THE SUCCESSION OF COFFEE FARMERS IN COLOMBIA

THE VOICE OF YOUNG RURAL PEOPLE
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1. INTRODUCTION

The generational handover is one of the structural problems of Colombian coffee farming. This is why, The Sustainable Trade Platform [PCS from its abbreviation in Spanish], in consultation with the sector has identified generational handover as a priority for reaching true sustainability.

The generational handover depends on young people deciding to remain on the land as farmers, or on them maintaining a relationship with farming production. This decision depends on an individual experience. If a young person considers that he/she can fulfil his/her welfare expectations by maintaining a relationship with said farming, this young person may consider to stay. Otherwise, they will want to leave and will do so, if the alternatives are uncertain (Visión Social, 2014).

Different studies on the topic agree that great efforts should be made to change the image that young people have of coffee in order to make it more attractive and competitive. Based on this context, the main guiding question of this study was: Does the rural situation in Colombia help or limit young people’s possibilities to remain as coffee farmers?
Migrations from rural to urban areas are natural phenomena that are showing exponential growth. The total number of settlers in cities worldwide went from 30% to 47% between 1950 and 2000. According to data from the World Bank, it is foreseen that this figure will reach 60% by 2030. Colombia is not an exception and for that reason the rural population went from 55% in 1960 to 24% in 2015 (World Bank, 2016).

It is expected that the global population will increase to 9 billion by 2050, and young people (aged between 15 and 24 years old) will represent 14 per cent of this total. Although it is expected that the youth cohort will grow worldwide, employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for young people - particularly for those that live in the economically stagnant rural areas of developing countries - remain limited, poorly paid and of low quality.

Young people do not see the farming sector as an employment niche because they think that it is work you have to sacrifice a lot for, which is also distanced from knowledge and technology for hardly any profit.

Colombian newspaper: El Progreso, 14 de enero de 2016.

According to data from the National Agricultural Census - NAC, conducted by DANE, substantial improvements have been made at a rural level in education and health, compared to the results of the 2005 NAC:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASPECT</th>
<th>NAC 2005</th>
<th>NAC 2014</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School attendance in population aged 5-16 years old.</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School attendance in population aged 17-24 years old.</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
<td>26.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate of illiteracy of rural population over the age of 15 years old.</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>12.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Healthcare membership in rural area.</td>
<td>77.2%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: DANE, 2015. Results of the National Agricultural Census - NAC.

Although agriculture represents 32% of total employment worldwide, the productivity and sustainability of this sector are compromised because rural areas are being left without young farmers. The majority of farmers are aged between 40 and 54 years old (DANE [the National Administrative Department of Statistics] 2014) and young people are planning their lives away from the countryside, as agriculture is not an attractive option.

The predominant level of education continues to be that of basic primary level, and there is not much difference between each gender: 59.7% of men reached this level compared to 56.1% of women.
CHARACTERIZATION OF RURAL COLOMBIAN POPULATION

According to the Global Employment Trends (GET) for Youth 2015 report, the world youth unemployment rate stabilised at 13% but it continues to be much higher than the previous level. Around 43% of young people from the world’s active population are not employed or are workers living in poverty. It is still not easy to be young and join the job market today.

Sara Elder, main author of the report.

Source: DANE, 2015. Results of the National Agricultural Census - NAC.
In Colombia, rural youth unemployment in 2014 reached 14%, three percentage points fewer than the urban unemployment figure. According to a report by the Colombian newspaper El Tiempo (2016), although youth unemployment continues to decrease, the rate in 2015 was quite high at 15.3%, which is almost double the national general rate despite the work placement strategies for young people promoted by the Government: The First Job Act and the “40,000 First Jobs” programme.

