



UNDERSTANDING THE SITUATION OF WORKERS IN CORPORATE AND FAMILY COFFEE FARMS



Solidaridad



SPECIALTY
COFFEE ASSOCIATION
OF AMERICA

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Special Coffee Association of America (SCAA)

Established in 1982 by a group of coffee professionals seeking to set quality standards for the specialty coffee trade, the SCAA is now the world's largest coffee trade association with nearly 2,500 company members. SCAA members can rightfully be credited for much of the growth and success the specialty coffee industry has experienced. | www.scaa.org

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I INTRODUCTION

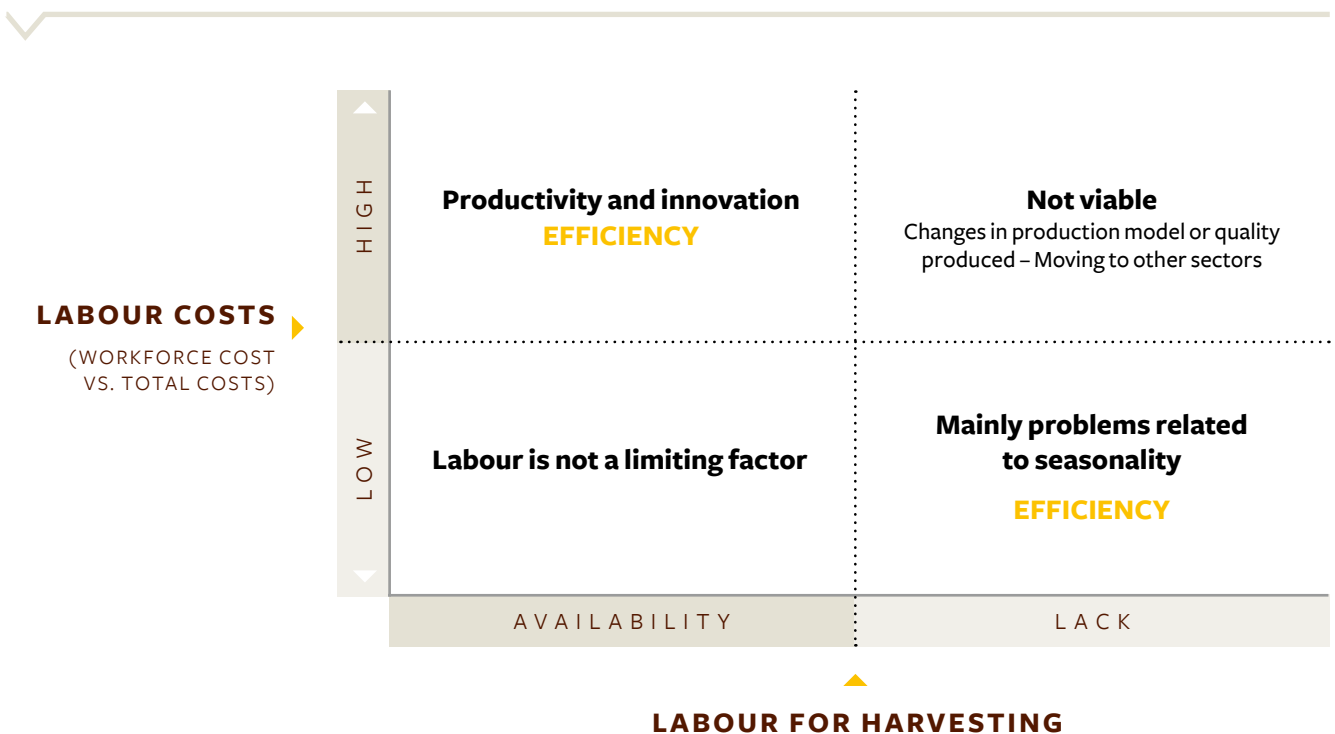
Coffee is a product that brings together thousands of people worldwide. Its financial importance lies both in the fact that it is a highly traded product, and that it represents the livelihood of thousands of farming families in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Price volatility and crop variation impact not only the producers but also the millions of rural workers employed in large plantations and small family production units. In terms of income and wellbeing, workers are perhaps the most vulnerable link in the chain.

Issues related to labour availability in coffee producing countries and workers' welfare are currently key discussion points amongst the industry and practitioners. Production volatility in some areas creates a cycle of shortages and unemployment year after year. In some countries, demographic evolution and rising opportunities in different economic sectors turn labour shortage into a structural issue. As a result, pro-

duction costs have increased in some regions whilst in other areas coffee production is becoming unfeasible (see figure).

Quality coffee and labour availability are closely related. So are the need to manually select and harvest the ripe fruit, and the producer's ability to manage pests such as berry borer or coffee rust. Labour availability is redrawing the map of coffee production areas in several countries and challenging the definition of high quality and commercially viable coffee in the coming years.

Through this report, Solidaridad and the Specialty Coffee Association of America's (SCAA) Sustainability Council want to contribute key discussion points to the coffee industry. In particular, to those most interested in the sustainability of the value chain and in making the supply of high quality coffee viable.



II CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

There are some important points to considering whilst reading this report:

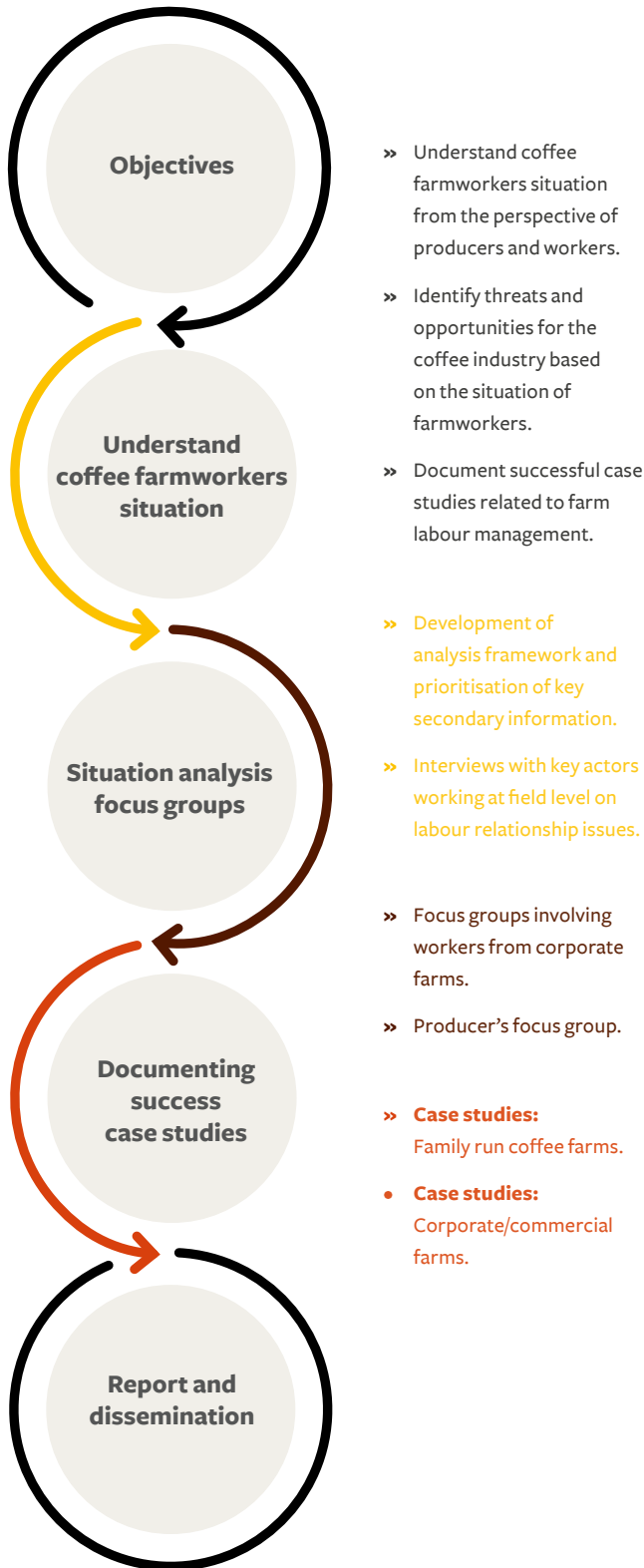
- » The aim of this study is not to compare labour conditions in Colombia and Nicaragua but to have an overview of the reality of workers in both locations. Any comparisons made through this report aim to provide a general context regarding size or scale.
- » Section IV of this report –Labour Issues in Colombia and Nicaragua– only focuses on key problems affecting labour in the selected areas of the study. This description might not apply to every coffee producing area in Colombia and Nicaragua.
- » The areas included in this study, including Huila, Cauca and Caldas in Colombia and Jinotega and Matagalpa in Nicaragua, are key producing areas for both origins. Nevertheless, their reality may not reflect the labour situation in all coffee producing areas in these countries.
- » Smallholders involved in focus groups or interviewed were organised through producer organisations and were part of at least one certification scheme. Workers from corporate farms contributing to the study comply with one or more sustainability standards.
- » As the aim of this study was to identify both the context of labour conditions in two locations and positive case studies that could inspire the industry, the workers and smallholder producers involved were often “best in class”. This means that their realities and perceptions might not fully represent the local context as their views and perceptions might have been influenced by enhanced labour programmes.
- » Some of the conclusions and recommendations included in this report were drawn from Solidaridad’s experience working with the coffee sector in Colombia. In particular from some of the work carried out as part of the Sustainable Trade Platform. Therefore, the information presented in this report should be interpreted a set of initial and general findings.

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Aldea Global (Warren E. Armstrong), CRECE (Carlos Ariel García), Cadefihuila (Carlos Andrés Lizcano), Cafenica (Marta Estela Gutiérrez), Cooperativa de Caficultores de Aguadas (César Julio Díaz, María Alejandra Henao, Egidio Ortiz), Expocafé (Ángela Peláez), Finca La Mesa (Didier López Gómez), Finca La Siria (Carlos Antonio Marulanda), Finca La Trinidad (Ricardo Botero, Arturo Valencia); ISEAL (Rene Escoto- consultant), Ramacafé (Henry Hüeck), Soppexcca (Fátima Ismael, Margarita Araus, Erik Morales), Supracafé- Tecnicafé (César Echeverry), UTZ (Jessenia Arguello, Juan Francisco Martínez), Asociación de Trabajadores del Campo (Yolanda Areas Blas) and Solidaridad (Eduardo Ocampo).

