

## **Social and business consolidation of the association of women coffee growers of western Huila (asmucaocc)**

Consolidación social y empresarial de la asociación de mujeres cafeteras del occidente del Huila (asmucaocc)

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## ABSTRACT

The Asociación de Mujeres Cafeteras del Occidente del Huila (ASMUCAOCC) was born in the municipality of La Plata (Huila) as a body representing women in the field of coffee work (association of people), but in reality they have developed opportunities for business (company), which makes it have a dual nature, complying with the characteristics identified by Law 454 of 1998 in Article 2, thus developing not only associativity, but also "is committed to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector in Colombia and particularly in the Department of Huila, especially as regards coffee, as well as the other activities carried out by its associates, to fulfill its corporate purpose ". Starting from an intervention process that integrated agribusiness technical assistance activities, investments from a revolving fund and socio-entrepreneurial support; operated by CADEFIHUILA and co-financed by La Caixa Foundation, the IDB / MIF, ASMUCAOCC and the Cooperative University of Colombia, the social and business consolidation of ASMUCAOCC is facilitated, making it a benchmark for solidarity organizations in its territory, hence the recognition and positioning. The process yields impactful results, from the increase in income to the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of women coffee growers, which has allowed to improve the quality of their products and services and the productivity in the coffee work they carry out, all this has helped to consolidate the social and business management of said association.

**Keywords:** Solidarity Economy, Associative Forms, Rural Development, Solidarity Socio-Business Development, Woman Coffee Grower.

## RESUMEN

La Asociación de Mujeres Cafeteras del Occidente del Huila (ASMUCAOCC) nace en el municipio de La Plata (Huila) como un organismo de representación de las mujeres en el ámbito del trabajo cafetero (asociación de personas), pero en su realidad han desarrollado oportunidades de negocio (empresa), lo que la hace tener doble naturaleza, cumpliendo con las características que identifica la Ley 454 de 1998 en su Artículo 2, desarrollando así no solo la asociatividad, también “está comprometida con el desarrollo sostenible del sector agropecuario en Colombia y particularmente en el Departamento del Huila en especial en cuanto de café se trata, así como las demás actividades que desarrollen sus asociadas, para cumplir con su objeto social”. A partir de un proceso de intervención que integró actividades de asistencia técnica agroempresarial, inversiones a partir de un fondo rotatorio y acompañamiento Socioempresarial; operado por CADEFIHUILA y cofinanciado por La Fundación la Caixa, el BID/FOMIN, ASMUCAOCC y la Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia, se

facilita la consolidación social y empresarial de ASMUCAOCC, convirtiéndola en referente de las organizaciones solidarias de su territorio, de ahí el reconocimiento y posicionamiento. El proceso arroja resultados de impacto, desde el aumento de ingresos a la mejora de las condiciones socioeconómicas de las mujeres cafeteras, lo que ha permitido mejorar la calidad de sus productos y servicios y la productividad en la labor cafetera que realizan, todo esta ha ayudado a consolidar la gestión social y empresarial de dicha asociación.

**Palabras clave:** Economía Solidaria, Formas Asociativas, Desarrollo Rural, Desarrollo Socio Empresarial Solidario, Mujer Cafetera.

## 1. Introduction

The research raises from the look of a specific case models that allow to recognize social innovation, Aguja, F. A. P., & Quintero, H. J. G. (2017). They recognize that the model of Nesta and Young from the spiral of social innovation can forge a recognition to the context, we start with ASMUCAOCC which is an association of women, constituted as a hybrid between a solidarity economy organization and a social development organization (Law 454 of 1998), it is located in the municipality of La Plata, west of the department of Huila. The initiative is part of the great work led by several women coffee growers from the western part of the department, who for several years have been working with the purpose of adding value to coffee growing, to the point that they are currently planting one of the best coffees produced in Huila, beans that are commercialized in the most select markets of the world.

ASMUCAOCC was created out of the need to make families aware of the importance of the countryside and agriculture, and thus avoid the displacement of children to the city, generating awareness that family farming is a great wealth for households and involves the same family nucleus, supporting the splicing and generational relay and serving as economic, social and cultural support, thus contributing to the integral development of each of the families and communities of influence, all supported by social and solidarity associativity.

