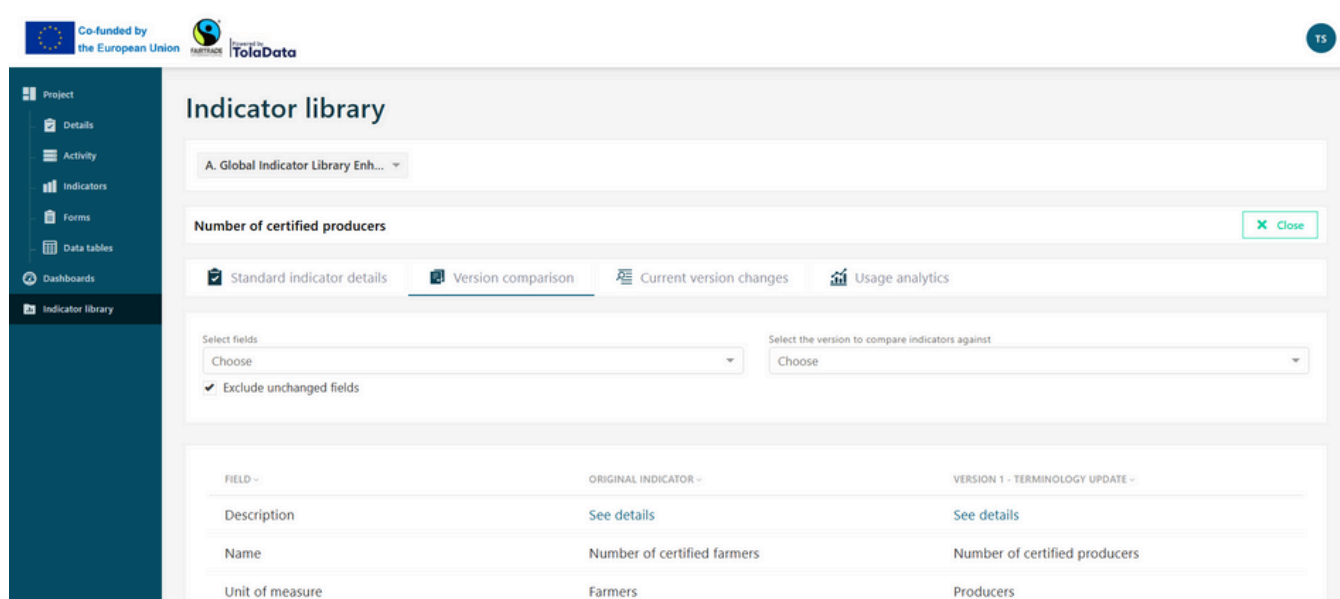
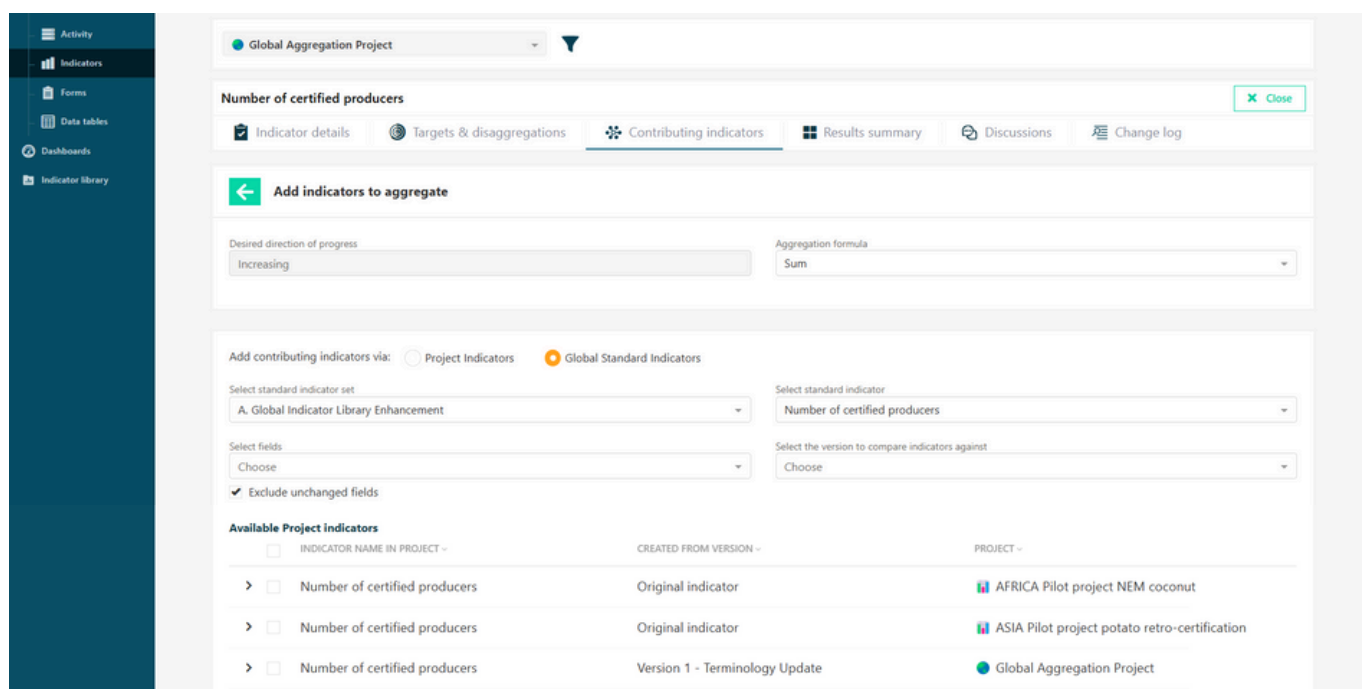


