

Women's Leadership and Economic Empowerment in Peru's Coffee Sector: Gender Equality in Coffee Production

| Executive summary

Empowering women is one of the most effective ways to combat poverty. However, in agricultural supply chains like coffee, women face significant cultural and structural barriers. They often lack access to critical resources such as land, finance, and education – key tools for participating fully in the economy and contributing to farm productivity. Additionally, women are disproportionately responsible for household and childcare duties, which limits their ability to develop skills and engage in income-generating activities, leaving them financially vulnerable.

This case study draws on TechnoServe's experience with the [Coffee Alliance for Excellence \(CAFE\)](#), an initiative by USAID supported by JDE Peet's and [Mujeres CAFE](#) sponsored by the Starbucks Foundation, to present a systematic approach to integrating women into the coffee value chain. The programs' focus on increasing incomes, building agency and leadership skills, and challenging cultural norms that restricted men's and women's roles in their economic success

all contributed to empowering women within the coffee value chain.

This approach operates across several dimensions: economic opportunity, leadership and agency, norms and attitudes, and the broader enabling environment. By addressing these areas holistically, the two programs fostered a transformative shift in women's inclusion and participation in Peru's coffee sector.

"We have learned not to be discriminated against, to be empowered, and to achieve our dreams and the goals we set for ourselves [...] I have changed in every way... I am no longer the timid, shy woman who was humiliated, not anymore."

— Elvira Córdoba Peña,
Participant in the CAFE and
Mujeres CAFE programs
(Moyobamba, Peru)

**Tu mirada es mi
felicidad." / "Your
gaze is my
happiness." (Image:
Zeneida Torres
Reyes)**



The Need for Women's Inclusion in Peru's Coffee Supply Chains

Despite women's significant contributions to Peru's coffee sector, their participation is often hindered by barriers that limit their access to resources, decision-making power, and leadership opportunities within the value chain. Even though [men own nearly 70% of the land, leaving women with only 30% ownership](#), there are still plenty of opportunities to make progress, even when women's access to land is restricted.

Women frequently contribute a significant share of on-farm labor without having equal decision-making power, driven by cultural norms that present men as heads of household and minimize the role of women as farmers. Women's responsibilities for household work diminish the time available for productive activities and training.

According to the 2018 National Time Use Survey (ENUT) in Peru, [women dedicate an average of 39.7 hours per week to unpaid domestic work, while men dedicate only 15.2 hours to the same activities](#). This significant disparity reflects an overload of unpaid work for women, contributing to the so-called "double workday." In contrast, men spend more time on paid activities, further widening the total workload gap. These findings highlight the unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities which limits women's ability to fully engage in productive activities like farming. As a result, their contributions are often overlooked and undervalued, which puts them in a particularly vulnerable position as economic agents.

Addressing these challenges is critical to creating a thriving and inclusive coffee value chain. Since its inception, the [Coffee Alliance for Excellence \(CAFE\)](#) and [Mujeres CAFE](#) programs recognized gender equality as an essential component of their mission. The methodologies developed by TechnoServe for these programs emphasized strategies that enhanced women's participation in the coffee supply chain, strengthened their economic and social empowerment, and solidified their decision-making power and control over assets at home and on their farms.

A Synergy for Change: The Coffee Alliance for Excellence (CAFE) and Mujeres CAFE Programs

TechnoServe's Coffee Alliance for Excellence (CAFE) and Mujeres CAFE programs have worked hand-in-hand to address both systemic barriers and the specific challenges faced by women in Peru's coffee sector. Together, these initiatives have improved the economic well-being of farmers and enabled women to play an integral role in the coffee value chain, resulting in lasting transformations in the regions of San Martin, Junin, and Huanuco.

CAFE, a public-private partnership funded by USAID, Jacobs Douwe Egberts (JDE), aimed to boost coffee farmers' income by enhancing productivity,