To promote the development of women coffee growers in the area, ASMUCAOCC began in 2010 with 50 women associates who promoted a coffee tree planting project. In 2014, it was formally constituted with 238 associates, today they have more than 300 associates. Coffee is their main crop and production is sold to the Cooperativa Departamental de Caficultores del Huila Ltda. (CADEFIHUILA) and/or to traders in the region.

Complementary crops are beans, bananas, banana, racacha, cassava, corn, among others, which are essentially used for self-consumption with little marketable surplus.

The average area of coffee cultivated by the women is 1.3 hectares. This intervention project, initially developed with ASMUCAOCC, and later joined by other Associations of Women Coffee Growers of the department of Huila, has as its origin the importance of coffee growing as an economic activity in Colombia, where, according to the National Federation of Coffee Growers (FNC), by December 2019, there are 853,700 cultivated hectares, of which Huila contributes 17% with 144,900 hectares, generating, in the country, a harvest value (2019) of more than \$7.2 billion pesos. On the other hand, it is estimated that coffee production contributes close to 30% of agricultural employment and is the main source of income for more than 600,000 producers.

The Department of Huila is characterized by its variety of climates and soils that facilitate the diversity and extension of livestock and agricultural production, with coffee agriculture being the most important, followed by beans, lulo, pitaya, rice, sorghum and passion fruit. Huila has been among the departments with the highest coffee production in Colombia since 2011 and today is the first coffee producing department. It is also estimated that 33% of the population of Huila lives from coffee.

This process contemplated three basic components for the achievement of results, providing comprehensive support from the Agribusiness Technical Assistance, Revolving Credit Fund and Socio-business Support to the ASMUCAOCC organization. The Agribusiness Technical Assistance service generates an integral accompaniment to the agricultural producer (Direct Rural Technical Assistance), it is carried out from the socioeconomic diagnosis to determine the needs of the crop and the elaboration and execution of integral management plans, including training, coaching and advice to the beneficiaries and their families for the administrative, operative and financial management of the coffee farm, quality control, for the sustainability of the coffee and its environmental management, the certification of the productive units and the identification of the cup profile, establishing the following scopes: Improvement of the production systems with a tendency towards productivity, improvement of the level of income of the producers, protection of natural resources and improvement of the living conditions of the producers. Méndez, J. E. R., Aguja, F. A. P., & Quintero, J. L. C. (2021), reflect that in education the practical cases, allow to deepen in how to exemplify transferable models to different sectors, this socioeconomic value manages to give significance to the stock market and to the related rights susceptible to companies with specific market orientations.

The credit system (Revolving Fund), accompanied by an integral plan that regulates the credit service to the associates and beneficiaries of this project in the modality of productive investments for; soil analysis, coffee maintenance, agricultural

infrastructure, waste water treatment and associativity and monitoring the behavior of the portfolio, through credit management indicators, which allows the protection of credit resources and the granting of greater credit benefits to women coffee growers.

The process of socio-entrepreneurial accompaniment to the Association, carried out by the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia based on the project My.Coop Colombia (How to Manage your Agricultural Cooperative), seeks to strengthen the management of agricultural cooperatives so that they can offer their members efficient, effective and high quality services so that the association's administrators (current and potential) can identify and address the main specific management challenges for market-oriented agricultural and livestock development, with the intention of participating, through CADEFIHUILA, in national and international business opportunities, by taking advantage of differentiated product prices (Specialty Coffee). The intervention also involves the case study of ASMUCAOCC, which analyzes the results of the project in the socio-entrepreneurial strengthening of the organization.

**Coffee growing:** The Coffee Dictionary defines coffee **growing** as "Agricultural activity whose objective is the cultivation and production of coffee".

**Association:** According to Rosales (1997), cited in Universidad Del Rosario (2009), associativity is a business cooperation mechanism in which each of the participating companies maintains its legal independence and managerial autonomy, voluntarily deciding to participate in a joint effort with the other participants in pursuit of a common objective.

**Coffee Growing Women:** The UNDP report states that rural women in Colombia suffer triple discrimination. In the first place, because of their condition and the fact of being women in a rural world with restricted opportunities compared to the advantages and privileges enjoyed by women and men in urban areas. Secondly, rural women are discriminated against and excluded due to the patriarchal structure of rural society and the deep-rooted and limited cultural role assigned to rural women, generally reduced to the tasks of reproducing the labor force, caring for and protecting family members and productive obligations in the home. Such activities do not have sufficient social recognition and, in terms of income, are not equivalent to the work they perform. Third, rural women are exposed and vulnerable to the different manifestations of intra-family and gender violence they experience in their daily environment, and to the dramatic consequences of the armed conflict, such as displacement, land dispossession, sexual violence as a weapon of war and forced recruitment. (Gonzales, G. Vicente & others, n.d.).