In addition to the above, other problems that the young rural population faces in their regions are:

- A lack of sufficient educational opportunities.
- Few work alternatives that meet their expectations.
- Discouragement in the face of low or no economic payment for their work and the lack of social recognition.
- Limited levels of intervention in their farms because their parents do not want their children to follow in their footsteps.
- Restricted access to the land due to the property succession process requirements.
- Small size of the farming units, which limits its distribution amongst young people.
- Exclusion of the financial services on account of the excessive demands to access the system and the low offer of funding channels from the traditional financial sector.
- Risks associated with the markets, which does not enable young people to have feasible and sustainable projects.
- The country’s armed conflict, which has generated forced displacement, connection and disconnection with the country side and participation in illegal crops (Jaramillo, Osorio, 2010).
2. METHOD

The majority of the generational handover studies have focused with reviewing secondary information and making state of the art reports about the situation of young people. On few cases, active participation has been considered. This study centres its interest in listening to young rural populations including their experiences, actions, motivations and expressions. Listening to what brings them closer or takes them further away from the rural scenario and coffee.

The analysis took place in five coffee-growing regions, between March and October 2015, using a case study approach. It had the support of organizations linked the Sustainable Trade Platform.

237 young people between 15 and 25 years of age, sons of owners of coffee farms, students of rural educational institutions and young workers at coffee farms.

Regions and partners from the coffee sector participating in workshops

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DEPARTMENT</th>
<th>TOWN</th>
<th>PARTNER FROM THE COFFEE SECTOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antioquia</td>
<td>Salgar</td>
<td>Cooperativa de Caficultores de Salgar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caldas</td>
<td>Anserma</td>
<td>Cooperativa de Caficultores de Anserma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cundinamarca</td>
<td>Pacho</td>
<td>Carcafé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nariño</td>
<td>Taminango</td>
<td>Carcafé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risaralda</td>
<td>Belén de Umbría</td>
<td>Comité Departamental de Cafeteros de Risaralda</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To identify the relationships that the young person establishes with themselves, with others and with those in their surroundings.

To study the life plans of young people.

To acknowledge young people’s perceptions of the rural context, their ideas about progress and their relationship with the opportunities in the area.

To promote the participation of the family in building possible scenarios for the life plans of their children.

To provide recommendations for different agents involved in projects with the young rural population.
The workshops were designed on the basis of the needs and interests of young people, applying different methods and creating spaces for dialogue and reflection, which were documented by the facilitating team.

**How were the workshops developed with young people?**

- **Coordination of different components of the workshop for the fulfilment of objectives.**
- **Identification of emerging issues proposed by young people.**
- **Recognition of differences and individual positions.**
- **Spontaneous dialogues between young people that made it possible to share what they had learned and experienced.**
- **Building on the basis of young people, starting off with what they think, how they feel and act.**
- **Identification of similarities and differences between individuals, between groups and between regions.**
To respond the question: Does the rural situation in Colombia help or limit young people’s possibilities to remain as coffee farmers? It is important to take into account:

- To acknowledge that coffee farming is related to the dynamics of production of wealth in extensive areas of the country, despite the limitations it faces today: i) the current situation of violence in rural areas; ii) the relative abandonment of the State, which complicates access to life opportunities; iii) the attraction of urban life, considered a source of progress and development compared to rural life, seen as backward and lacking in appeal; iv) the diverse young population represented in population groups: farmers, indigenous communities, Afro-descendants, displaced persons, demobilised persons; v) the appealing progress of technology, particularly from information and communication, which awakens new interests.

- To analyse the dynamics of the rural family, which can discourage young people from remaining in the countryside so as not to repeat their life story and be able to access greater opportunities in the city.
To understand that young people want to stay in the countryside provided that they are granted the benefits of the city and, in many cases, they think about living simultaneously in both areas: rural and urban.

To assess that the current sustainability practices and projects are established as a means of support for the development of projects and opportunities for the new generations, as possible scenarios for building their life stories.

To involve young people directly in reflections on their role within the current context of rural life and in particular with regard to the production of coffee, as an alternative for life and human and social sustainability.