Figure 8: Screenshot displaying the aggregation view showing projects and their standard indicator versions.



Challenges with rolling out a digital system

While the initial roll-out of the new digitalised MEL system has been successful, it has not been without its challenges. The diversity of languages used across Fairtrade's global network complicated communication and training efforts. There was also apprehension about whether the continuous investment in new technologies would deliver the promised improvements. In the face of these concerns, Baba Adam, Fairtrade's Global Impact Portfolio Manager, took on the critical task of fostering enthusiasm and momentum for the digital transition. His efforts were instrumental in rallying support for the adoption of new processes.

Successfully overcoming challenges by championing digital transition

Sustaining the momentum for Fairtrade's digital transition involved a coordinated effort both internally and externally, spearheaded by Baba Adam and supported by TolaData account managers. Internally, Fairtrade fostered engagement through a series of webinars that introduced colleagues to TolaData. A particularly notable event was a Community of Practice meeting in 2023 to which Fairtrade invited colleagues from a German NGO, GIZ, to showcase their work with TolaData. This provided a tangible example of the platform's potential. To find out more about GIZ's use of TolaData, you can explore this previous [case study](#). To support these efforts, the TolaData communications team compiled a [newsletter](#) to give an overview of the use case. In addition, Fairtrade organised peer learning meetings where successful projects shared best practices with other colleagues. During one of these meetings, Fairtrade Africa presented their work on TolaData to other regions.

“Each year, as reports are prepared and data is updated, the work becomes progressively easier and more efficient.”

*Dr Baba Adam,
Impact Portfolio
Manager*

Externally, Fairtrade invested in consulting and training hours from TolaData to facilitate the transition. TolaData account managers worked closely with Fairtrade to set up logframes and indicators on the TolaData platform, ensuring projects were ready for data entry. Training sessions in both English and Spanish were conducted to onboard staff effectively, complemented by the production and distribution of support materials.

This ongoing collaboration and support has led to significant growth. From an initial 25 users of the Fairtrade platform, there are now more than 50. The success has been so pronounced that project managers as well as MEL officers are seeking access to TolaData. Some projects have even begun using TolaData's activity section for comprehensive project management, consolidating all their data in one place.