**Solidarity Economy:** Law 454 of 1998 offers a broad panorama of organizations, since it defines solidarity economy as a "socioeconomic, cultural and environmental system conformed by the set of social forces organized in associative forms identified by solidarity, democratic and humanistic self-management practices, non-profit for the integral development of the human being as subject, actor and end of the economy" (Article 2), this implies having solidarity economy organizations (those of Law 79 of 1988), of dual nature, that is, association and company, and social development organizations, associations of people.

**Solidarity-based associativity:** that which aims to improve the living conditions of a community by basing its practices on solidarity and cooperation. Expressions of solidarity associativity are known as solidarity organizations (Organizaciones Solidarias, 2018, p.14).

**Socio-entrepreneurial Strengthening and Consolidation:** The strengthening and consolidation of organizations, according to Conpes Document 3661 of 2010 establishes that, "...for civil society organizations it is of vital relevance to be subject to a set of intentional, systematic and contextualized strategies through which the improvement of their collective skills or competencies becomes viable, in such a way that through this organizational development contributes to the improvement in the execution of their mission and the achievement of their goals" (p.17).

## **2. Materials and Methods**

The Social and Business Consolidation Project of the Association of Women Coffee Growers of Western Huila ASMUCAOCC (La Plata), executed by the Departmental Cooperative of Coffee Growers of Huila Ltda. CADEFIHUILA with resources provided by the Inter-American Development Bank IDB - Multilateral Investment Fund Member of the IDB MIF Group, La Caixa Foundation, the Cooperative University of Colombia and CADEFIHUILA, addresses, in a comprehensive manner, the problems of the Association in terms of social and solidarity associativity, technical assistance and credit to meet the needs of modernization of production, processing and marketing. Mixed paradigm of exploratory character.

Methodologically, we worked:

Support for productive investment, Agricultural technical assistance.

Quality certification programs.

Strengthening of the Associations in the Governance of the agricultural enterprise, through the My.COOP methodology applied by the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia.

Financial education and savings for the proper management of personal finances and of the coffee company.

Strengthening for the socio-entrepreneurial management of the organization through the My.Coop Colombia methodology.

Demonstration tours, coffee fairs and events.

Brand and commercial image consulting:

Commercial accompaniment in negotiations of specialty coffee.

Development of a quality laboratory to establish the cup profile.

The supervision and control of the activities and investments made were verified through the ex-post evaluation methodology, with the development of a mid-term evaluation and a final evaluation, together with 6 periodic audits, through an international firm of auditors.

### 3. Results

As a result of this project the associated women coffee growers achieved: (1) an increase in coffee quality, reaching an average price above the standard, (2) an increase in productivity to reach 2,520 kg of dry parchment coffee per hectare, (3) ASMUCAOCC was consolidated as an association with autonomous governance and strengthened commercial management, with recognition of its own brand "Las Rosas". In terms of quality of life, the FNC estimates that 70% of Colombian coffee growing families live below the poverty line, obtaining average incomes equivalent to 56% of the legal minimum wage in force in Colombia; these levels of poverty are explained by the challenges faced by small coffee growers due to the lack of: (i) implementation of good agricultural practices that limit yields and product quality, (ii) effective associativity that allows them to reduce costs and improve their positioning and access to markets; (iii) access to financing under adequate conditions to invest in the improvement of coffee plantations.

The municipality of La Plata (Huila) has a similar problem-situation, especially in agricultural production, which is carried out by small producers, and which has not allowed its development and requires concrete actions to strengthen it in order to consolidate it as a productive and competitive territory that protects the environment. These problems can be summarized as: unconsolidated social and solidarity-based associativity, unplanned agricultural production without consulting soil suitability, and high levels of rural poverty. The actions defined around this proposal are linked to what the State, academia (Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia) and the private solidarity



sector (CADEFIHUILA) can identify in order to formulate strategies to solve the needs for modernizing production, especially in terms of associativity, technical assistance, marketing and credit.