THE MAIN REASONS PROVIDED BY YOUNG PEOPLE FOR CONTINUING IN THE COFFEE BUSINESS

- Hard and unappealing work
- Not very dignified working conditions
- Unequal distribution of the land
- Low salary
- Few options for welfare
- Inadequate educational offer
DIFFICULT AND NOT VERY APPEALING WORK

With regard to this aspect, a lot of tension was observed from parents to influence the decisions of their children in terms of continuing to live in the countryside or not. On the one hand, they dream that their children get an education and leave the countryside in search of better conditions. On the other hand, they face the great pressure of being left alone and without the option of inheriting their farm, due to the apathy their children feel towards rural life.

[...] young people leave the countryside because they have more opportunities in the city, and because working the fields is very difficult and they prefer to find something easier...or let’s say better jobs. We are thinking about new technologies as we do not want to follow the same process as our forbears. We can see that other agricultural products have new tools, automate their tasks and they involve less labour, making the quality of life better. I dream of managing many of the crop processes with the push of a button. Just like that device they invented for the coffee mill, there ought to be many more that ease a farmer’s life.

Ricardo Bernal from Pacho, Cundinamarca.

Today media is at the service of young people and that contributes to increasing their desire to leave the countryside, “the use of mobile phones, the internet, satellite TV and other information and communication technologies (ICT) are appealing to the young rural population, as they provide access to information to increase productivity in the field, make agricultural innovation possible and provide access to services and to financial markets” (MIJARC/FIDA/FAO, 2012). Although the National Government has made efforts to improve access to the ICT, rural areas are still lagging and this has a marked influence on the chances of binding young people to agricultural work.

NOT VERY DIGNIFIED WORKING CONDITIONS

The closest reference young people have for categorising coffee work as not very dignified is their parents. During the study, they stated that they feel that this work is poorly paid, the majority of time they cannot access a pension, even when they become ill they do not have sick leave. In addition, they believe that the working days in the field are very long and you cannot think about taking holidays because it is not possible with the crops and the animals.

Young people also call attention to the restrictions posed by Colombia’s labour legislation relating to child labour, which sometimes goes against the reality faced by families, given that the labour available reduces and therefore the household incomes.

When a young person reaches legal age, they feel that the salary received is very low, given the hard work that has to be done, and that their own family has to improve the remuneration of their work and do so in a timely manner.

Consultations with young people all over the world made it clear that “young people understand more easily the new technologies related to agriculture and that young farmers want to increase their production by means of improved and modern technologies”

Young people are migrating to the cities for several reasons. One of the main reason is that the Government is not allowing minors under the age of 18 to work, and it should not be that way because this means that young people do not learn the craft and do not have knowledge about coffee farming and agricultural work. I therefore think that there should be a law where young people voluntarily say, “I want to learn about the countryside and I would like to work in it.”

Fernando Betancur from Belén de Umbría, Risaralda.

According to data from the ILO in 2015, around 43% of young people in the world’s active population are not employed or are workers living in poverty. In addition they face barriers to entering the labour market.

However, young people who did part of the study show their preference for casual work over remaining on their farm. The main reason is the low remuneration that they receive at the expense of hard work, as shown in the following testimony by Juliana Rios from Salgar, Antioquia: “Working on the fields is not sustainable, it doesn’t have the advantages that would make young people stay here. We go to harvest coffee and at most they pay us $25.000 (9 USD), but you go to the city and they get you to paint walls and pay you up to $40.000 (14 USD), so there you are in the shade but here the sun shines down on you. My father loves the land and coffee and he told us: “I want to buy more land”...We, his children, say to him beforehand: “sell that, eat it, enjoy it! Why have so much land if no-one can work it.”

Several studies show that as education level is higher, young people are more likely to migrate. This affects farming as it increases the lack of workforce. To a great extent, the following graph summarises the thoughts that young people and families have about the importance of studying to improve their income and the individual and family quality of life.

