



# WOMEN'S ACCESS, EQUITY AND EMPOWERMENT UNDER THE FAIRTRADE GENDER STRATEGY

## INTRODUCTION

There are currently 604 coffee small-scale producer organizations (SPOs) certified as Fairtrade in over 32 countries, producing 745,500 metric tons of coffee, with 758,400 farmers as members - only 17% women.

The [Fairtrade Gender Strategy 2016-2020](#) set a clear direction and approach for Fairtrade's global work on gender. In 2019, Fairtrade commissioned the Center for International Forestry Research for [a study to assess progress on the gender strategy](#) in the coffee sector, examining Fairtrade's contribution to improving outcomes for Fairtrade farmers, workers and their communities with a focus on more inclusion and empowerment of women and girls.



**The findings indicate that Fairtrade has contributed to greater gender equality in the studied producer organizations (POs) despite challenging structural and cultural barriers to women's equal participation in the environments where Fairtrade operates.**

## KEY STUDY FINDINGS



### Fairtrade Standards and gender programmes are being implemented

Women are highly active in agricultural coffee production in the six POs included in the study, representing Indonesia, Kenya and Guatemala. Despite this, women's membership in the SPOs ranged from 12% to 40%. **All POs had some degree of women represented in governance and some gender programming**, although half had no approved gender policy in place at the time (which has since become a Fairtrade requirement).



### The POs studied made good progress on participation and inclusion

On average, progress was strongest in increasing equal participation and inclusion of women, for instance in the membership and management of the POs. Social empowerment increased through **PO gender policies, gender sensitization and leadership trainings**, while economic empowerment requires addressing **technical skills and access to membership and capital**. Transformative change was less prevalent, attributable to a longer timeframe required and Fairtrade's focus on POs and members, not broader legal or social constructs.



### Common barriers are structural, cultural and economic

Commonly cited barriers to inclusion and participation are **lack of women's land ownership** which impacts SPO membership; **lack of technical knowledge and services access**, such as relating to organic production requirements; **gender norms** related to household work and an associated lack of time; and **lack of access to capital**.



### Engaging men as allies and creating spaces for women are successful approaches

Working with men and encouraging them to support women in production and leadership roles can **reduce systemic issues** that hinder gender equality. Women's committees and projects offer channels and resources for women specifically, on the way to breaking down gender hierarchies.

# LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



## Systemic change takes time

While good progress has been made, significant barriers to women's full and equitable participation remain, which are structural, cultural and outside Fairtrade's direct realm of influence. Recommendations are to consider Fairtrade's intended scope, take local context into account, and involve partners.



## Membership is the first step to increased participation and representation

A land ownership requirement, common to many SPOs, poses a structural barrier for women to become members. Some Fairtrade POs are trying to address this creatively, by relaxing these requirements, or considering entire households as members. Fairtrade can also develop requirements that provide more protections for casual labour within POs, including women and other non-members.



## Scale out successful programmes

Successful projects – including the Women's School of Leadership model and Growing Women in Coffee – have built confidence but also addressed real-world constraints for women, such as investing in labour-saving tools, access to credit, and value chain development. Programmes at the PO or even national levels (such as the Women Coffee Producer Forum in Indonesia) are also useful examples of developing and marketing women-produced coffee brands.



## Support PO gender policies and projects

Fairtrade can provide more guidance on best practices in gender policies, including protections for casual and non-member household labour.



### The successful 'Growing Women in Coffee' programme in Kenya\*

aimed to encourage and enable women to manage their own coffee production by:

- Transferring at least 50 coffee bushes from male to female household members
- Offering gender-specific training to women on how to produce coffee
- Building efficient biogas stoves to reduce women's labour and conserve forest in the region
- Developing a new coffee brand and forming a youth coffee association

By enabling the transfer of coffee bushes, **300 women farmers registered as full cooperative members**, giving them access to income and training. Men and women reported **improved living standards** through increased income and enhanced working conditions and labour distribution. **For the first time in the history of the Nairobi Coffee Exchange, women sold branded coffee in the 2016/2017 season.**

\*funded by the UK's Big Lottery Fund, the Dutch Post Code Lottery, Jersey Overseas Aid Commission, Guernsey Overseas Aid Commission

# RESEARCH METHODS

The study looked at how Fairtrade's standards and programmes contribute to achieving the Gender Strategy targets through:

- 1 **A document review** to collect, catalogue and analyse Fairtrade relevant literature to assess the scope and content of activities.
- 2 **Interviews** with Fairtrade staff and producers to explore roles and responsibilities, to assess how policies have improved gender inclusion and equality, to examine how outcomes are monitored and to identify case studies.
- 3 **A field study** of six coffee producer organizations with different levels of involvement in gender programmes from Indonesia, Guatemala and Kenya. The case studies assessed how Fairtrade affects gender dynamics in family farm situations. To gather information, men and women completed intra-household surveys.
- 4 **Producer Validation and Learning workshops** where PO staff and farmers validated findings and discussed possible gender actions to improve outcomes for women in their communities.

# FAIRTRADE RESPONSE

Gender equality is important to Fairtrade. The study findings provide a basis for scaling the positive impacts of Fairtrade's gender programmes. Fairtrade also welcomes the concrete recommendations to further enhance Fairtrade's gender strategy and related interventions.

For any questions on the study and Fairtrade's response, please contact [impact@fairtrade.net](mailto:impact@fairtrade.net).

Image: Coffee worker for Fairtrade certified cooperative Koperasi Baithul Qiradh Baburayyan in Indonesia. (c) Nathalie Bertrams  
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