III METHODOLOGY



The research was conducted in Colombia and Nicaragua between January and March 2016, using a case study approach. The aim was to conduct an analysis based on the experiences of workers, producers and organisations.

The methodology combined the use of secondary sources with a literature review of articles referencing the coffee production economy in the selected countries and areas. In addition to this, aspects such as labour supply and demand, labour law and salary regulation, workers' conditions and demography, were taken into account.

Interviews involved expert analysts on labour issues and stakeholders with field experience in producer organisations and private companies contexts.

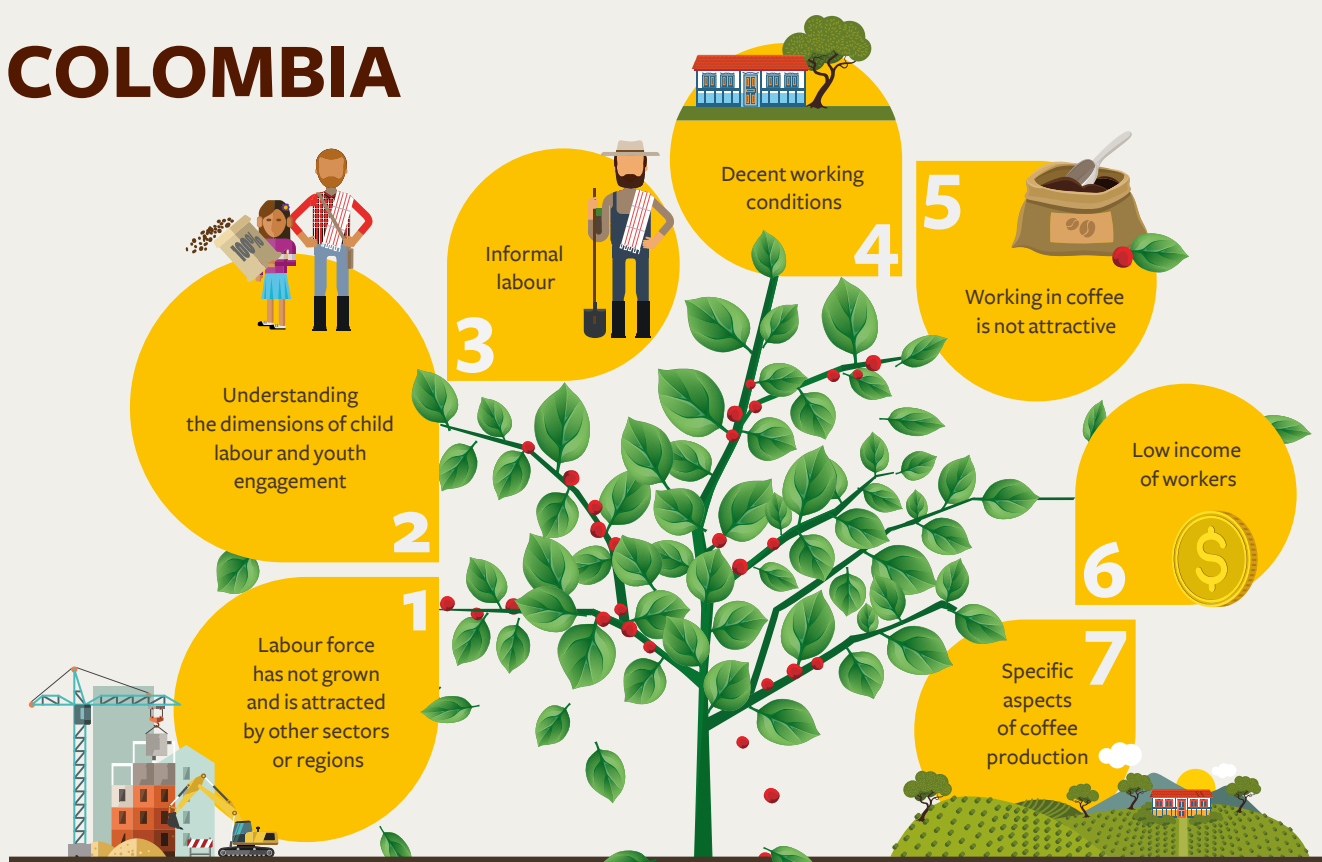
Focus groups enabled an interaction and comparison of the preliminary findings. They also provided open responses from a group of 55 producers and workers. Custom-built tools were used to encourage discussion among participants and to document their reactions and contributions.

The data for each case study was collected through field visits and local interviews. In the interest of producing a concise report, experiences are grouped together.

IV COFFEE LABOUR ISSUES IN COLOMBIA AND NICARAGUA

Through this study, we were able to identify important elements that affect the situation of coffee workers in Colombia and Nicaragua. As outlined above, the aim of this chapter is not to compare both countries but to understand trends that affect labour conditions in both locations.

COLOMBIA



Lack of labour force and limitations to provide lack of decent working conditions.