### Salary scales for recent graduates in Colombia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>University graduate</th>
<th>Technology</th>
<th>Professional specialist</th>
<th>Average**</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salary in 2014</td>
<td>$1.736.849</td>
<td>$1.113.635</td>
<td>$1.041.927</td>
<td>$679.646</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salary in 2013</td>
<td>$1.699.773</td>
<td>$1.108.646</td>
<td>$1.033.018</td>
<td>$681.257</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**average income GEIH – DANE 2013-2014**

The study conducted in 2015 by Corporación Ambiental Río Verde, Procasur, International Land Coalition and the Fondo Nacional de Desarrollo Agrícola - FIDA [National Fund for Agricultural Development] within the framework of the Young Rural Population and Access to the Land Series demonstrates the tension that education represents for young people in the field. On the one hand, families’ economic conditions impede the provision of sufficient support for children to go to the urban centres where there is a concentration of higher education possibilities. On the other hand, those who wish to remain in the countryside or study and return not only face the economic limitations to do so but the social pressures resulting from the
Parents tell their kids "Look son, I work hard to get you at least through high school so that you can leave, study and then see if you can help us!" And, well, now, there are hardly any parents that tell their kids to stay here but I think that the best way to resolve this is to search for help so that farmers feel more supported and want us, their children, to make the most of their farms and the crops. That is the only way to find peace.

Daylena Calle from Anserma, Caldas.

If we define welfare as the "set of things you need to live well" you need to comprehensively expand the view of care for young people. Although it may well be that young people acknowledge that progress has been made in terms of education and entrepreneurship, they feel that there are many gaps to be closed regarding health, work, culture and leisure.

To a great extent they want to access the services offered to them in the city. They particularly highlight the need to have artistic and sports opportunities to hand that can take them out of the routine of working on the field. Some of them suggest alternating their life between rural and urban spaces.

We believe that it is unfair that other young people have a way to study and are able to choose their profession, their life, their hobbies... and be happy with what they do. In the meantime we have to continue

Coffee farms owned by families who live in the countryside are becoming increasingly small. The industry is not enabling the rural population to grow, they are barely just managing to scrape enough together to survive.

The limitations posed by the size of the plot of land or the absence of such, reduce the chances of young people performing activities of their own account within the family plot and building up assets from a young age. In cases where this is possible and there are practices for enabling access to the land for young people, we can find very positive evaluations and overviews by different generations which would be showing the potential for arrangements between parents and children and that would contribute to the creation of conditions so that young people commit to life plans in the countryside.

Corporación Ambiental Río Verde and others, 2015.
4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although young people have their differences for assuming the challenges of coffee farming, it is not the main reason they state for not finding staying in the countryside appealing. This depends on the conditions of welfare associated with different aspects of their life (education, health, work, leisure and sport).

Emigration to the cities or leaving the countryside cannot be understood as young people’s rejection of continuing with coffee farming. This is particularly so when you hear young people say that they are not disinterested in it but in the conditions in which they have to accept the challenge of replacing their parents within the business. The foregoing makes it possible to acknowledge that the main problem is more exogenous than endogenous.

In order to understand the problem with the generational handover of coffee producers, you have to listen to the social agents, both old and young, about how they live, feel and long for their existence related to coffee. It is essential that their needs and expectations are understood. In the same as their fulfilment in their own experiences within farming and selling of coffee.
In fact, many family head of households encourage their children to leave the countryside. They want a more promising future for them and an opportunity to improve the family’s quality of life, albeit at the cost of a survival that adapting to a different life and an economic and cultural rationale. They feel that, in this way, they are responsible for the future of their children and prefer to fulfil their expectations before seeing them frustrated and in an uncomfortable situation that they themselves would not be able to accept.

Young people are very insistent when it comes to acknowledging that the plans, programmes and projects that are geared and budgeted towards meeting their needs and interests are very scarce. As regards their expectations and needs, they mention enjoying free time, education, family and community life. They feel that the necessary effort is not being made to generate more commitment and devotion in them to rural life and in particular coffee farming.

In accordance with the foregoing, some proposals identified for resolving this structural problem are:

- To improve the salary of young people working in the coffee trade. In the case of family farming, this improvement is tied to increasing the productivity of prices. Parents have to acknowledge the work of their children with economic remuneration and this has to be appropriate.