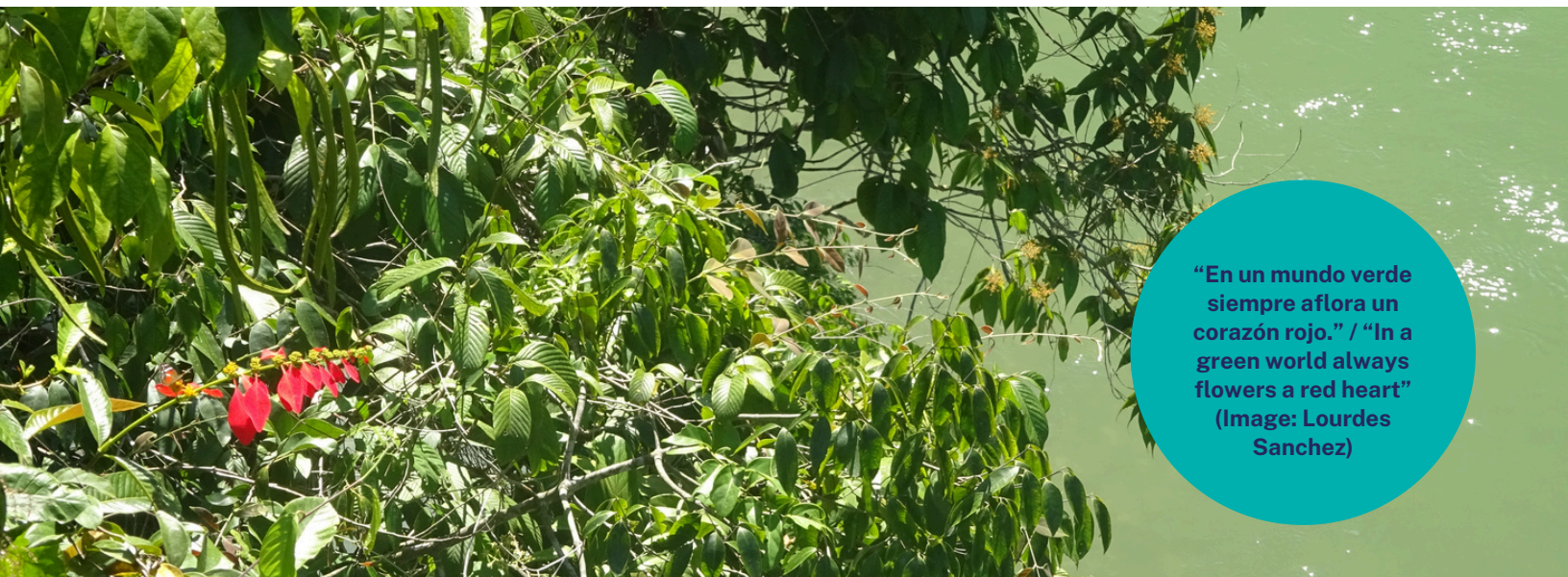
transforming family dynamics to promote shared roles and responsibilities at both the farm and household levels, strengthening producer organizations, and improving market access. Concurrently, Mujeres CAFE, supported by The Starbucks Foundation, focused on unlocking women's empowerment through leadership and communication training, enabling them to assume more prominent roles in household and community decision-making.

Together, these programs generated substantial progress, with **over 1,600 coffee farming families** now making joint decisions on the marketing of their coffee and the use of income generated from sales. Women emerged as vital contributors within their communities, **holding 59% of leadership positions** in coffee producer organizations associated with the programs. The synergy between CAFE and Mujeres CAFE also led to personal growth and development, **88% of women trained in leadership reported increased decision-making power** at both the farm and household levels. Additionally, **97% of women gained more control over their income**. Participants also reported a significant boost in self-confidence, illustrating the broad impact of the training on both their economic independence and personal growth.

Despite owning only 30% of Peru's coffee farms, women's contributions have been amplified through these programs. By addressing barriers such as limited access to agricultural training and financing, and limited agency, CAFE and Mujeres CAFE have helped close the gender gap in income: baseline data from 2018 revealed that income in the households of **male cooperative members was 32% higher** than of female cooperative members; by 2024, **the gap had reduced to 11%**, largely as a result of an **82% increase in income** derived from coffee. This demonstrates that with improved access to resources and opportunities, women are now better positioned to continue closing this gap and advancing their economic empowerment.

This shared approach between CAFE and Mujeres CAFE created synergies that have enabled an inclusive and equitable coffee value chain to emerge; one in which women can fully engage in economic opportunities and have their contributions recognized.

The result is a thriving coffee sector in which women have gained autonomy, control over assets, and the ability to make informed decisions that benefit themselves, their families, and their communities.



“En un mundo verde siempre aflora un corazón rojo.” / “In a green world always flowers a red heart”
(Image: Lourdes Sanchez)

A Four-Pillar Approach to Women's Economic Empowerment

TechnoServe's approach to women's economic empowerment is rooted in the belief that enabling women to earn an income and control their economic decisions is essential for gender equality and inclusive growth. Drawing inspiration from models like those of the [International Food Policy Research Institute \(IFPRI\)](#) and the socio-ecological framework developed by psychologist Urie Bronfenbrenner, TechnoServe aims to support women across multiple dimensions of empowerment.

The organization's strategy centers on equipping women with the skills, resources, and confidence to increase their incomes and make informed economic choices. This is achieved through four key pillars: economic opportunity, leadership and agency, norms and attitudes, and ecosystem and enabling environment. By focusing on these areas, TechnoServe ensures that women are empowered not just as individuals but also within their families, communities, and broader market systems.