Figure 9: Poster created by Fairtrade to promote TolaData internally



THE RESULTS

“TolaData provides an effective platform for tracking and managing processes and results for projects and programmes.”

Kipruto Tallam MEL Manager,
Fairtrade DONUTS programme

The integration of TolaData into the DONUTS programme marked a significant step in managing the complexity of this multi-country initiative. DONUTS, a four-year programme focusing on promoting justice, fairness, and sustainability for marginalized farmers and workers across Africa and Latin America, sought to digitalise their M&E systems as the programme expanded. As the scope of projects grew, the need for an efficient digital solution to manage data and processes became clear, leading to the adoption of TolaData.

The DONUTS programme Impact Measurement

One key aspect of the DONUTS programme focuses on measuring the impact of initiatives aimed at improving the lives of marginalized groups, especially in the context of justice, fairness, and sustainability. While the programme's Theory of Change (ToC) focuses on lifting farmers and workers to a sustainable life within ecological boundaries, it also addresses challenges such as climate change, child and forced labor, and discrimination. These challenges are particularly relevant in the supply chain of coffee, cocoa, and flowers, where workers and farmers often face systemic injustice and vulnerability.

The programme specifically aims to:

- Social: Strengthen civil society, making it more inclusive and resilient.
- Economic: Ensure that farmers' and workers' economic rights are realized.
- Ecological: Promote sustainable agricultural practices that protect the environment.

In measuring their impact, DONUTS focuses on both quantitative data (e.g., economic indicators, environmental metrics) and qualitative data (e.g., worker well-being, gender equality). One of the key aims is to assess how well projects are contributing to long-term, systemic changes within these vulnerable communities.

Supporting Fairtrade farmers amid climate change

An example of how the DONUTS programme tracks these impacts can be seen in the coffee sector projects in Kenya, particularly the Climate Academy and sustainable coffee production efforts. With climate change threatening coffee production worldwide, these projects focus on supporting farmers with sustainable agricultural practices. As outlined in the DONUTS ToC, these initiatives aim to build resilience through improved farming techniques, climate adaptation strategies, and community empowerment.

In this context, DONUTS is measuring both the direct impacts on coffee yield and quality and the broader societal and environmental shifts that emerge as farmers adopt more sustainable practices. TolaData's impact measurement capacities ensure that data from these projects are captured in real-time, providing accurate insights into both economic and ecological outcomes. By focusing on the integration of sustainable practices, such as forestry and conservation agriculture, these projects aim to contribute to the broader goal of achieving economic sustainability while staying within the planet's ecological limits.

