This is a flagship project for Fairtrade Africa aimed at deepening the role of Fairtrade-certification in promoting gender equality and empowerment within export crop value chains such as coffee.

The project which runs from March 2015 to February 2018 is in line with UN’s 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development with a specific focus on SDG 5 on achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls & SDG 13 of taking urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts. It is also operating under Fairtrade International’s 2016-2020 Strategy of ‘Changing Lives through Trade’ with its implementation supported by Fairtrade Foundation (UK) and Solidaridad Eastern & Central Africa Expertise Centre (SECAEC). Being a pilot project, Fairtrade Africa chose to support two legally registered ‘Women in Coffee’ associations uniquely established and nurtured by smallholder male coffee farmers within Kabng’etuny and Kapkiyai Cooperative Societies in Kericho and Nandi Counties of Kenya respectively.
Kabng'etuny Women in Coffee Association is located in the highlands, west of the Kenyan Rift Valley which stands on the edge of the Mau Forest. There are two rainy seasons in the region which provides perfect conditions for growing Arabica coffee.

In this area, we have partnered with Solidaridad to build capacity of 300 women coffee farmers on Good Agricultural Practices (GAPs) towards increasing coffee quality and yield. We have supported adoption & construction of domestic biogas units for 300 households of Women-in-Coffee members reducing over-reliance on firewood and charcoal. The bio-slurry waste from biogas plants is then used as a cheap source of organic fertilizer for sustainable production of coffee and other food crops.

We have recruited unemployed 20 youth from Kabng'etuny community and trained them as biogas masons empowering them to earn a living while encouraging them to embrace coffee farming.

Over 80% of the women’s production is mainly AA & AB grades of Arabica coffee and their coffee is handled separately during all the processing stages.

**FAIRTRADE BENEFITS AND PLANS**

Through support from the project, the women’s association has initiated a poultry project, biogas with 42 complete biogas units installed for the women and a commercial maize mill, which they hope to complete using proceeds from this year’s (2016) coffee harvest. They plan to build a store and install electricity to enable them commence with milling maize flour and livestock feeds for sale in the region.

When they receive Fairtrade premium, they plan to set up a dairy project to increase their incomes and sustain operation of the biogas units and organic manure that are dependent on cow dung. They also plan to put up an education program kitty for their children.

**CHALLENGES**

Some men still do not believe in the concept of women owning coffee bushes, hence their wives are missing out on the benefits from the Women’s Association.

Majority of the farmers are aged, challenging the maintenance of coffee quality as well as their participation in the association activities. This in turn affects production volumes.

The women are yet to find a fair market for their coffee which demotivates them.

“We have benefited as a community and for sure we are not where we started 4 years ago. We have been exposed to the world through the Fairtrade Africa’s Women in Coffee project by attending seminars and workshops. We have also had the opportunity to meet with women from other parts of the world and share experiences. The knowledge gained is always shared during our regular meetings. In the past, we were not united as everyone went on with their lives independently. Right now, we are united, stronger, and we keep on supporting each other. Our households have also grown since we are able to contribute financially."

Esther Koskei, Chairlady Kabng'etuny Women in Coffee Association
Kapkiyai Women in Coffee Association is located in a region that has a cool wet climate complemented by the rich volcanic soils, making Nandi an ideal area for Arabica coffee farming.

Within Kapkiyai Cooperative, we are using lessons learned from Kabng’etuny to work with men and women farmers to encourage and sustain transfer of ownership of coffee bushes to 150 more women coffee farmers, providing them with greater independence and income.

Over 80% of the women’s production is mainly AA & AB grades of Arabica coffee. The women selectively pick by hand only the bright red, glossy and firm coffee cherries which are delivered to their mother cooperative (Kapkiyai Multipurpose Farmer’s cooperative society) for processing. The Women’s coffee deliver their coffee on selected days to avoid getting mixed up with coffee of the general members of the society. The coffee is handled separately during all the processing stages.

FAIRTRADE BENEFITS

Through the Women in Coffee project, they will soon be receiving biogas units. The other projects which they are planning to set up with proceeds from Fairtrade sales include: a dairy project, piped water and a bursary kitty for their education needs.

CHALLENGES

Lack of Fairtrade markets for their coffee despite the high level of investment by the cooperative and the women.

The area has very poor infrastructure making the cooperative quite inaccessible.

“It is important to find a market for the women’s coffee since the project truly empowers women in all aspects. It has reduced the dependency on one single source of income for the families. When women’s coffee is marketed separately, their coffee may fetch a different price which at the end of the day will come back to the family to supplement what the husband will earn from his coffee and the other sources of family income. Our husbands are happy that we are empowered to support them financially in the family”

Dorcas Jeptanui, Chairlady Kapkiyai Women in Coffee Association
Within Kipkelion Union, which encompasses both Kabngetuny and Kapkiyai, we are developing and marketing a new product for sale into the Kenyan domestic market combining women’s coffee from these two groups. We have also partnered with the cooperative societies’ marketers to launch and seek international buyers of Fairtrade-certified, climate-smart women’s coffee from Kenya that has a traceable ethical and sustainable production background.

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