
WOMEN'S EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES OF CERTIFICATION SCHEMES AND EMPOWERMENT IN THE COSTA RICAN COFFEE INDUSTRY

Laura Stein, W.A. Franke College of Forestry and Conservation, University of Montana, Missoula

Coffee certification schemes, such as Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance, and Organic, influence the environmental, economic, and social conditions of the global coffee industry by promoting sustainable production practices and equitable trade relations. Over the past three decades, studies show that adhering to environmental standards supports ecological conservation in agricultural communities. However, research examining the economic and social impacts among producers yields mixed results due to context-specific factors such as management strategies, landholding size, and market conditions. Furthermore, although many certification schemes incorporate gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives, little attention has been given to the perspectives of women producers, many of whom confront challenges due to socially constructed gender norms. This research addresses this gap in knowledge through case study analysis of two organizations in southern Costa Rica: CoopeAgri, a mixed-gender producer cooperative, and ASOMOBI, an all-women's coffee association. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews, document analysis, and participant observation within each organization. Preliminary results suggest that while the majority of women believe certifications can provide benefits, there are significant costs (i.e., money, time, energy), and the actual benefits received can be minimal.