

# Women: Champions in Meeting Certification Standards

*Asociación Aldea Global Jinotega's experience, in partnership with UTZ (now Rainforest Alliance): the business case for mainstreaming gender in Nicaragua*

## Aldea Global

Asociación 'Aldea Global' Jinotega is a small farmer association which supports more than 12,000 members in North Central Nicaragua, in Central America. It provides members small loans and technical assistance for basic grains, vegetables, and coffee. It also exports the specialty coffee of its members.

In 1992, 22 small farmers started this association with the aim of seeking sustainable solutions for smallholder family producers. The association focusses on promoting environmentally friendly production, development of resilient small farms, as well as improving family health.

## The Coffee Sector

In the coffee sector, Aldea Global has become Nicaragua's fourth-largest coffee exporter. It serves more than 4,800 small producer members who live from the coffee culture in the high mountains of Jinotega, Matagalpa, Madriz and Nueva Segovia.

Aldea Global offers coffee certified by Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, Organic Fair Trade and Manos de Mujer. To this end, Aldea Global internally developed a system, called Aldea-Cert, to provide technical assistance to the farms and to guarantee compliance with certification criteria. This work is done by a network of 30 'promoters', the sons and daughters of the members of Aldea. So at the same time, Aldea created new employment opportunities for youth within the coffee highlands.

Coffee in Nicaragua is produced mostly in small family farms through family labor. Most farms are managed by men and characterized by a patriarchal culture. The man is 'the leader of the house' who commands in all productive matters and controls the coffee income that has been produced with the work of the whole family. Only 21% of the coffee farms are managed by women.



## GENDER-BASED CONSTRAINTS

### Limited Adoption of New Technology

Aldea Global observed that men often question technical recommendations and hardly change their practice. While women are more open to new knowledge and adopt innovations faster. Thus the limited decision-making of women in the family business limit the adoption of new technology.

### Underutilization of the Skills of Women as Quality Controllers and Managers

Women usually give more attention to the quality of the harvested coffee than their male counterparts. They demonstrate responsibility and organization to meet certification standards. However, the gender culture often makes their work less visible and less valorized.

### Low Representation of Female Leaders in Governing Bodies

As a consequence, the interests of women are hardly addressed.

### Less Investment in Health Issues

Women usually invest coffee earnings in food, health, education, and family housing. Men tend to prioritize investments in motorcycles, vehicles or productive assets. As women have less access to (coffee) earnings, health issues are often addressed in a limited way.





# STRATEGIES

In 2013, Aldea Global reformulated its by-laws committing itself to mainstream the gender perspective within their policies. This is supported by the UTZ Sector Partnerships Program.

## Setting Gender Parameters

At Aldea Global, at least 40% of the territorial delegates and governing bodies and 50% of the staff must be women.

## Training and Technical Assistance Directed to the Couple, Not Only to the Man

In several areas, women delegates make door-to-door visits to raise awareness among men to allow their wives to participate in gender training, financial education and technical training.

## Providing Women Access to Credit

Aldea Global promotes that female farmers get access to small loans through solidarity groups consisting of five to six women. Currently, 34% of its credit clientele is female.

## Seeking a Market for Coffee Produced by Women: Tierra Madre

Since 2011, Aldea Global promotes the sale of its 'Tierra Madre' coffee with sales growing annually.

## Supporting Female Ownership of plots

Aldea Global supports women to secure the legal ownership of land through its Social Program of Tierra Madre coffee sales.

# RESULTS



## Benefits for the company

### Increased Quality and Quantity

In families where women and men cooperate, the quality of the coffee produced is better. The volumes are more in compliance with the volumes agreed upon.

### Certification Standards Better Met

Aldea Global data show that 59% of the farms managed by women meet the certification standards versus 51% of the farms managed by men. Meeting certification standards has a positive impact on access to certified markets and the final price that families receive for their coffee.

### Reduction of the Default Rate of Microfinance Loans from Aldea Global

This results from the timely repayments of the affiliated women.

### Access to New Financing/Investments

As a gender-sensitive organization, Aldea Global attracts more funds from social investors.

### Access to a New Niche Market

The 'Tierra Madre' brand produced by women generates an expanding market opportunity.



## Benefits for women

### More Knowledge

Through their access to training and extension services, women acquired more knowledge about producing quality coffee.

### Economic Empowerment

Thanks to training and credit, women learned to manage household and business finances and obtained greater control over family income investment decisions. This has a positive impact on the social and economic sustainability of coffee families.

### Women's Access to Credit.

More women managed to acquire economic goods of high value, such as land, thanks to their access to credit.

### Legal Land Ownership

Women receive support to legally register land in their name.

### Important Health Issues Being Addressed

Thanks to investments in potable drinking water systems by companies that purchase Aldea Global's specialty coffee, health issues caused by non-potable water are being reduced.

### Higher Self-Esteem

Women are proud that their coffee, marketed as 'Café Tierra Madre', is sold in Europe and the United States.

