Fairtrade goes hand in hand with co-operation. Around the world, there are thousands of organised co-operatives where people work together for the benefit of everyone.

1. What Does Co-operation Mean?

Class Discussion: In your class think about the idea of co-operation in your everyday life and what it means. For instance:

- Can you think of an example when:
  - You have helped a friend with something?
  - Your parents have asked you to help do things at home?
- Is it easier to do things when you are working alone or with someone else?
- What do you think co-operation means?
- Have you ever won a competition? How does it feel if you don’t win?

Co-operation means working together with other people towards the same goals. When people work together it is possible for everyone to be successful, but in competitions there is usually just one winner.

2. What is a co-operative?

The worldwide co-operative movement was established in 1844 during the Industrial Revolution. This was a time of great exploitation and hardship for working people and there was a need for fairness, honesty and support for all. Robert Owen’s ideas at New Lanark were thought to be an inspiration to the Rochdale Pioneers who set up the first co-operative society.

A co-operative is a group of people who set up an enterprise which:

- Allows anyone to become a member
- Is run democratically, with all members having an equal say in decision-making
- Is run openly and honestly with good quality products at fair prices.
According to the United Nations, co-operatives have directly contributed to improving the living standards of over half the world's population by creating jobs, improving livelihoods, providing access to financial services and building stronger communities!

At the heart of Fairtrading co-operatives are found. They provide much need support and market access for small farmers and agricultural producers. There are lots of different types of co-operatives in different economic sectors. The most important thing is that it is an enterprise which is owned and democratically run by its member farmers.

**3. How does a co-operative work?**

*An agricultural co-operative is for farmers. This is how it operates:*

A. Farmers buy shares in the co-operative to become members.

B. The co-operative buys goods from other firms (such as fertilisers and seeds) and sells these to the members at a low price.

C. The members sell their farm produce to the co-operative society (crops like maize, cocoa, cotton, coffee, milk etc.)

D. The co-operative tries to get a good price when it sells these products again.

E. Some big co-operatives export goods abroad.

F. Some co-operatives change products (like making butter and cheese out of milk or milling maize to sell flour.)

G. The co-operative may give training to the farmers to help them grow better crops.

H. The co-operative may also give loans to the farmers so they can buy new things and expand their farm.

Co-operatives offer poor farmers a way out of poverty because they can work together to get services that they did not have before.
Activity – Can you co-operate?

You have just read how a farming cooperative works. Your task is to co-operate with your class mates to illustrate how it works as a large wall display.

You will need: Large pieces of thick sugar paper, coloured pens/crayons, stapler or tape.

What to do:
1. You will be split into 8 groups.
2. Each group is responsible for drawing a picture to represent a part (a letter) of the cooperative process.
3. You will be given a caption and you have to illustrate the caption. You must also write the words on the page.
4. When the pictures are finished, each group must stand in turn and present their part of the larger display explaining what you have drawn and why you have drawn it, so everyone can see how their picture fits with the story of how a co-operative business works.
5. Mount the pictures in sequence on the wall.

Class Discussion: How did you co-operate?

Would it have been different if one person had worked alone?
What were the benefits of doing the task as a group?
What would you do differently?

[With thanks to the Cooperative College]