Programs like CAFE and Mujeres CAFE embody this comprehensive approach by:

- ✓ Expanding economic opportunity: Women gain the skills needed to enhance their productivity and income as farmers and entrepreneurs.
- ✓ Building leadership and agency: Women develop the confidence and decision-making capacity to lead and influence change at the household and community levels.
- ✓ Transforming norms and attitudes: Social and cultural attitudes shift to support women's economic participation and leadership.
- ✓ Creating an enabling environment: Ecosystem actors, such as producer organizations and market institutions, adopt inclusive business models that promote gender equality.

Inspired by the [Pro-WEAI](#) (the Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index), TechnoServe designs its women's economic empowerment approaches across the dimensions of **power within** (building confidence), **power to** (acting on decisions), and **power with** (collective action). This framework supports all interventions, ensuring that women's empowerment is a goal in and of itself and a catalyst for stronger, more inclusive agricultural systems.

Through CAFE and Mujeres CAFE, women have developed the confidence and agency to assume leadership roles, manage their economic activities, and drive transformative changes within their communities, leading to sustainable and equitable outcomes across the coffee value chain. The following sections will explore in greater detail how these outcomes were achieved and the specific strategies that led to such significant progress.

Solutions for Addressing Inequalities: Economic Opportunity

To achieve women's economic empowerment, programs need to design interventions that create pathways for women to acquire the skills necessary to increase their incomes. This primarily comes from overcoming barriers that limit women's participation in technical training, ensuring they are recruited to programs, and tailoring training spaces and content in inclusive and contextually-appropriate ways.

For example, in CAFE and Mujeres CAFE, TechnoServe employed various tactics to ensure that training sessions were designed around women's needs — considering how, when, and where the sessions were held to allow women to balance household and childcare responsibilities. The use of inclusive communication and imagery helped ensure that the program's materials and messages resonated equally with both women and men, creating an environment where women could fully engage. By focusing on these and other practical strategies, TechnoServe laid the foundation for inclusive development. This ensured that both women and men in Peru could contribute to and benefit from the economic progress made through coffee production, while also advancing gender equality as a key outcome.

Women's equal access to agronomy training

Recognizing that women are key players in the coffee value chain, the CAFE program made deliberate efforts to ensure their participation in every step of the technical training process.

To ensure both men and women were invited to training sessions, the program used inclusive communication methods. Posters announcing group training sessions were displayed in community centers, and loudspeakers broadcasted invitations, emphasizing that the sessions were open to all. This approach aimed to dismantle the traditional gender biases that often limit women's participation in such activities.

On field days, where the program presented modules on best agronomy practices, childcare stations were set up to enable mothers to fully engage in the activities. This addressed a critical barrier to women's participation — childcare responsibilities.

Furthermore, during individual family visits, technicians made a point to invite both spouses to join in the technical training, ensuring that both men and women were equally involved in learning and decision-making about farm practices.

Through these efforts, the CAFE program increased women's involvement in technical training and supported them in acquiring essential knowledge to succeed as coffee farmers.



This ensured that women were not left behind as new agricultural practices were introduced, positioning them as key contributors to the sustainability and productivity of coffee farming in their communities.

These simple practices helped break down cultural barriers, integrating women into spaces where they could acquire knowledge and skills, placing them on equal footing with men and enhancing their credibility as farmers.

THE STORY OF GEMA

One of those farmers who is embracing agricultural training on regenerative agriculture is Gema Acha. At just 27 years old, Gema completed her agronomy studies and began working at her father's farm. "I am in charge of the whole coffee processing topic, from harvesting, selecting the cherries, washing, and processing, to roasting and grinding," she explains.

Her expertise as an agronomist has been key for implementing regenerative practices, such as using vetiver for treating coffee wastewater. "Vetiver is a natural biofilter, more than 80% of the water comes out clean," she notes, highlighting its benefits for the environment.

Her involvement with the CAFE project has brought significant improvements. "We have added the vetiver, efficient microorganisms, and prunings to avoid deforestation," Gema shares. These practices have enhanced productivity and improved the farm's resilience to climate change. "Now we are more trained...to keep improving our production quality."

Gema's dedication extends beyond her farm. She is passionate about inspiring other women to join the coffee industry. "Women are getting more involved...we continue to inspire other

women to get into this coffee world," she states. This involvement has led to women taking on roles in tasting, barismo, and specialty coffee processing.

Her vision for the future is clear: "We intend to have a laboratory for fermentation and tasting...so that farmers can learn not only in theory but also in practice." Gema is committed to ensuring that coffee growers are not deceived in the market and can achieve better yields and prices.

