The effects of fair trade on livelihood diversification and food security: a study of Peruvian coffee farmers

SURG | Social Sciences, Journalism (SSJ) | Tags: International Travel; Surveys; Interviews; Fieldwork; Qualitative Data Analysis

This cover page is meant to focus your reading of the sample proposal, summarizing important aspects of proposal writing that the author did well or could have improved. Review the following sections before reading the sample. The proposal is also annotated throughout to highlight key elements of the proposal’s structure and content.

Proposal Strengths

<table>
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<th>The researcher explicitly identifies gaps in knowledge and makes claims for why it is important to fill these gaps using evidence from past research to support their assertions.</th>
<th>The proposal utilizes rhetorical questions throughout. Instead we suggest creating direct statements about your project and the questions you are trying to answer.</th>
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<td>The methods of data collection (surveys, interviews), sample size, recruitment strategies, and methods of analysis are all justified and described in terms of how they help to answer the research question.</td>
<td>No proof of contact is included. As an international project working with an organization, it is crucial to reference the appendix where you have a proof of contact (email screenshot, whatsapp screenshot, formal letter, etc.) to make it clear that you have the collaboration you claim to have.</td>
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<td>The researcher justifies the location of the project in a way that builds on the justification for the project as a whole.</td>
<td>While some queries are present, an explicit research question or statement of objectives would strengthen the proposal.</td>
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Other Key Features to Take Note Of

Projects that require international travel are eligible to receive additional funding of up to ½ the price of the round-trip plane ticket (as long as that travel is not to a researcher’s country of permanent residence).

SURG proposals do not require IRB submission at time of application. However, the students must include CITI Training Certificate in Social and Behavioral Research in the appendix of their grant application; this appendix was removed from the sample grant for anonymity. Please see the Human Subjects Research section of our website for additional details.

Any project with survey or interview methods should include the survey and interview questions as an appendix.
Fair trade certification has grown tremendously in the last few decades as a mechanism for improving the lives of small-scale producers in developing countries. Consumers of fair trade commodities like coffee agree to pay a higher price for the product with the knowledge that fair trade certified producers are held to certain environmental and working condition standards and that the extra profits earned will be used to give producers access to credit and higher wages. This, in theory, guarantees greater income and stability of well-being for producers and their households. But are improved, more stable livelihoods, rather than just incomes, a sure thing for producers who become fair trade certified? In particular, how do changing patterns of agricultural production resulting from certification affect the food security of farmers?

Stability related to economic mechanisms specific to fair trade is well-studied, and researchers have determined that fair trade certified producers are receiving higher prices than non-certified producers. However, as Dragusanu et al note, “It is not a foregone conclusion that the price floor fully insulates farmers from the impacts of significant price declines” (2014). Therefore, empirical evidence on the intersection between fair trade, risk mitigation, and income stability and their effects on livelihood would be particularly valuable. Ellis defines livelihood diversification as “the process by which rural families construct a diverse portfolio of activities and social support capabilities in order to survive and improve their standards of living” (1998). To date, little empirical work has been done examining livelihood diversification and the income risk associated to switching to fair trade activities. While Smith has argued that fair trade can improve diversification, he does so by reviewing the current literature and offering a theoretical basis rather than by performing empirical tests and examining individual experiences (2009). He recognizes that the body of evidence on this topic is small (Becchetti and Costantino 2008; Le Mare 2007). These ideas thus remain under-tested, particularly in the Latin American context. Are producers actually better off in terms of livelihood diversification and income streams than they would have been without fair trade certification?