The project directly benefits an organization in the municipality of La Plata, ASMUCAOCC, an organization led by women coffee bean producers who have a weak business structure, their associates belong to low socioeconomic strata, their family income is made up of the direct sale of their crops, they do not keep accounts and have a low level of schooling.

ASMUCAOCC was born as an organization representing women in the field of coffee work (association of persons), but in its reality it has developed business opportunities (company), and "is committed to the sustainable development of the agricultural sector in Colombia and particularly in the Department of Huila, especially in terms of coffee, as well as other activities that its associates develop in order to comply with its corporate purpose", Article 5 of its Articles of Incorporation.

ASMUCAOCC had to face, from its beginnings, the problem related, in the first instance, with the gender perspective, which according to the Beijing Declaration, should: Ensure women's equal access to economic resources, including land, credit, science and technology, vocational training, information, communications and markets, as a means of promoting the advancement and empowerment of women and girls, including by increasing their capacity to enjoy the benefits of equal access to these resources through, inter alia, international cooperation (United Nations, 1995, p. 5); derived from this gender perspective, ASMUCAOCC was also confronted with gender equality, i.e., that rights, responsibilities and opportunities do not depend on the sex with which one is born. Finally, the Association, despite these setbacks must achieve women's empowerment, which occurs "when women and men exercise control and take charge of their own lives through an expansion of their choices" (UNESCO, 2014, p. 106).

Therefore, the central problem that responds to the problematic question is related to the aspiration of women coffee growers to improve their income levels through the production and commercialization of their products, as well as the consolidation of their associative enterprise in the social (qualification and development of the associates) and entrepreneurial (management of their businesses) aspects. Coffee productivity in Huila is one of the highest in Colombia, partly due to the climatic conditions and technical conditions. Huila has an average production of 20 to 25 loads of 125 kilograms per hectare of dry parchment coffee. Despite the success of the department



of Huila as a leading coffee producer the poverty level was 43.9% in 2014 (Fedesarrollo). The rural municipality of La Plata, whose population is 80% dedicated to agricultural activities, still has a series of poverty in the agricultural sector, mainly due to lack of associativity, credit resources, technical capacity and structural factors such as transportation and roads, which limit its ability to consolidate as a productive and competitive territory.

Torrente Castro, W. (2016), concludes, the associates of ASMUCAOCC have small extensions of land, the average of them barely reaches 3.13 has. And in that extension they dedicate 78.0% to agricultural production, predominantly coffee as economic base, but complemented with the presence of pastures, beans, plantain and banana, arracacha, cassava, corn, among others. They also identify the importance of protection zones, with forests or stubble and some livestock, especially chickens and chickens, as well as fish. The characterization of these farm systems includes: small extensions, healthy possession of the land, they have a document that guarantees their tenure, family labor, a mixture of traditional and technified production systems, concern for soil and environmental conservation, they identify a commercial product, which is considered the economic axis, they develop other agricultural and livestock production systems, they use credit systems from various sources that are expensive. Rodríguez, C. E. L., Rubiano-Calderón, J. S., Aguja, F. A. P., Martínez, E. G., & Quintero, J. L. C. (2021), the pandemic gives a turn to each daily work consignment, its value, its recognition in agriculture reflects how production and mediation grows according to what is demanded by the market, products so considerable for the countries continued their course, commercialization does not stop production or expenditure.

It is important to note that the women's association project involves the family nucleus, but the fundamental reason is to maintain the generational relay and serve as economic, social and cultural support, making more visible the work done by women in the agricultural enterprise, interacting with the family and instilling in the children the value of the land, its wealth and how, by making good use of it, quality food can be produced, teaching them to share, to be supportive and strengthen the bonds of friendship among neighbors. However, the importance of this project relates the agribusiness accompaniment activity with the impact it could cause in the community of the producers of La Plata; and that is expressed in:

- 1) The improvement of coffee production systems through the implementation of Good Agricultural Practices.
- 2) The protection of the coffee environment through the implementation of Good Environmental Practices.

- 3) Increase in production volumes of dry parchment coffee/hectare/year
  - 4) The increase in coffee productivity understood as the relationship between profits in relation to production and quality.
  - 5) An increase in the level of income of coffee producers.
  - 5) The implementation of traceability processes, performing quality control;
  - 6) Facilitating the commercial positioning of the Association.
  - 7) The facilitation of resources under favorable conditions for productive investment.
- And with the Socio-business accompaniment that strengthens and consolidates the organization ASMUCAOCC, through the activities developed, caused an impact that was reflected in:
- Strengthening the levels of associativity
  - Strengthening the solidarity organization of coffee producers.
  - Improvement in social and business management through the MyCOOP Model.