Gema's message to the new generation of coffee growers is one of encouragement and openness to innovation. "Coffee is a very beautiful industry...each farm has its specific coffee, and for that coffee, there is a buyer.

With knowledge and an open mind...we will continue to grow," she says.



Gema tending to her coffee plants in Marona, Moyobamba, Peru
(Image: Julieta Ocampo TechnoServe)

Assembling gender-inclusive teams

It is crucial for any program seeking to make a profound impact within their communities to lead by example. Therefore, it was essential for the CAFE project to hire a diverse multidisciplinary team and ensure that all staff, regardless of their specific role, had a clear understanding of the approach to inclusion. To achieve this, the program started with a recruiting process that respected, valued, and acknowledged all gender identities, and implemented a set of strategies to accomplish the program's goals, such as:

- ✓ Promoting a culture of equity and inclusion within the program
- ✓ Developing the confidence and capacity of staff to understand and implement equitable programming
- ✓ Ensuring an increased percentage of women in field staff teams
- ✓ Collecting data disaggregated by gender
- ✓ Including inclusive language in training materials

The recruitment process aimed to achieve parity on the team and included the hiring of at least one individual with a strong technical background in gender integration. Additionally, staff received training to ensure they had a foundational knowledge of gender issues and reflected on their own attitudes and beliefs around gender equality. Promoting an equitable and inclusive organizational culture was essential.

LLUDY BARTRA: A COMMITTED FAMILY TRAINER

Since 2018, Lludy Bartra Ramirez has been a family trainer with the CAFE program, bringing her expertise as an agronomist with a great understanding of a wide range of concerns and problems that affect men and women in all aspects of their lives. Lludy's work with CAFE began by addressing the deeply rooted machismo she encountered in rural families, where women were often excluded from decision-making processes. "When I started, I found families where women still did not make decisions together with their husbands," she recalls.

One of the major challenges Lludy faced was convincing men to allow women to participate in training and decision-making processes.

Despite these challenges, Lludy has witnessed significant changes in the communities where she works. Women have started taking active roles in meetings and decision-making processes, breaking away from traditional norms.

Lludy's role evolved to incorporate dynamic methodologies that made training sessions more accessible and engaging for women. "We use flipcharts with drawings that help women understand the leadership and empowerment themes we presented," Lludy explains. This visual approach has proven effective, especially for rural women with limited literacy, enabling them to understand complex concepts more easily.



Leadership training group in Moyobamba, Peru (Image: Edson Arratea, TechnoServe)

BUILDING CONFIDENCE AND LEADERSHIP

Through her work, Lludy has witnessed women gaining confidence and leadership skills. "Women make decisions together, and they want to participate in meetings," she says proudly. Her efforts have not only transformed individual families but also had a broader impact on community dynamics.

Looking ahead, Lludy highlights the importance of continuing this work. "The association now has the responsibility to continue the path we started," she says, confident that the seeds of change she has planted will continue to grow.

Solutions for Addressing Inequalities: Economic Opportunity

The CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs recognized that genuine empowerment involved fostering confidence and enabling women to take control of decisions at personal, household, and farm levels. Leadership and agency were developed through reflection and workshops that encouraged women to recognize their intrinsic power and build the capacity to lead within their households and communities.

This deliberate focus on leadership allowed women to expand their influence at the family level and positioned them as active agents of change within the broader coffee value chain. By addressing leadership through the distinct lens of women's empowerment, the programs positioned women's agency with a view to the long term: it went beyond individual growth, transforming the dynamics of entire communities. The next section explains how these strategies were implemented to create a profound transformation.

Reconnecting women with their power

The heart of this transformation emerged with the leadership workshops promoted by the Mujeres CAFE program. These were established for women to recognize and reconnect with their potential, regardless of their educational level or previous experiences.

The Mujeres CAFE program designed training with four key modules that responded to the local context and challenges faced by rural women in Peru:

Recognizing My Power:

- Helping women understand the skills and qualities of successful leadership, explore confidence and self-esteem, and identify individual strengths.

Communicating My Power:

- Developing communication skills and learning strategies to convey their ideas and needs effectively.