Within this broader question, I am particularly interested in investigating well-being as it relates to food security among fair trade certified producers. Current views on this matter in the literature are conflicting. Jaffee finds that among Mexican coffee producers, fair trade certified ones were less likely to experience food shortages (2009). Meanwhile, another study found that although certified households earned higher gross coffee revenue, this did not translate to greater food security (Mendez et al 2010). Mendez suggests possible channels for this phenomenon, including higher production costs associated with certified production, the infrequency of payments during the hunger period, and the incentive to specialize in production of the fair trade commodity, rather than diversifying agricultural and other sources of income. What these studies did not consider is a more thorough and locally contextualized assessment of food security. By including relevant questions in my survey, I will address this question of fair trade’s impact on food security more in depth than other studies have been able to achieve in the past, and thus be able to weigh in on this controversy.

I have connected with the CEO of a fair trade coffee company that makes arrangements between farming communities and students planning to do research on the impacts of fair trade. He has agreed to help make arrangements between me and the Pangoa Cooperative, located in San Martin de Pangoa, Peru, with whom he has developed a relationship since 2003. Given the length and strength of his relationship with this community, I will have a basis on which to build trust with the farmers in order to obtain truthful responses. Peru is an interesting place to study given recent outbreaks of a “coffee rust” disease that unfortunately have damaged significant portions of crops since 2012. In addition, this region has utilized coffee as an alternative crop to...
SURG Application (Summer 2016): Economics

coca—an Andes-native plant traditionally used for medicinal and religious purposes in addition to being the raw material for cocaine. With these contexts in mind, this setting is particularly suitable for evaluating how farmers deal with the risk of their fair trade coffee crop and how farmers have managed to sustain their livelihoods in light of significant changes to their fields.

I will administer a survey of structured questions along with open-ended interview questions to members of the coffee cooperative. The cooperative is made up of approximately 200 smallholder farmers, while my intended sample size is around 50 producers. The survey and interview will include basic demographic questions, certification history, questions about land and agricultural production, income sources and time allocated to each, income flow throughout the year, and food security measures. To get at how fair trade certification has affected their livelihoods, I will ask retroactive questions about land use, food security, and income sources before certification. Most of my structured questions, including measures of food security, will be adopted from other household surveys validated in developing country contexts. I will be utilizing three different measures of food security recognized by the International Food Policy Research Institute and the World Food Programme: a food consumption expenditure score, a household diary diversity score, and a household coping strategy index. I will also gather supplementary qualitative information on these topics, which best incorporate the perceptions of food insecurity by those most affected and are well-suited for developing country contexts (Kennedy).

After data collection, I will return to the U.S. to enter, compile, and analyze the data. This includes categorizing and coding qualitative responses, as well as creating composite measures: statistically combining responses to questions that fall within the same category. For instance, I will calculate the existing food security indices. I will compute averages for the outcome variables reported before and after certification—considered to be the counterfactual and treatment states—and test whether any differences are statistically significant. These tests will help reveal the effects of fair trade, if any. In order to illuminate relationships in the data, I will create scatter plots relating different variables among each other using STATA—a statistical program. I will also run regressions using STATA of the outcomes of interest on fair trade certification and other household and individual characteristics. Testing statistical significance on coefficients from these regressions will illuminate findings on the effect of fair trade certification, including differential effects across characteristics like gender.

The skills I have acquired through coursework, in my six quarters as research assistant in a mixed-methods lab, and from experiences abroad make me qualified to complete this project. In econometrics courses, I have acquired the mathematical modeling skills necessary to put together and interpret models, and to test these models using data and regressions. This quarter, I completed an applied econometrics course where I wrote a paper utilizing econometric methods to analyze an existing dataset. As a research assistant, I have helped put together surveys, translated them into Spanish and administered one to approximately 50 Spanish-speaking individuals in Evanston. I have also analyzed survey results using STATA, so I know how to manipulate datasets and code for summary measures. My experience travelling to Bolivia through the Global Engagement Studies Institute (GESI) program and working with a non-governmental organization exclusively in Spanish for two months also gives me the confidence to communicate and administer surveys in Spanish to complete my data collection. As a part of my degree in the Mathematical Methods in the Social Sciences program, I am required to complete a senior thesis next year. By completing research over the summer, I hope to begin to develop my thesis project.