



A FUTURE IN COFFEE:

Growing a new generation of coffee professionals

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BACKGROUND

Chic coffee shops are multiplying all over the world, but in many places coffee farmers are dwindling. In one area of Indonesia, the average age of a coffee farmer is sixty; in Colombia it is fifty. Growing coffee is hard work that can sometimes generate little income. Older people who have spent their lives in the fields persist, but their children are leaving to seek more gainful, modern and enjoyable employment. A new generation of coffee professionals is urgently needed.

Over the last decade, therefore, organisations in various parts of the world have launched projects to increase the number of youth involved in the coffee sector. Some have been extremely successful, generating benefits that extend far beyond the coffee sector into social, economic and psychological welfare. These projects provide clear insights that can be applied in many other places and can potentially transform the entire coffee production sector. As part of the development of the Coffee Toolkit *Sustainable Coffee As a Family Business*¹, Hivos commissioned several case studies on best practices to involve youth in coffee. These tools were included in the Toolkit and the five case studies are presented here. After an outline of each case, we offer the general lessons that can be distilled from them all.

¹ Hivos, IDH, Agri-ProFocus, Fair & Sustainable Advisory services, Sustainable Coffee as a Family Business: Approaches and tools to include women and youth, October 2014.
Download: <https://hivos.org/coffeetoolkit>.

REVOLUTIONISING COFFEE PRODUCTION: CASE STUDIES

1 YOUTH AND SUSTAINABLE COFFEE IN BAJAWA NGADA NTT, FLORES, **INDONESIA**

Coffee plants cover 8,000 hectares of fertile volcanic soil on Flores Island, Indonesia, but around the year 2000, productivity there was very low. Ageing farmers employed out-dated practices; coffee plantations looked like jungles dominated by dense intercropping plants. Locals said the coffee fields grew pumpkins, since pumpkin vines crawled all over them. The farmers knew little about processing or marketing their coffee beans and were reliant on middlemen. They therefore earned just 40% of the price generated in a café in New York, remained poor and were unable to invest in improving their practices.

Children reaching adolescence tend to move to other places to seek a better livelihood.

Many men and women choose to migrate to Malaysia or other islands in Indonesia. Of those opting to stay in their homeland, most young men would rather be a motorcycle taxi driver, as the job earns money faster...

Young people remain in their parents' homes and do not develop a sense of responsibility for their own lives.

Young people on Flores Island therefore saw coffee as a lost cause and abandoned the fields. Then, in 2010, the local government, together with a local NGO and a local Catholic church, spearheaded a multi-pronged intervention that turned the situation around entirely. They created Field Schools to teach techniques in cultivation skills, pruning, post-harvest processing, financial management, marketing and price negotiation. To date they have trained 429 women and 261 men.

Low prices resulted from the selling of unprocessed beans, so the programme focused on increasing farmers' roles in the processing and marketing of them, thereby creating added value. They helped organise farmer groups of 50 to 100 families and taught them the wet-process procedure for Arabica coffee, which is important for getting good quality. The local government supplied equipment and capital, providing some groups with a processing unit equipped with items such as pulpers, washers and drying shelves. Productivity doubled. Their coffee, sold in the US, was branded with the name of their location, 'Flores Bajawa'.

Initially, the priority was to train older people, but later priority extended to young people, who were trained as field coordinators. From 2007 onwards, site managers were also appointed to the processing units: four young males and six young females in total. The project expanded in scope and depth. Prices received for the coffee berries went up from 20-30% of the New York price to 70-80%! Farmers rushed to increase the quantities they produced. Flora Bajawa Arabica won first prize in a local competition and gained local consumer preference. Exporters even began to contribute equipment to the farmers, to facilitate processing. The average age of people working in the Flores coffee industry is now falling. The pastor in one community includes farming advice in his sermon. The entire community has been galvanised by the training and support in coffee production.