Another factor that supports the project's success argument is the successful operation and coordination carried out by CADEFIHUILA as a result of the call launched by La Caixa Foundation and IDB/MIF for the co-financing of two projects of the Social Entrepreneurship Program (PES) in Colombia in 2015. The entity stood out for its soundness and extensive experience in supporting productive projects, in addition to exhibiting successful management of the demand for reimbursable financing and demonstrating its financial solvency. The project was selected for its potential to generate a triple environmental, economic and social impact in the Department of Huila. On the other hand, the alliance with the Universidad Cooperativa de Colombia guarantees a process of academic, social and entrepreneurial accompaniment. The intervention began with ASMUCAOCC, but the results achieved led the co-financiers to approve benefiting other Associations of Women Coffee Growers, which are identified in the following table.

**Table 1.** Coverage of the Women Coffee Growers Project in the Department of Huila according to organizations and number of beneficiaries.

MUNICIPALITIES	ORGANIZATION	BENEFICIARIES Associated
Colombia	Association and alliance of women coffee growers of Colombia Huila	

Tello	Rural Women's Association PRISMA of Tello Huila	
Teruel	Association of Women Coffee Growers Futuro de Teruel Huila	
Timana	Associative Group of high quality coffee produced by CINCO - COPROALCA 5	
Pitalito	Southern Huila Coffee Businesswomen	
Santa Maria	Asociación Agropecuaria Mujer Caficultora Samaria (Samaria Women's Coffee Growers' Agricultural Association)	
La Plata - Paicol - Argentina	Association of Women Coffee Growers of Western Huila - ASMUCAOCC - ASMUCAOCC	293
<b>TOTAL WOMEN COFFEE GROWERS BENEFITED</b>		<b>404</b>

**Source:** CADEFIHUILA: progress reports from project technicians.

#### 4. Conclusions

At the beginning of this organizational project, the head of the household was the one who gave the orders and carried out everything related to the coffee company; the woman was dedicated to the care of the children and household chores, without even being allowed to give an opinion, this has been changing and today the woman has her own plot of land where the family nucleus, children and husbands work and with this income they collaborate in all the expenses of the coffee company. In addition, through social and solidarity-based associativity they strengthen inter-institutional work (Government of Huila, Coffee Growers' Committee, SENA, Coffee Growers'

Cooperative, and the Cooperative University of Colombia). The multifunctionality of family agriculture and social and solidarity associativity, in the case of the association:

- Instills the cultural, social and economic value of the community.
- Integrate the family into the teamwork.
- It highlights the work of women as a fundamental part of society.
- The contribution of women in the coffee business raises awareness among husbands about the importance of gender equity work.
- It conserves the flora and fauna.
- Strengthens inter-institutional work (Coffee Growers' Committee, sena, Cooperative of Coffee Growers).
- Contributes to the well-being of the family with a healthy diet.
- Facilitates the economic improvement of the family nucleus.
- Produces quality food that contributes to the nutrition of many people surrounding families.

The project has been successfully executed, supported by the programming and foresight of the executing entity. The beneficiary groups were those foreseen, to which women coffee growers from other regions of the department of Huila were added, reaching more population than was estimated in the programming. The institutional capacity of the executing company to identify, carry out and follow up on the project is evident when analyzing its results.

The analysis of the project, as a solution to the problem (relevance), is highly satisfactory; the beneficiaries endorse the fulfillment of the project's objectives, its coverage and the technical, environmental and institutional aspects. Community participation was also key to meeting the project's goals.

The project had a positive impact on the beneficiaries, increasing their levels of quality and productivity, which resulted in higher income from the commercialization of their coffee and, of course, in their quality of life, as well as improving the management of their farms and the Association, gaining space at the local, regional and international levels. A good measure of the success of the project is also the consolidation of alliances for its development, in which the Academy and the State intervened, as well as the community. The factors to be taken into account to achieve the project's objectives:

- Clear and concrete identification of the problem, the community and the institution that can contribute to its solution.
- The executor must be another griever, so that the solution to the problem must be part of his or her mission.

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