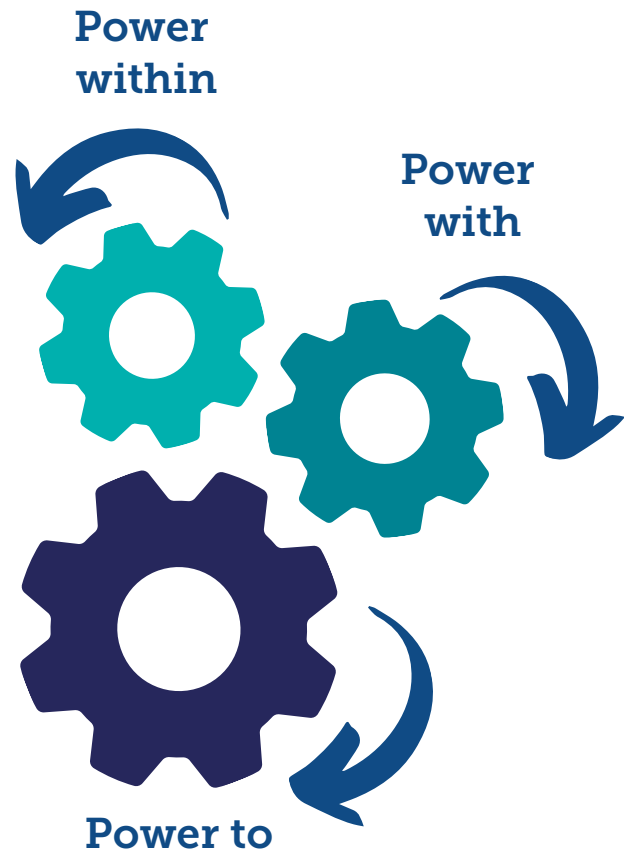
Identifying Resources Within My Reach:

- Enhancing their belief in their ability to succeed and reach their goals.

Putting Into Action Our Leadership:

- Enhancing their ability to execute actions and behaviors that will allow them to achieve greater participation in their communities.

A key element principle of these workshops is that women are already leaders in different spheres of their lives.



The workshop emphasized this while seeking to build women’s intrinsic agency (power within), instrumental agency (power to) related to agricultural contributions, and other assets, and collective agency (power with) related to group membership, access and use of public or private services, control and use of income, financial access and decisions, and equitable distribution of labor. The intent of the workshops was for women to view themselves as agents of change in their families, communities, and the coffee sector.



WOMEN LEADERS

"Each of us women has that leadership inside us, and many times we have it overshadowed because society is used to women staying at home raising children and not expanding, going out, and holding leadership positions."

Lucy Pulce, 29, is the president of the Association of Entrepreneurial Women in Agriculture of Nuevo Salinas. Lucy recalls that before she took on this responsibility, everyone was asking her to lead, but she believed that because she did not have high school studies, she wouldn't be able to do it.

Lucy participated in different activities offered by CAFE and Mujeres CAFE. The first thing Lucy recalls about her experience with Mujeres CAFE was a story featured in the self-efficacy materials. The story is about Clementina, a woman with many dreams but many fears, and Arturo, who did not help her move forward. However, Clementina did not stop pursuing her dreams. Lucy reflected on her own story and realized, "When I got appointed as president, I realized that I was my own Arturo and that I could do anything that I set my mind to do, and even better, I had others supporting and encouraging me." That was when she started to realize her own leadership skills.

Lucy and her husband Elias have undergone a transformation in their household. "Men began to have awareness, to value the work that we women often do, and that helped us share the roles. Just as I help him with the work in the coffee production field, he also helps with household chores when we come home."

Lucy has continued her leadership by managing sales and decision-making on behalf of her family's farm. She shares, "The first time I felt fear because I had never sold coffee, even in my home where I grew up, my father never let the women or my mother go to sell. Then my husband trusted me and said, go, you can sell your coffee, it is your production. So, I went, and despite my fear, I saw that it was not something out of this world. It's something we can all do."

Lucy's story demonstrates the power of self-confidence and the impact of supportive communities in empowering women leaders.

LASTING IMPACT

With the Association of Entrepreneurial Women of Nuevo Salinas, Lucy participated in a competition and secured government funding to enhance coffee washing, drying, and pulping machines. This improvement allows her and neighboring producers to boost their product quality and, consequently, get better prices.

Both programs have ensured their efforts continue by supporting community leaders in conducting replicas of the leadership training. Lucy is one of the women leading these sessions, guided by the materials developed by the program, ensuring that the knowledge and skills are passed on and sustained within the community.

In addition to the impacts Lucy describes, women now assert shared ownership of the land as a key element of their partnership

with their spouses, gaining greater influence and recognition within their families and communities. They actively contribute to decision-making on household resources and strategic choices about coffee sales, moving

beyond traditional roles. This shift has enabled women to take on responsibilities previously held by men, such as negotiating coffee sales, leading to personal growth and increased self-confidence.

Empowering Women through Participatory Methodologies: The Photovoice Experience in Mujeres CAFE

Mujeres CAFE deliberately selected the Photovoice methodology as the bookend to its leadership program, ensuring that women could take control of the narratives surrounding their experiences in CAFE and Mujeres CAFE. This choice of methodology was deeply aligned with the broader goals of leadership and agency-building within the program. By using Photovoice, a qualitative method in community-based research, women documented and evaluated changes in their lives and communities through photography and storytelling. This ownership over their narratives played a critical role in strengthening their leadership and self-agency.

