

Gender Mainstreaming strengthen smallholder coffee farmers - June 11th, 2015

Kasese, Uganda – The notion of gender mainstreaming is gaining considerable importance in the sector of development cooperation. Recent experiences have shown that the increase in income alone does not necessarily lead to an improvement of livelihoods in smallholder farmer communities. Women are faced with the challenge of limited access to resources and opportunities like expertise, money, and decision-making power, while at the meantime they are oftentimes the most active household members of the family.

The International Coffee Partners are running a project in a remote region of Western Uganda, Kasese. The project's main objective is to improve the livelihoods of 8,000 coffee farming families in Ruwenzori region, based upon sustainable and competitive Arabica production. An important component of these project activities is the improvement of gender equality, so that married couples decide together on how their incomes from coffee are invested, daily household activities are equally divided between husband and wife, and women have equal access to training activities and leadership positions.

- Thanks to the gender mainstreaming initiative, our household incomes and living conditions have improved. We now have much more financial freedom and are now able to send our children to school, says Asaba Alex and Kabugho Rose who joined the program in 2012.

Structures for a sustainable business environment

So far, more than 3,000 households have been reached by so-called couple seminars, and 170 married couples have as a result become change-agents – stewards in their community to advocate for gender equality. One farmer organization stands out in particular: the Maliba Agro-Business Depot. The 22 initial change agents have trained 82 more change agents to become ambassadors and multipliers of gender equality, and to further promote joint planning and cooperation within families. Together, they have managed to set up seven savings and loans associations, in which both long- and short-term loans are offered to enable families to re-invest savings into their business or household – an essential component to sustainable development on the premises.

- All of these are remarkable steps ahead. The project establishes elemental structures for a sustainable business environment, of which not only the local communities benefit but the global coffee industry as a whole, says Jorge Tiemeier, representing International Coffee Partners.

Sustainable practices to improve livelihoods

International Coffee Partners was founded in 2001 by five European family-owned coffee roasters: Gustav Paulig Ltd. of Finland, Löfbergs Lila AB of Sweden, Luigi Lavazza S.p.A. of Italy, Neumann Gruppe GmbH of Germany and Tchibo GmbH of Germany, joined by Joh. Johannson Kaffe AS of Norway in 2011 and Franck d.d. of Croatia in 2014.

The initiative's aim is to make smallholder coffee farmers competitive on the basis of sustainable practices in order to improve their livelihoods. This vision goes beyond the implementation of individual development projects; the International Coffee Partners want to contribute to the sustainable transformation of the coffee sector at large. Innovative regional programs in Central America, Uganda and Tanzania as well as Brazil demonstrate the significant benefits for farmer families and the entire supply chain, generate relevant experiences on developing farmer operations and provide valuable guidance for stakeholders and the coffee policy framework.

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