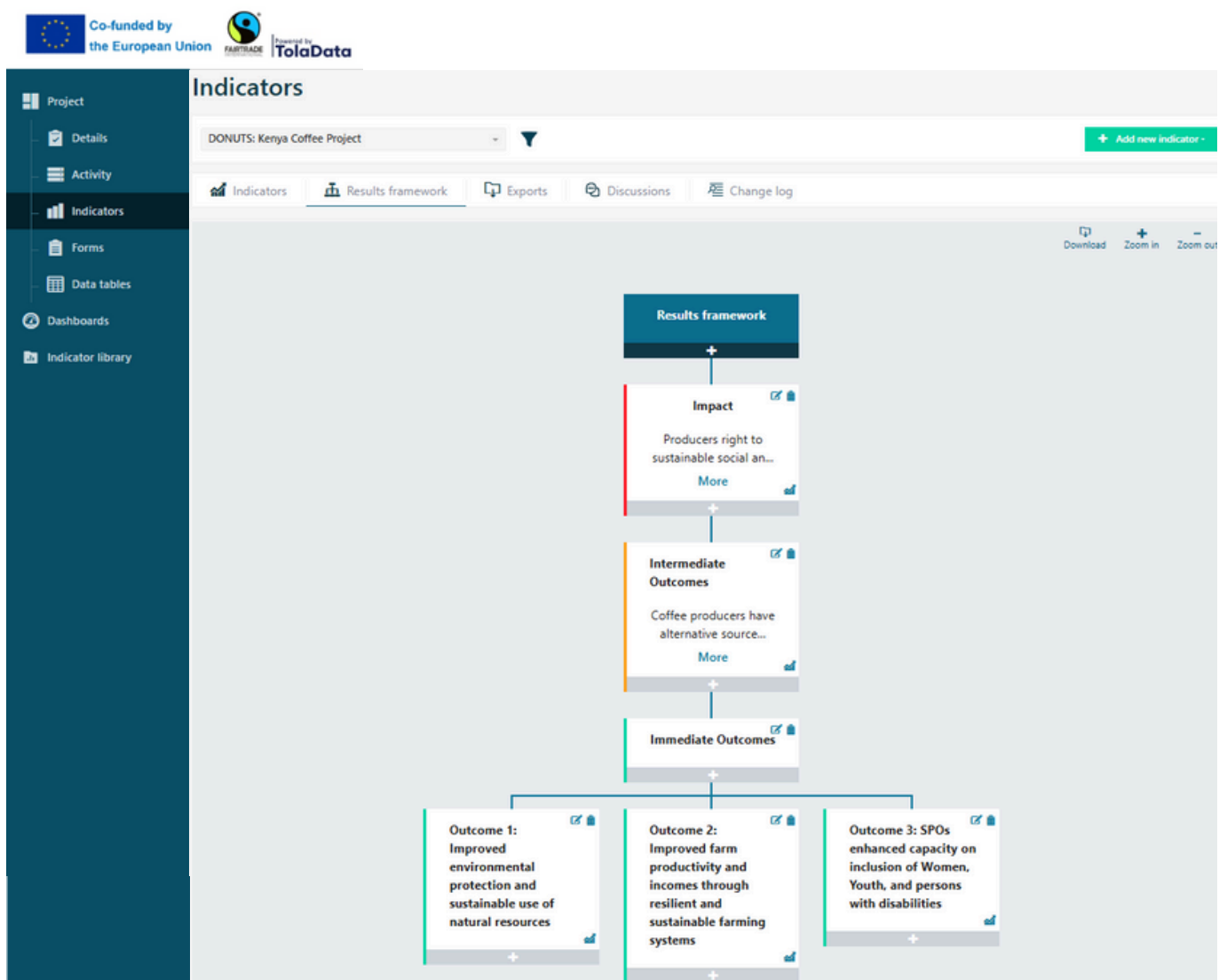
The DONUTS programme transition to TolaData

Transitioning to TolaData was largely straightforward for the DONUTS team. The platform's ability to work with existing data formats like Excel and CSV allowed the DONUTS team to import their existing data. This compatibility meant that project structures could be quickly set up. The DONUTS team also collaborated with their TolaData account managers in the conversion of project-specific logframes into workflows that linked data to broader programme results in the TolaData

system. An example of one such project logframe can be seen in Figure 10.