2. OCOTAL COFFEE SCHOOL NUEVA SEGOVIA, NICARAGUA

In 2003 and 2004, international coffee prices plummeted to the point that, at \$40-50 per quintal (46 kg) they were not sufficient to keep a farm going in Nueva Segovia. Then a group of concerned citizens decided the solution was to improve both productivity and quality on their farms and to cease selling their coffee via export companies without certification or differentiation. In 2004, they founded a school to develop technical skills in people connected with the coffee sector. Stakeholders in the sector - business people, educators, farmers and agricultural professionals - provided human resources for instruction activities or paid for student scholarships and lent their farms for field practice.

Over the past 11 years, the school has trained young men and women from all levels of the coffee sector: agronomists, farmers, farm staff, administrators in technical disciplines related to crop management, agricultural development work, phytosanitary diagnosis and farm administration, as well as in topics related to industrialisation and marketing, in particular coffee cupping and barista skills. Students have become technicians who specialise in equipment and machinery repair for coffee processing plants, roasters who ensure uniform quality of the product, and *promotores* who monitor farms to ensure standards are maintained for organic and fair-trade certification.

This strategy has transformed coffee production in the area. Nueva Segovia's coffee has become positioned in international markets as a high-quality coffee and has won top awards in the Cup of Excellence, an international competition for high-end coffees. The negotiating capacity of the cooperatives and export companies with international buyers has soared. 'Previously, large buyers would say that only 20% of your coffee was high quality,' noted one businessman. 'Now I qualify for Starbucks, we have a cupping laboratory, and we have become aware that our coffee is high-end.'

² Informe Nacional sobre Desarrollo Humano 2011: "Las Juventudes construyendo Nicaragua". UNDP, Nicaragua. 2011

³ <http://www.soppexcca.org/en/>

3. THE COFFEE KIDS PROGRAMME JINOTEGA, NICARAGUA

Nearly 40% of Jinoteга's population was illiterate in the year 2000. About 90% of them lived in rural areas. Young people comprised 27% of the illiterate population. And they were more than twice as likely to be unemployed as people over 30 years of age. According to the United Nations Development Programme, even when they received education it did not help them find employment².

The Agricultural and Livestock Cooperative Union³ believed that a scarcity of land for growing coffee was to blame for the unemployment among rural youth and their migration to the cities. So they set up a fund to raise money to buy land. However, they failed to manage the necessary amount of money, so two years later they switched to providing training for young people from coffee growing families. They set up the Coffee Kids programme, which offers scholarships to both boys and girls to pursue secondary, professional-technical and university studies. The scholarships are targeted towards study programmes linked to the need to improve quality in the coffee chain and to the various social development needs of the cooperatives and communities where they work. They also develop training courses together with local technical education centres in areas such as mid-level rural development management, coffee-cupping, barista skills, *promotores* of high-end coffee, environmental protection, marketing, customer service, farm diversification, rural tourism, health, literacy and other areas of business.

Some of these young people get job opportunities provided by the union. Its quality control and coffee-cupping laboratory is managed by two young 'master tasters' who are farmers' offspring and have qualified as Q-Grader tasters by the Coffee Quality Institute in the US. One of them is also a barista and has been selected for seven consecutive years as the official coffee roaster of the International Cup of Excellence competition. The union also maintains efforts to help young people acquire land for crop raising or coffee-land renovation.

Lastly, the programme runs numerous initiatives to improve social life among young people, build self-esteem, counter depression and isolation, and provide resources for sports as well as creative and cultural activities such as theatre, dance, video production, personal development and environmental protection.

'One of the things that make it unattractive for young people to stay in their communities is the lack of options for leisure, for development of creativity and in general, for exercise of their right to recreation.'

4. THE YOUNG COFFEE FARMERS PROGRAMME ANTIOQUIA, COLOMBIA

In 2009, rural Antioquia was an extremely depressed area. Some 70% of its coffee grower families lived in poverty or extreme poverty, earning less than four US dollars per day. This resulted in poor nutrition and poor health. Economic crisis and armed conflict had drained away opportunities for social and economic development. Education levels were exceedingly low and there was no training or money to stimulate better production techniques and improve farm quality and competitiveness. 95% of coffee growers had less than five hectares of land and 89% less than three. Young people were migrating to the cities in large numbers.