COLOMBIA is the biggest producer of washed Arabica coffee in the world, reaching 14.2 million bags in 2015. This coffee is produced in 970,000 hectares and employs 700,000 workers¹. Farmers have, on average, less than five hectares and require external labour. The production of coffee is concentrated in two main areas: The Central region including the traditional coffee triangle and proximities and the South, which are newer areas of production that have rapidly gained importance in terms of volumes. Labour conditions in the Central region are different to those in the South.

One of the critical differences between them is the place where workers come from. Workers in the Central region are internal migrants that move from farm to farm, whilst the workforce in the South comes mainly from local communities. Below are some of the key elements that affect labour conditions in Colombia.

1 Labour force has not grown and is attracted by other sectors or regions

The rural population is reducing and is directly affecting the coffee sector. This is mainly caused by changes in

¹ Sarmiento Gómez, A. (2013) Educación, calificación y formalización de la Mano de obra en el sector cafetero. Universidad del Rosario. On Line: <http://www.urosario.edu.co/Mision-Cafetera/Archivos/Educacion,-Calificacion-y-Formalizacion-de-la-Mano.pdf>

population dynamics and migration of rural workers to urban areas seeking new opportunities, higher wages and subsidies. The building sector is the main competitor to agriculture as wages are higher and demand is stable.

2 Understanding the dimensions of child labour and youth engagement

The engagement of children and young people in Colombian coffee could be seen as a systemic challenge. It is illegal for children under 15 years to work. Young people between 15-17 years old can work if they have permission from their parents and if the activities carried out are not depriving them of their childhood, not interfering with their ability to attend school regularly, and if the work done is not mentally, physically, socially or morally dangerous or harmful. Rural work in coffee is categorised as hazardous activity². Therefore, young people between 15-17 years old cannot work in coffee farms. This creates real challenges to engage young people in the future production of coffee as their interest can only be developed when they become adults. Other elements such as higher education levels and the curriculum studied –which is often not relevant to agriculture– also affect their engagement.

3 Informal labour

The majority of coffee farm workers have informal/verbal contracts with their employers and have limited access to social benefits described by law. Some of the benefits that coffee workers are entitled to are health, pension, paid holidays and safety at work insurance. Some of these benefits have to be jointly paid by employers and employees and require employers to deduct resources from workers wages to be subse-

quently transferred to the national system. Workers are not willing to pay these reductions and employers struggled to pay social benefits from coffee proceeds. The limited knowledge of labour law amongst workers, farmers and managers of corporate farms exacerbates this reality.

4 Lack of decent working conditions (mainly relevant to the Central region)

Work on coffee farms is not dignified. This is the perception of workers in both small and corporate farms involved in the study. Workers experience long working hours (above eight hours) and have poor housing and transport conditions. Transport to farms and accommodation provided is often crowded. If food is provided it is discounted from weekly payments. Migrant workers known as “andariegos” tend to have lower education levels and serious social problems linked to the use of alcohol and drugs. This issue not only affects security in farms, it is a difficult element to manage when workforce is limited and coffee needs to be urgently harvested. The work of women in coffee is often not recognised or invisible.

5 Working in coffee is not attractive

Working in the coffee industry is not attractive for workers. They are not always proud of being part of the coffee industry and do not want their children to be harvesters. As a consequence, young people are not interested in working in coffee. This is made worse by the curriculum for agricultural education, which is often not useful or relevant to the reality in the field. Another element that affects the interest of workers in coffee farms is location. Workers want to be in farms with good proximity to urban areas and with good mobile phone reception.

² REPUBLICA DE COLOMBIA. Ministerio del Trabajo. Resolución 3597- 03 Oct 2012. On Line: <http://oitcolombia.org/trabajo-infantil/download/Resoluci%C3%B3n-3597-Trabajos-peligrosos-Colombia.pdf>