Approximately 60 women directly engaged in this process, using photography to reflect on their personal challenges and successes. By visually capturing and sharing their experiences, they initiated discussions that led them to reflect upon the themes visible in their photos.

These themes included: women's relationship with nature, either as a source of inspiration and admiration, or as a resource to protect and care for to ensure the future for their families and communities; women's pride in their role as farmers and contributions to the coffee

production process; and women self-perception as courageous, independent and enterprising leaders. The combination of photography and storytelling allowed women of different literacy levels to actively participate, building their communication and public speaking skills.

From a gender perspective, Photovoice was particularly powerful because it amplified the voices and visibility of women who can struggle to express their needs and experiences. It served as a transformational process that strengthened confidence, self-expression, and problem-solving abilities among the participants.

As Janet Livia Chuquipoma, one of the women who participated in the Photovoice activity, reflects: "We grow coffee; we come from the countryside. I see us as strong, entrepreneurial women because not just anyone would commit to agriculture, to planting and harvesting coffee. It requires a tremendous amount of effort."

The facilitated dialogue that followed the Photovoice evaluation in Moyobamba, San Martin, ensured that the change identified through the photographs



were validated by all women, reflecting the entire group's collective experience. Conducted in the final nine months of the program, this process allowed for individual and collective reflections on the changes achieved, providing a platform for women to share their stories with other stakeholders, thus reinforcing their role as leaders in their communities.

For TechnoServe, the Photovoice methodology was particularly valuable as it offered participant-centered insights into the impact of their work, deepening the understanding of behavioral shifts, relationships, and gender dynamics across different actors. Participants, like Elvira Córdoba Peña, shared how the experience helped them build confidence and agency: “We have learned not to be discriminated against, to be empowered, and to achieve the dreams and goals we set for ourselves.”

It introduced a people-centered approach to qualitative data collection and analysis, which

contributed to adaptive learning and improved program management. The field staff, by engaging in this process, enhanced their ability to learn from and with clients, using these insights to refine the program to better meet women’s needs. In this way,

"We grow coffee; we come from the countryside. I see us as strong, entrepreneurial women because not just anyone would commit to agriculture, to planting and harvesting coffee. It requires a tremendous amount of effort."

— Janet Livia Chuquipoma

Photovoice became a key strategy for reinforcing leadership and agency-building by creating a safe space where women control the narrative of their journeys.

**"Mujer Luchadora" /
"Woman Fighter"
(Image: Lilia Tocto
Padilla)**



Solutions for Addressing Inequalities: Norms and Attitudes

Norms and attitudes must shift to open up space for women to participate in decision-making processes at both the household and community levels and address women’s disproportionate responsibility for care work that restricts women’s participation in training and other productivity-enhancing activities. By targeting norms and attitudes within households, the CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs aimed to foster a profound transformation at the most foundational level of these societal dynamics – the family – creating opportunities for a lasting shift in gender roles and decision-making power.

Family transformation as the core of gender inclusion

Family systems and beliefs play a big part in the overall segregation of women into care roles almost exclusively. Women’s contributions are often invisible to their families and communities, leading to a lack of recognition and participation in commercial activities and decision-making processes. To promote a more equitable redistribution of roles and balance of power between men and women, the CAFE program created spaces for conversation, reflection, and analysis between family members in a safe and intimate environment through in-home gender advisory visits. The advisory professionals or “family engineers” visited each family once a month for three months, addressing three important topics: shared roles, shared decision-making, and women’s participation in coffee sales.

During this phase of implementation, the program reached 1,907 families who reported improvements in:

- ✓ **Gender Equity:** Promoting that women and men have equal exercise of rights, duties, benefits, and opportunities.
- ✓ **Shared Roles:** Reducing the workload of unpaid domestic work for women.
- ✓ **Shared Decision Making:** To promote a balance of power between women and men, benefiting all members of the household.
- ✓ **Participation in Commercialization:** Increasing women’s participation in commercialization and economic decision-making at home.
- ✓ **Prevention of Gender-Based Violence:** Violence against women is a significant contributor to the loss of women’s autonomy and becomes an obstacle to achieving equity and development.





THE STORY OF LUCY AND ELIAS

Men in rural contexts have often held leadership roles as breadwinners, and protectors of traditional views on gender roles, both on the farm and at home. However, Elías Córdoba, a 26-year-old coffee producer from Nuevo Salinas and husband to Lucy Pulce, represents a new generation ready to embrace change. With the support of the CAFE project, Elías has become a strong supporter of women's involvement in productive activities.