On smallholder structures, the children learn traditional techniques from their families, but remain unqualified for the adoption of better agricultural and farm management practices that are necessary to establish more productive and sustainable farming systems that could mean a decent job and income.

The Colombian Coffee Growers Federation, supported by various international partners, therefore launched a programme to improve productivity on the farms and develop good agricultural practices. It aimed at both human and agricultural development, focusing on empowerment and awareness raising, and developing the social, entrepreneurial and agricultural skills of the young farmers. All family members of the coffee growers were invited to participate. Some 30% of the participants were women.

Fifteen young farmers groups were organised and offered regular advice from agricultural experts. The farmers were encouraged to grow food crops as well as coffee to raise nutrition levels in the area. Post harvesting processing was improved and the farmers received financial and technical support to improve equipment and infrastructure. The training also covered leadership development, conflict resolution, teamwork, nutrition and other social development areas.

The result was that 573 hectares of coffee were established or renewed with high yield and rust resistant varieties, nearly three million new coffee trees were planted and over 322 hectares of food security crops established for better family nutrition and budget management. 1,166 young farmers registered at Colombian Coffee Growers. A new generation of coffee farmers has been created, contributing to the stability and future of the sector.

5. THE VIJANA UPRISING YOUTH GROUP & NEEMA YOUTH GROUP – CIRIGWA COOPERATIVE MERU COUNTY, **KENYA**

In our area young people concentrate on chewing and selling khat [...],’ says a member of the Vijana Uprising Group. ‘Before our group was formed, the youth were scattered, unemployed and had lost focus. If the interventions had not been implemented, they would have engaged themselves in illegal practices, drug abuse and immorality.’

Around 2012, two small youth groups were formed within the Cirigwa Farmers’ Cooperative. A company called Sustainable Management Services (SMS, a subsidiary of ECOM Agro Industrial Corporation) trained the youth in pruning, composting, spraying and harvesting so they were able to help carry out these tasks on each other’s coffee fields. Together, they began purchasing inputs, such as fertilisers, to increase yields on their farms. They also became *promoter* farmers who offered training in these skills to other farmers. Productivity in the coffee fields surged. ‘The members have recorded tremendous change in terms of quality and quantity,’ one group noted in its report. ‘One member reported producing 25-30 kg of cherry per tree. The members are now self-motivated [...] with their coffee farms among the leading farms in the country.’

This brought new life and hope into their communities and vastly improved relationships. The groups’ successes motivated other young people to acquire land and grow coffee. Their members also received training in management skills and close mentorship from field staff, which they used to engage in other activities. ‘Table banking’, for instance, was used to provide soft loans to members to invest in coffee seedlings. Currently, they are leasing land and developing a joint farm, the proceeds of which will enable individual members to buy land and expand their farming.

‘If youth are involved in coffee, it will bring a huge change over time in the society.’

Neema Youth Group, Kenya

CONCLUSIONS

WHY YOUTH FLEE THE COFFEE SECTOR

Coffee is grown in rural areas of the developing world, which are sometimes isolated and neglected by government authorities. Services are few, poverty widespread and education levels low. These factors feed into each other and create a vicious cycle of hopelessness amongst young people. Incomes are very low, particularly since farmers are at the low-value end of the coffee chain. In addition, coffee is often grown on smallholdings and ageing farmers use old production methods that result in low output. Being somewhat isolated, they have less access to information about new techniques that can be applied to boost productivity. Scanty incomes deter investments in field maintenance, which compounds the productivity problem. Populations in the coffee sector generally lack education and training.

'Many coffee-producing regions lack qualified human resources to meet the needs of the dynamic and demanding international markets in particular because of poor educational systems, which are insufficiently attuned to the needs of local economies.'