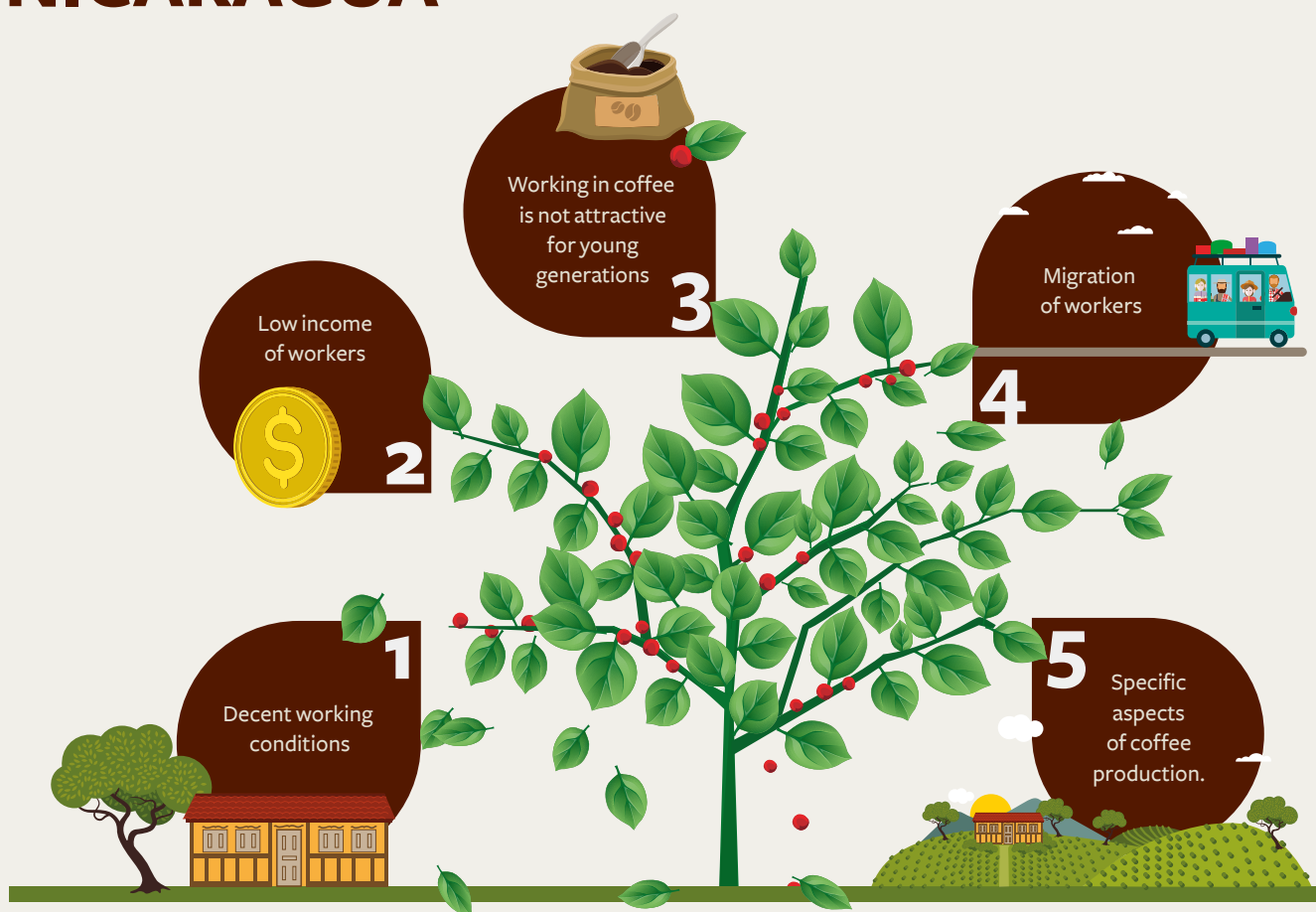
6 Low incomes of workers

Although coffee wages are above the legal minimum during harvest, workers are not able to receive annual minimum wages because of the seasonality of the crop. Other elements affecting workers' incomes are low yields and low productivity of labour. As a result, workers are unable to save or developing a saving culture.

7 Specific aspects of coffee production

Other specific aspects that exacerbate labour dynamics in the Colombian coffee sector are: harvest variability (early/late harvest), seasonality (high concentration and demand of labour during harvest), increase of productivity at national level but reduction of agricultural workforce, limited innovation at farm level to retain workers, and limited ability or willingness of the industry to cover real production costs.

NICARAGUA



Limitations to provide decent working conditions and job stability.

NICARAGUA produced 2.2 million bags between 2015-16³. This coffee is produced in 126,000 hectares and employs 300,000 workers⁴. The production of coffee is concentrated in the North of the country including important areas such as Matagalpa, Jinotega, Estelí and Nueva Segovia. Given the scope and size of coffee production in Nicaragua, its concentration and its location, labour trends tend to be more homogeneous than in Colombia. Below are some of the key elements that affect labour conditions in Nicaragua:

1 Lack of decent working conditions

Although workers in coffee are earning above the legal minimum wage for agriculture, their conditions are below living wage. This means that they have limitations to reach the standard intake of calories and fulfil minimum needs. Although the industry is making important efforts to resolve problems, there is still room for improvement and many farms, especially those that are not certified, are below the minimum standards. Smallholder producers employing workers make a great effort to provide optimal working conditions. Nevertheless, they often struggle to cover their own needs. As in Colombia, the contribution of women in labour is often invisible or not recognised.

2 Low income of workers

Coffee workers in Nicaragua often have access to land and use coffee proceeds to produce other crops that provide them with food security throughout the year. Their income is limited to the short season (3-4 months of the year) and is often not stable. Their income is also affected by the low country yields, which became more critical when Nicaragua was hit by leaf rust in 2012/13. The productivity of workers is also low and is reflected in the income that they are able to earn daily. Finally,

the country has limited access to technology with the potential to improve labour input.

3 Working in coffee is not attractive to young generations

Workers are not proud to work in the coffee industry and encourage their children to go to urban areas to seek better opportunities. Workers involved in farms with enhanced working conditions are more willing to encourage their children to join the sector. Young people have greater interest to move to urban areas than to live in the countryside.

4 Migration of workers

Migration is perhaps the most critical element that affects labour in Nicaragua. The country has enough people to cover the sector demands, but these people are often migrating to neighbouring countries such as Costa Rica and Honduras in search of higher wages. Some migrant workers enter neighbouring countries with tourist status, which limits their negotiations with employers and put their working rights at risk. The migration of workers has put pressure on Nicaraguan employers, including both corporate and smallholder farms, to increase wages of workers and carry out investments to improve facilities at farms.