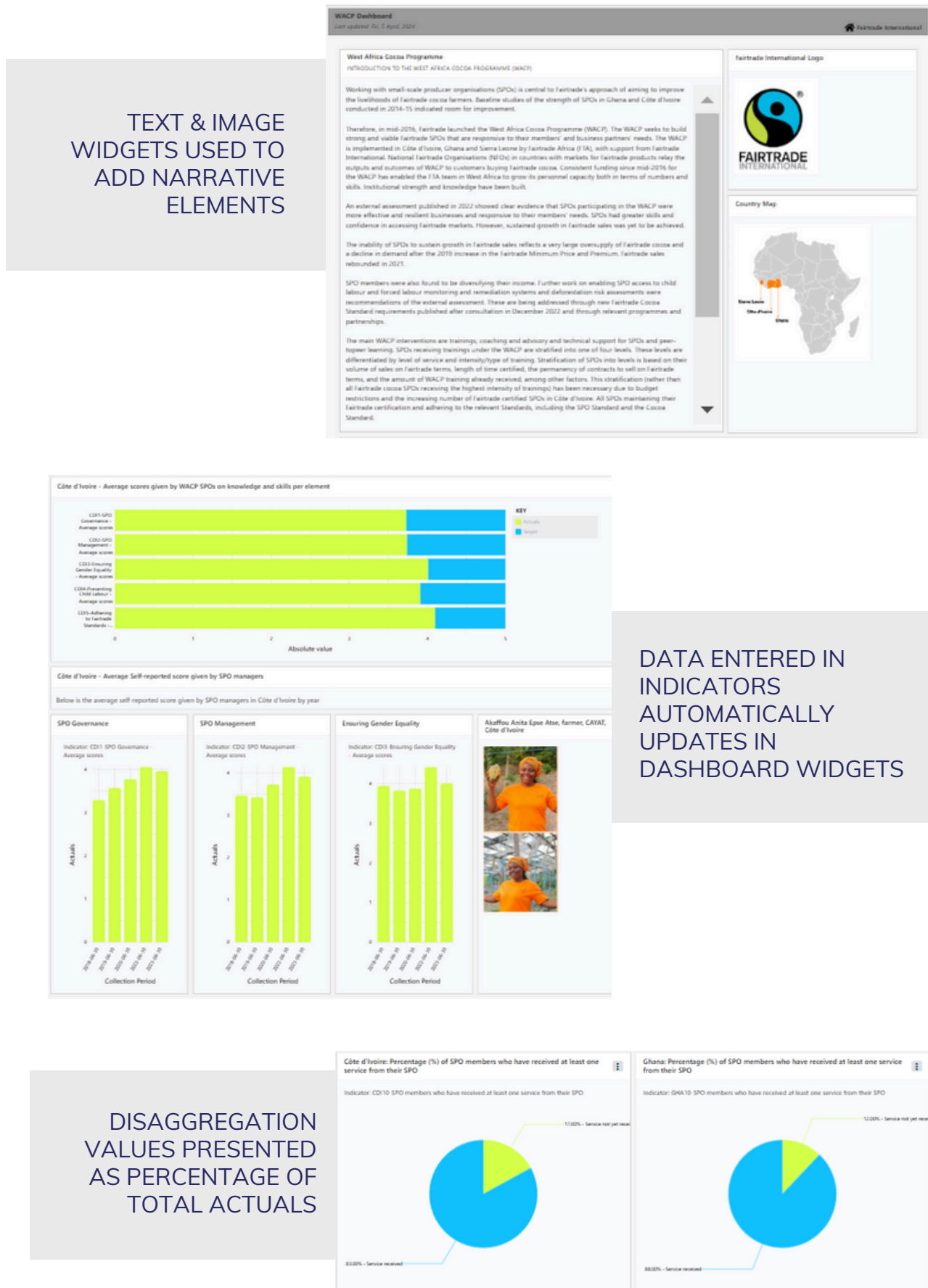
Adapting to new workflows and building the capacity to use the platform effectively required significant effort. Fairtrade International committed to using TolaData's training resources to ensure that the DONUTS team fully engaged in the roll-out of the platform. This was successful and resulted in the DONUTS team expanding on their reporting on the TolaData system, an example of which can be seen in Figure 11.