- To ensure a quality educational offer for the rural sector, clearly constitutes a commitment to the country’s development. However, it is crucial that the curricula are relevant and take into account the specific characteristics to each area. Coffee farming can be seen as a business activity, that with effective technological innovations, attracts a new generation of farmers.

- To ensure conditions of comfort and welfare at work to make coffee farming more attractive for young people. For example, the design of tools to mechanise and automate coffee farming and reduce physical labour could be considered.

- Research within the coffee sector should explore the use of new technologies that make it possible to increase productivity, build innovative agricultural practices and improved technologies, such as precision agriculture, mechanization, the use of drones, and smartphones for remote technical assistance, amongst others.

- Use technologies that improve the performance of the workforce available, particularly in high demand periods such as harvesting.

- Analyse legislation on child labour in the coffee sector in more detail in order to acknowledge the narrow confines “of work as an education and work as an imposition”. This analysis should use as starting point the reality in the field and assigning specific activities that could be performed by young people without affecting their safety and wellbeing.

- To add more value to the product that comes from farms (parchment coffee) and ensure that young people benefit from this addition of value in order to improve the benefits and economic remuneration of the coffee trade. Under current conditions, the final price of coffee is in the hands of a few agents and the producer does not receive sufficient income from the coffee industry. The supply chain should increase its engagement with the needs of rural young people.

- Develop appropriate alternatives to the different types of young people who today live in the countryside given that their needs, expectations and demands are different, just as their opportunities for progress.
The findings of the study showed that the percentage of young people who dream of being a coffee-grower within the context of family farming and who want to stay on the farm of their own, is reducing increasingly. The trend is that young people who have the option of getting an education and accessing higher levels of education plan to migrate to the city or other economic sectors in search of better opportunities. A wider extreme can be seen amongst young people who help their parents but whose economic remuneration is nil or low, they are in the farms because it is their turn but not because it is their choice and because of that their future is uncertain. Lastly, young people who do domestic work and who do not earn very much feel satisfied with rural life. This classification is backed up by the testimony of Franklin Castillo from the Comité de Cafeteros del Valle [Committee of Coffee-Growers of el Valle] in the executive report on the systematisation of the Young Rural Population (MADR, Corporación Colombia Internacional, 2015).

The foregoing can be summarised in the following graph:

In summary, the countryside has to become truly competitive for it to be productive. Private companies and farmers have to work together, and no ideological or dogmatic bias can take precede there but minds open to the real world. Without these changes, the countryside will not be able to retain its young population and will again become a breeding ground for violence.

Rafael Mejía, SAC, 2016.
THE CHALLENGES OF GENERATIONAL HANDOVER AS COMPARED TO CYCLING

You could say that the generational handover is a lap that represents great challenges: steep climbs, winding curves and tense time trials. Given this panorama, a good team strategy is needed in which we all as agents interested in the sustainability of the coffee chain join efforts. This is the only way we can reach the podium and increase the number of people who find the business of coffee-growing a feasible and appealing option for fulfilling their life plans.

In order for new members to join the top batches, we will have to pedal constantly with force and regularity, understanding that the regional contexts shape a different type of coffee grower and as such we cannot have magic formulas that are adapted to everyone. The challenge therefore is to break the inertia of those areas where little progress has been made to work with young people and to try to teach them on the basis of good experiences of those at the top of the game.

We need more inspired young coffee-growers, with the example of Nairo Quintana, who is the Colombian ambassador of the agriculture in the country, to keep adding more trophies to the national track record to position the coffee trade as an agricultural reference point despite the difficulties it faces today, ensure it continues to progress and with enviable fighting power.

In order to complete new stages and win the generational handover, the country must step up to the challenge of communicating the message in the best possible way. This will enable young people to see that farming and the coffee sector are a way to earn a decent living and make good money and would help turn the coffee industry into a benchmark which, despite the current challenges it faces, is on the uprise with an enviable fighting power.
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