5 Specific aspects of coffee production

Nicaragua has similar aspects to Colombia that affect coffee production, especially regarding harvest variability and seasonality. Other aspects that affect –or have affected– labour in Nicaragua are: leaf rust and labour being a high proportion of total production costs. As in Colombia, there is an important focus on the quality of harvesting which is highly affected by labour demand and skills available.

³ Total production by all exporting countries, Historical data on the global coffee trade, www.ico.org

⁴ Revista Estrategia y Negocios, 30-12-2015. <http://www.estrategiaynegocios.net/inicio/915568-330/nicaragua->

V EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICES IN COFFEE

Below are two examples that showcase enhanced labour management within producer organisations, smallholder farms and coffee estates. In general, activities implemented resulted in benefits such as:

- » Availability of workers to manage production and harvest.
- » Lower workers turnover and stability.
- » Quality of work.
- » Higher productivity of workers and therefore income.
- » Decrease in and control of production costs.

Didier López, working towards the wellbeing of his family and workers. **A smallholder producer experience.**

LA MESA FARM | Mr. Didier López Gómez | Aguadas, Caldas – Colombia

La Mesa farm, located in the Aguadas mountains in Colombia, is an example of generations of family work. In no more than **four hectares** of coffee, the López family has lived for over 30 years. Didier is the second generation to live on this land and at least one of his sons hopes to stay in the coffee business. The story of the López family is proof of how a small, **efficient family farm can create wellbeing for a household and offer better conditions for the workers.**

Didier's relationship with his workers is one of friendship. For almost eight years, he has been working towards securing a **consistent workforce for harvesting** and other tasks. For Didier, securing enough workers for the harvest is not a challenge. Firstly, he thought that having a productive crop would not only be good for him, but it would also be good for the harvesters. If he could earn a good income, so could they. As a second strategy, Didier makes an effort to understand the skills of his workers and provides them with

training to make their work more efficient and productive. In this way, he is able to pay his workers up to **20% above the local wages.**

Didier always wants his employees to work in the best possible conditions, to be treated well, and to earn a decent livelihood. Establishing **good interpersonal relationships** generates trust in the work, task autonomy, and a way for the workers to suggest improvement measures within the farm. At the time of the study **60% of the harvest in the farm was collected by women.** The producer believes that women want to excel in their work. Male workers help them carry the coffee bags to the wet mill.

Didier is a member of the **Cooperativa de Caficultores de Aguadas, which works with over 1,500 producers on coffee trading and productivity improvement.** The Cooperative promotes long-term savings between producer members, which in turn enabled the establishment of pension schemes for producers.

SOPPEXCCA COOPERATIVE IN NICARAGUA supports its producer members with productivity boosting programmes that benefits not only the coffee producers' income but also the workers as they are able to collect higher volumes during harvest. This is a simple strategy to retain labour that is not always perceived by producers. Average green coffee productivity per producer members in Soppexcca is **23.4 -31.2** quintales/hectare, compared to **18.7** quintales/hectare national average (ICO, 2016).

Soppexcca also encourages savings amongst 300 women who work on their dry mill. As their job is seasonal they used to be a marginalised link in the value chain. Saving ability and culture was achieved through the creation of a female cooperative of workers that provides them with additional sources of income during the whole year and not only seasonally. The organisation supported these women to set up their own food shop, which offers basic goods to other workers and farmers.

Improving human resource management in a corporate farm. Labour in La Trinidad Estate.

LA TRINIDAD ESTATE | Mr. Ricardo Botero | Manizales, Caldas – Colombia

Labour management is one of today's key challenges for coffee farming in Colombia. It is an unresolved issue but one which Ricardo Botero has been actively working towards during the past 11 years. La Trinidad is a **28-hectare estate**, which employs **two permanent workers and 50 during the peak of the harvesting season**.

In the estate, resource control and management is an important strategy to achieve labour efficiency and obtain benefits for both the company and workers. At the farm, it is normal to hear people talk about yields and objectives, as the planning has been inclusive. **Good and fluid communication** is encouraged among staff. For example, there are committees in which workers and farm managers have a direct line with the Management to express their concerns or

suggest improvements. This has enabled the creation of interpersonal relationships based on collaboration, teamwork and work motivation.

As a first step, records and work reports are used to plan and manage labour including efficiency and budget indicators. Secondly, labour quality parameters are standardised. This encourages staff to be selected based on skills and number of hours needed. At La Trinidad, the structure of coffee plots are also changing, including planting distances, in order to make the collection of coffee easier. The farm also offers training to enable people to carry out their work safely and productively. There is still a long way to go at corporate farms when working on labour formalisation and human resource management. Ricardo Botero and his team have already begun this journey.

SUPRACAFÉ (CAUCA, COLOMBIA) AND RAMACAFÉ (MATAGALPA, NICARAGUA) are similar examples of enhanced labour management, regular training and a commitment to the workers' wellbeing.

In addition to this, Supracafé is currently developing a technological hub for innovation, created to add value to coffee production. This hub, known as Tecnicafé, has the ambition to test accessible technologies, which could be replicated by smallholder communities that border the estate. The technical development centre is eager to innovate in subjects such as crop management, logistics for labour during harvest, differentiated payment models for workers combining fixed wages and productivity bonuses, as well as employing women during harvest to improve gender equality.