Elías recalls the past: “Machismo was very strong. We always left women aside; women were only dedicated to tending the home, cooking. But now it’s different: women have a lot to contribute and they need to continue doing more of that.”

This shift in perspective was significantly influenced by the Mujeres CAFE program. “For me, it was quite a surprise, because at first here [Nuevo Salinas] nothing was organized. And they [Mujeres CAFE] started organizing us...giving training to women so they too could be leaders of an association or take part in the municipality where we live, they can take charge themselves and move forward.”

Elías has seen firsthand the benefits of involving women in coffee production and commercialization. Lucy, his wife is now in charge of selling coffee and negotiating better prices. “Yes, I have seen that change not only in our home but also in our plot.

Many changes with the training and everything. Now we are more equipped to keep improving our production quality.” His family's business has flourished as a result of shared roles and responsibilities at the farm level.

This transformation is not limited to his home but extends to his community in Nuevo Salinas. “Now we have everything already set up, like dryers, depulpers, tanks, everything complete.” Elías's story emphasizes the importance of men as allies in inclusion and his testimony illustrates how inclusive practices can lead to personal and community-wide benefits, building the way for a brighter future where everyone has the opportunity to contribute and thrive.

“Machismo was very strong. We always left women aside; women were only dedicated to tending the home, cooking. But now it’s different: women have a lot to contribute and they need to continue doing more of that.”

— Elias Cordoba

Solutions for Addressing Inequalities: Ecosystem and Enabling Environment

Creating lasting change in gender equality requires addressing the broader ecosystem beyond the household that shapes women's access to financial resources and coffee associations. The CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs recognized that fostering inclusive organizational structures was crucial for enabling women's full participation in the coffee value chain. Initially, efforts were focused on making coffee producer associations more inclusive, but it soon became clear that access to financial resources was equally important. The following section explores both aspects: enhancing women's access to financial resources and creating inclusive cooperatives that support gender equality.

Fostering gender-inclusive producer organizations

Coffee cooperatives and associations are a critical link between markets and producers and a focal point for several of the CAFE interventions. The engagement with associations started with an inclusive practices assessment to understand the disparities faced by women within their area of influence. The first stage involved working directly with the organizational structures, presenting an assessment of the landscape that women faced within their organizations. It was one thing to hear or read about the issues, but understanding the actual context in the field within the coffee sector was essential to get leadership buy-in.

This turned an external concern into an internal priority, providing a clear path toward establishing strategies to achieve greater balance. Additionally, CAFE began to explore the business case for organizations to work more on gender equality because initially, it was not a priority for them. Based on these diagnoses, the following strategies were developed and implemented:

- ✓ **Training and Sensitization Modules:** Among associations' leadership, so they could understand the barriers.
- ✓ **Development of Organizational Policies:** Creating specific policies for organizations that address limitations and promote gender equality.
- ✓ **Gender Action Plans:** Implementing personalized action plans for each organization, ensuring that strategies are relevant and effective in their specific context.
- ✓ **Gender Committees:** Forming women's committees of producers to co-design and provide feedback on the plans, activities, and policies developed at the organizational level.

The program noticed that all these organizations either had certifications, such as Rainforest Alliance or Fair Trade, or were applying for such certifications for their coffee in order to access better markets and prices. By pursuing those quality certifications, the organizations acknowledged that there were social inclusion requirements, including greater parity in terms of access to services, goods, and opportunities within the organizations.

LASTING IMPACT

Paid gender equality professionals are now part of the staff at five associations. Their role is to continue gender inclusion activities and ensure that the goals set in the action plans are met. This integration helps sustain the progress made and keeps equality at the forefront of the association's initiatives.


Significant challenges emerged during the initial implementation due to the focus on organizational restructuring of coffee cooperatives, which took precedence over building women's self-confidence and awareness of their power and agency. This approach slightly delayed the necessary strengthening of women's confidence and made it difficult to convince them to fill leadership positions and become part of productive decision-making processes within these organizations.

A key lesson learned from this experience is that efforts to build women's confidence and self-awareness must begin in parallel with organizational restructuring. By simultaneously fostering women's empowerment and addressing structural changes, the integration of women into leadership and decision-making roles becomes more effective and sustainable. This dual approach ensures that as organizations evolve, women are prepared and willing to contribute to the transformation.

LEIDY: A LEADER DRIVING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Leidy Requejo, 35, is the general manager of Apromayo, a coffee producer association in Soritor, Peru. As a daughter of coffee growers, her passion for coffee and dedication to improving the conditions of families like hers was evident. "I saw my parents attend modules and participate, and it inspired me to study administration and get involved in the coffee industry" Leidy recalls.

