Women and fair trade coffee production in Nicaragua

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Abstract

Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America with a population of 5.8 million of whom just over half are women. Systems such as Fair Trade allow consumers to express concern and take action by utilizing their purchasing power to help small scale producers. If Fair Trade is understood correctly, the system will be more affective at both ends of the supply chain, from the producer to the consumer. Yet, it has long been understood that the benefits of development do not always trickle down equally to both men and women. This paper argues that Fair Trade can make an impact on women and it must be analyzed through a gendered lens as in a case study of a coffee Fair Trade cooperative in Nicaragua. This study shows that the SOPPEXCCA cooperative would not have been such a success for women farmers without being a part of Fair Trade, which provides the means by which women are empowered as producers, mothers, and community members. Though, it is not Fair Trade alone that has created this success. It is the hard work and determination of the cooperative staff and the female producers themselves. The recent history of dictatorship, revolution, civil war and the feminist movement in Nicaragua set the stage for the cooperative to make physical and mental changes for cooperative members a more realistic endeavour.

Keywords: cooperatives, Fair Trade, gender factor, supply chain, women empowerment, women farmers