VI CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The foregoing analysis of the situation of workers in Colombian and Nicaragua contributes to the growing body of evidence documenting that there are structural problems related to labour that need to be resolved in order for coffee to become sustainable. Although key industry players such as producers, owners of corporate farms and sector associations are trying to find solutions, the entire coffee industry needs to include labour conditions in its lists of future priorities. This will require a change of mentality as for many years we have focused on producers, forgetting farm workers as a crucial link of the value chain. Below are listed some of the conclusions from this study and recommendations made for future action.

Situation of workers in Colombia and Nicaragua

Workers feel that their contribution to the coffee industry is not valued. This is possibly reflected by the coffee industry, which is not often aware that farms as small as two hectares in Colombia or Nicaragua are employing external people. Coffee workers in both lo-

cations are at the bottom of the social pyramid. They are often marginalised and are aware of this. Although their daily wages during harvest season tend to be higher than minimum wages, the crop seasonality means that they are not able to earn an annual minimum wage working in coffee.

The results from this study also showed that social and economic conditions of migrants are worse than those of local workers. This is relevant to migrant workers in Nicaragua when travelling to neighbouring countries and in Colombia where internal migrant workers tend to be more affected by the use of drugs. Regarding benefits and facilities accessed by workers in farms, elements such as accommodation and provision food seem to be improving as a result of the lack of labour and the implementation of sustainability standards. This is particularly relevant to Nicaragua.

Implementation of labour national law in coffee farms

Law related to labour in both countries is in place but not always applied. Law is not applied in coffee farms

primarily for two reasons: it is expensive to apply it and in the case of farmers they are often struggling to cover their own benefits such as health or pension, and there is little understanding about labour law. In the case of Colombia, labour law for temporary workers is complex and not many people understand how to apply it. The Colombian government is currently developing tools and measures to facilitate employer's responsibilities. Nevertheless, these tools are not widely disseminated and most of the workers are not receiving social benefits.

The majority of contractual relationships in farms are informal –with the exception of permanent workers. In Colombia, the law protects the worker when conflicts arise even if contracts are verbal. In Nicaragua the complexity of law results in a protection of the employer as the worker cannot afford legal fees. There is a clear need to develop more mechanisms to understand and apply the law. Producer organisations and the private sector operating locally could facilitate and advocate this development.

Key strategies implemented to retain labour and most common mistakes

Most common mistakes include providing poor facilities and food for workers at farms and workers moving from farm to farm seeking better payments. In addition to this, corporate farms managing a significant number of workers have little innovation or general knowledge about human resources strategies to retain workers.

It was found that some effective strategies to retain labour include: increasing the productivity of the farm, having different models to pay wages (variable, fixed, mixed or additional bonuses), involving women in their workforce and adjusting their systems to enable their performance, and involving workers in planning the harvest.

Salaries in Colombia and Nicaragua

Minimum wages in Colombia are the same for all economic sectors. Minimum wages in Nicaragua are tailored to each sector. Agriculture has the lowest wages (74% compared to the industrial sector). If these salaries are converted to USD and local purchasing power is not taken into account, it is evident that workers in 2015/2016 exceed minimum wages in both countries. This confirms scarcity of labour and a regulation of workers wages based on supply and demand. Productivity of workers during harvest is similar in both countries (90 kg –8 latas / day on average). Outside harvest, workers do not always receive a minimum wage. This changes significantly between regions.

Re-thinking the Colombian quality model

Colombia's business model is based on high quality coffee with an important degree of specialisation. It requires workers that have specific skills and are available at specific moments. The lack of workforce in Colombia might shift the current quality model that has been able to position the origin around the world. Volumes are increasing whilst the number of skilful harvesters is reducing. In the future, larger farms with greater labour needs might consider a degree of mechanisation and aim towards larger volumes with different quality standards, using less labour for harvest. Smaller farms might want to continue the quality-based model that enables them to access added value prices. Those farms located near urban spots might have a greater chance to secure labour. This context might also be applicable to Nicaragua if, in the medium-term, the situation of workers moves from limited access to labour to a lack of labour.

Categorising child labour

Child labour still exists in both countries but is not a general problem in coffee. Both countries have made important efforts to eradicate the worst forms of child labour. Nevertheless, the reality in the field is not always

aligned to national law. Colombia could learn from the Nicaraguan example regarding categorisation of children's and young people's contributions to coffee production. Children under 18 years old can engage in coffee but only when they reach a certain age and in specific activities. For instance, the law specifies the weight of the coffee bags containing cherries that can be carried by children between 15 and 17 years old. Some international suitability standards allow young people to work in farms if these activities do not affect their school attendance. However, this does not always match local law. It is important to analyse, categorise and specify what is considered child labour in Colombia and why coffee is classified as a hazardous activity. The coffee industry could help to identify and drive the differentiation of activities and ages to engage with coffee production.

What matters for workers?

Results from focus groups with both workers, smallholder producers and managers of corporate farms

showed that workers consider the following important: food/housing conditions, wages received compared to neighbouring farms, productivity of farms, having respectful employers and the proximity to urban areas with mobile reception and access to electricity. The ultimate goal of workers is to make a living and find work stability at farms that they can return to year on year.