Figure 10: TolaData screenshot of the Results Framework of the DONUTS Kenya Coffee project



3 Link to DONUT Coffee project on Fairtrade Impact Map: [https://impactmap.fairtrade.net/projects/strengthening-of-small-producer-organizations-of-coffee#~\(state~\(filters~\(entityType~project~active~\(~\)\)\)~version~1\)](https://impactmap.fairtrade.net/projects/strengthening-of-small-producer-organizations-of-coffee#~(state~(filters~(entityType~project~active~(~)))~version~1))

Figure 11: A sample Dashboard on West Africa Cocoa Programme (WACP) in TolaData



The Future is Fair – empowering Producer Organisations to achieve the SDGs

In 2024, the European Commission signed a Financial Framework Partnership Agreement (FFPA) with Fairtrade International for which Fairtrade International was awarded a grant €5 million to implement a strategic programme “The Future is Fair – empowering Producer Organisations to achieve SDGs”. The programme is implemented by Fairtrade International and three producer networks in over 50 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, in Africa and the Middle East and in Asia and the Pacific, as well as by the Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO). Through this programme, Fairtrade International and Producer Networks aim to:

- Strengthen the advocacy capacity of its members to support producers in directly advocating for their rights and needs
- Improve its governance systems to ensure the voices of producers are being represented in its decision-making bodies

- Increase internal capacity and systems to support resource mobilisation and programme delivery that respond to producers’ needs
- Advance digitalisation to strengthen impact reporting, producer compliance and learning across the membership.

During the initial phase, the programme implementation team successfully established the project governance structure, internal reporting mechanisms, and monitoring processes. This time, the consortium transitioned to TolaData to perform their MEL, as seen in Figure 12, which depicts a snapshot of their project. Fairtrade International developed a TolaData digital dashboard containing detailed EC FFPA information, including logframe indicators, financial data, and activity related metrics. The dashboard was introduced to implementing partners, accompanied by regular training sessions on its use. Currently, the platform is being piloted for internal quarterly reporting by partners.

Figure 12: TolaData screenshot of the ECFFPA Programme

NAME	PROJECT ID CODE	STAGE	GROUP	START DATE	END DATE	STATUS
0. The Future is Fair - empowering Producer Organisations to achieve SDGs	450-289	Implementation	EC FFPA	01.01.2024	31.12.2027	Active
1. The Future is Fair - Global Advocacy Policy influencing	450-289	Implementation	EC FFPA	01.01.2024	31.12.2027	Active
2. The Future is Fair - Governance & Inclusion	450-289	Implementation	EC FFPA	01.01.2024	31.12.2027	Active
3. The Future is Fair - Fundraising & PCM	450-289	Implementation	EC FFPA	01.01.2024	31.12.2027	Active
4. The Future is Fair - Global Impact & Learning	450-289	Implementation	EC FFPA	01.01.2024	31.12.2027	Active

4 Link to the ECFFPA Programm on the Fairtrade Impact Map: [https://impactmap.fairtrade.net/projects/ec-ff- pa-the-future-is-fair#~\(state~\(filters~\(entityType~'project~active~\(~~\)\)\)~version~1\)](https://impactmap.fairtrade.net/projects/ec-ff- pa-the-future-is-fair#~(state~(filters~(entityType~'project~active~(~~)))~version~1))

Future collaboration

Looking ahead, TolaData is set to play an increasingly integral role across Fairtrade's numerous programmes and projects. Fairtrade will continue to roll out the platform to support its growing number of initiatives. In addition, the Global Indicator Library will continue to develop through Fairtrade's feedback to the TolaData development team. This feature will facilitate the use of standardised indicators across all Fairtrade projects, significantly improving data aggregation and reporting. With these advancements, TolaData will become a key tool in driving Fairtrade's commitment to transparency, impact measurement, and sustainable development.