Case study Nueva Segovia, Nicaragua.

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES THAT ATTRACTED YOUNG PEOPLE BACK TO THE COFFEE SECTOR

Increased education and training

In each of these studies, the pivotal element attracting young people was education and training, both for women and men. Once this was facilitated, participants experienced the benefits in terms of productivity in their fields, and progressed to training others as well. The training opened up many new vistas and caused the young people to look at their fields and at coffee production in a new light. It fitted better with their desire to be part of the modern world. Self-confidence soared, their ambitions expanded, and they branched out into other activities within the coffee chain and beyond.

Value chain approach

The most successful initiatives broadened their focus from farming to all aspects of the coffee chain. This worked well with the young people as it diversified the range of activities they could be involved in and brought their work in line with developments in the modern world. The communities involved were able to take advantage of new trends in coffee-consumerism. Young people received training in processing technique, organisation, management,

financial management, marketing, tasting, coffee-cupping and becoming baristas. In many cases, young people were also trained to become trainers and take over leadership roles in cooperatives, unions and in the community generally. Some of the young people opened cafes.

Multi-stakeholder approach

In several cases, local governments played an important role in initiating the strategies described. In others, the initiators were coffee cooperatives or unions. But none of these actors functioned in isolation. They drew in other agencies as sources of support, expertise and training. These included companies in the coffee sector, universities or training institutes, international NGOs, even a church in Indonesia and a city council in Spain.

Gender Equality

All the successful projects encouraged women and girls to participate equally with males, receive training in all the areas connected with coffee production and develop ambitions and goals. In Colombia, the Young Coffee Growers Programme, which focuses on empowerment and capacity building, has 30% female participation. At the Ocotal Coffee School in Nicaragua, women made up 35% of the young farmers trained, 32% of the technical staff, 74% of the tasters and 50% of the baristas. The two highly successful youth groups in Kenya comprise more female than male members (10 male: 12 female and 4 male: 10 female). The SOPPEXCCA Strategy for youth participation ran a clear and proactive gender policy, and many of the young people who were trained up to university level are women. Some of the young women opened their own coffee bars after they were trained, others became tasters, and one even went to university, studied agriculture and became a farmer in her own right. This has had a very positive effect on gender relations.

'A second key learning is that young women are equal to male counterparts. The women members of the group are more appreciated by the men counterparts, especially in the group leadership and management.'

Kenya case studies

Focus on community development

The interventions did not limit themselves to agricultural training. They focused on wider areas of empowerment within the community, such as leadership development, provisions of social necessities and even creative work. This combination of foci seems to have translated into a major source of general support for the young people, enthused and motivated them, and increased their feelings of self-worth. They earned more money, saw a future before them and saw themselves developing at a personal level. This amounts to a potent mix of change.

Local ownership

The initiatives described were all initiated by entities on the ground, close to the target communities: municipal authorities, cooperatives and unions. The designers of the projects thus knew what was happening in their communities, what the problems were, and could create initiatives that addressed real, specific needs. When one thing did not work, they could shift gear easily and respond to new needs generated by involvement in this fast-developing industry.

'Before the interventions, no youth was involved in coffee farming. We were poor and idle and very much involved with alcohol...'

Neema Youth Group, Kenya

IN SUM...

In all of the cases described, rural populations moved from a situation of hopelessness and apathy to becoming proudly interlinked into the global coffee market.

Coffee can therefore be a means of achieving personal and community transformation and provide new impetus for rural populations. In many of our locations, the young people were not just despairing but resorting to drug use and criminal activity. Once the central facet of their lives – their work and income – was strengthened, they became enthusiastic and positive in their outlooks, expressing confidence and ambition. A focus on the coffee chain supplied goals to their education and was a key factor in promoting gender equality. It was a highly effective path to empowerment. If stakeholders in the private and public sector join forces to improve the conditions of coffee growers, better quality follows. Coffee can indeed be a potent stimulant and energiser.

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