What workers ask of the coffee industry

Workers and producers ask the industry to have a better understanding of production costs and pay accordingly. The coffee industry should engage with honest conversations regarding real production costs that are tailored to specific origins. Demanding suppliers to cover these costs and be fair with their workers is not enough. Industry initiatives to tackle labour issues are required. Workers also ask the industry to promote good practices to manage labour situations in coffee that are aligned to the reality in the field.

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ANNEX

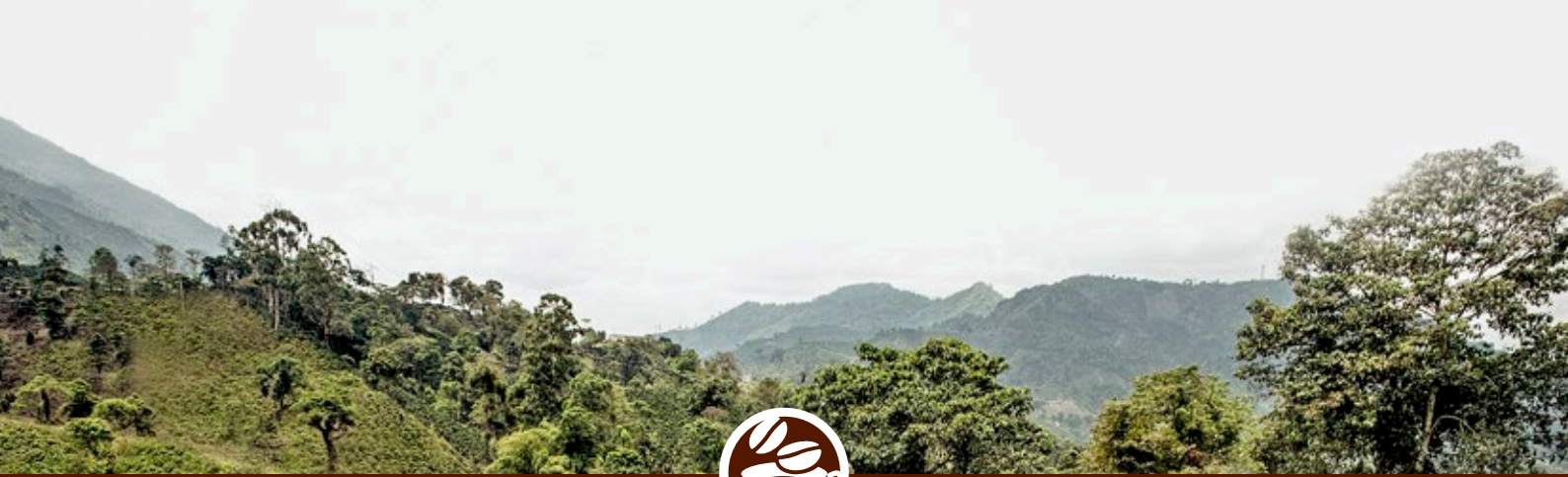
Focus Groups General Information

Focus group 1	Pitalito, Huila (Colombia)
Coordination and logistical support	Expocafé – Cadefihuila
Date	17 th February 2016
Participants	115 small and medium scale producers (men and women) 2 focus groups
Main topics discussed	<p>Labour migration trends in Southern Colombia.</p> <p>Labour shortages are becoming increasingly common.</p> <p>Workers who receive good working conditions tend to return year on year.</p> <p>Farmers were aware that they are protected by law although they do not have written contracts with their employers.</p> <p>Female harvesters are possibly a third of the total workforce.</p> <p>Focus groups participants involved in coffee quality programmes and voluntary certification schemes.</p>

Focus group 2	Cajibío, Cauca (Colombia)
Coordination and logistical support	Supracafé - Expocafe
Fecha	19 th February 2016
Participantes	17 workers (men and women) 2 focus groups divided by gender
Main topics discussed	<p>A large coffee plantation aiming to innovate its quality and production processes.</p> <p>Harvest carried out by women.</p> <p>The human resources management model has an innovative payment model and an incentive-based remuneration system.</p> <p>Building social relationships with local communities.</p> <p>Many of the workers in the focus groups were internal migrants.</p> <p>They shared their views on working in the Central region of Colombia.</p> <p>Women are proud, as they know that they have been selected because they are careful and pay more attention to detail. They know that they are contributing to the delivery of high quality coffee.</p> <p>Communication between managers and workers at Supracafé is very fluid.</p>

Focus group 3	Matagalpa (Nicaragua)
Coordination and logistical support	Finca La Virgen Ramacafe - UTZ
Fecha	2 nd March 2016
Participantes	23 workers (men and women) 2 focus groups
Principales temas de discusión	<p>25% of workers were local and 75% are migrant.</p> <p>30% of workers were women.</p> <p>The estate has excellent working condition beyond those offered by other estates and smallholder farms (food, accommodation and transport).</p> <p>Workers felt that the owners are fair and paid them fair wages.</p> <p>They also appreciate the job stability that they have at this farm.</p> <p>Salaries for harvesting are higher than those indicated by law.</p> <p>In addition to this, food and accommodation is provided.</p> <p>Workers were positive about conditions in farm and communication at all levels of the organisation.</p>





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