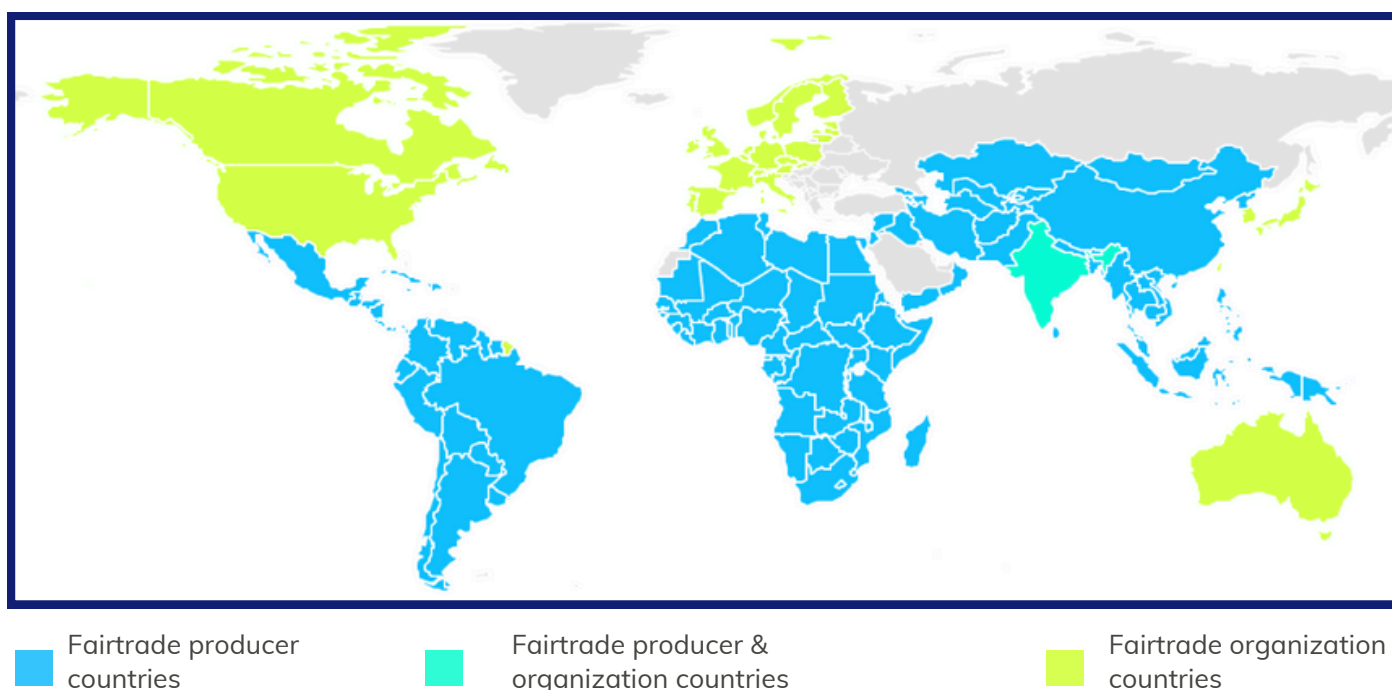
Conclusion

Fairtrade's transition to a digital monitoring and evaluation system represents a significant step toward streamlining and improving MEL processes across projects and programmes.

This case study provides an introduction to the challenges and successes of this digital transformation, illustrating how Fairtrade addressed decentralisation and usability issues by implementing standardised indicators and streamlining data collection across regions. The success of this digital transformation, particularly in initiatives like the DONUTS and Future is Fair Programmes, underscores the importance of continuous training, collaboration and adaptation.

Looking ahead, Fairtrade's partnership with TolaData will further refine its MEL processes, enabling more effective impact reporting and supporting its commitment to sustainable and ethical practices. Through these advancements, Fairtrade continues to empower marginalised producers, foster equitable trade, and promote global consumer awareness of fair trading practices.

Figure 13: Fairtrade International 'where we work' graphic



TolaData Case Study

Fairtrade International This document was produced by TolaData with support from Fairtrade International in May/ June 2025. All screenshots were generously provided by Fairtrade International, with charts and maps adapted by TolaData from Fairtrade International sources. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Fairtrade International. The designations employed and the presentation of material throughout the publication do not imply expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of Fairtrade International or TolaData concerning the legal borders or status of any geography or its governing authorities.

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TolaData