Leidy has been a strong advocate for gender inclusion in Apromayo. "Women are more committed. They are fighters," she says, emphasizing the importance of women in both family and business roles. Under her leadership, and with the support of the Mujeres CAFE program, Apromayo has reached a nearly equal split among its members. "We started with the idea that women should also be involved, and now we have women leading and holding positions in the association," she proudly notes. "Thanks to the training and support from CAFE, our coffee quality has improved, and we've accessed better markets and prices," Leidy explains.



Leidy Requejo and
her father Julian,
Moyobamba, Peru
(Image: Julieta
Ocampo
TechnoServe)

Women's increased access to finance and resources

A significant intervention for CAFE was the creation of grassroots savings and credit unions to improve access to finance for rural women. Uniones de crédito y ahorro, or UNICAs, are savings-and-credit unions formed by a few dozen families from a rural community. Members made regular deposits to the UNICA, which then used the funds to provide small loans to members or finance other commercial activities.

Members became shareholders in the UNICA and received a portion of the profits from the loans and business ventures.

CAFE, in conjunction with the Peruvian development bank COFIDE, helped community members create and **strengthen 41 UNICAs**. Because UNICAs were administered by their members, it was vitally important that participating families and the elected leadership received training on financial literacy, and CAFE helped build these skills. The UNICAs supported by CAFE **provided more than \$2.16m USD in loans** since 2019, and nine of the unions established small businesses – micro-retail shops, fertilizer distributors, and coffee processors – to provide services to community members and income to shareholders.

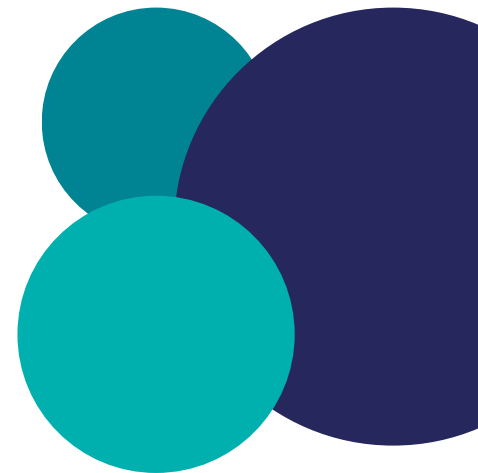
Since UNICAs do not have some of the access barriers – such as the requirement of legal possession of assets – that traditional financial institutions do, they were particularly promising avenues for improving women's access to financial services. CAFE focused on ensuring that the recruitment and training for UNICA members supported the participation

of women at all levels of the unions, building awareness of the importance of inclusion in the success of the UNICAs. “Alongside APROSELVANOR, we formed the UNICA, as women, to have our savings and to succeed along with our families,” explains Lilibeth Llanos Fernández, president of the group.

Among the 41 UNICAs participating in the project, **51%** of the members were women; **45%** of the leadership positions were held by women; and **47%** of loans were distributed to women.

“...We formed the UNICA, as women, to have our savings and to succeed along with our families”

— Lilibeth Llanos Fernández





Conclusion

The success of the CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs showcases how targeted interventions, grounded in locally-driven solutions, can transform both individual lives and broader systems. Through continuous feedback mechanisms and adaptive strategies, these programs maintained their relevance, evolving to meet the shifting needs of the communities they served. By leveraging market incentives like certification standards, they encouraged organizations to adopt more inclusive practices that promoted gender equality and boosted the economic viability and competitiveness of their coffee production.

Together, these programs generated remarkable progress. Over **1,600 coffee farming families now jointly decide on coffee marketing and income allocation**, while women have emerged as critical decision-makers within their communities. **Women hold 59% of leadership positions** in coffee producer organizations, **with 88%** of those trained in leadership **reporting greater decision-making power** at both farm and household levels.

Households experienced an **82% increase in income** from coffee sales, and the income difference between male cooperative members and female cooperative members decreased from **32%** -at baseline in 2018- to **11%** in 2024. Additionally, a remarkable **97%** of women participants **reported gaining greater control over their income**.

This transformation was possible because the CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs operated at multiple levels: individual, family, and community. They demonstrated that addressing inequalities requires more than just working with women; it requires engaging the entire ecosystem — families, producer organizations, and the broader community — to create lasting change. Women alone cannot dismantle systems of exclusion; they need a supportive environment that values and recognizes that their empowerment benefits everyone.

The synergy of these programs has laid the building blocks of an inclusive model that can be replicated elsewhere, ensuring that the progress made continues to flourish. CAFE and Mujeres CAFE showed that a balance between building external systems and supporting individual empowerment is needed, and further exploration is required to refine this approach and ensure sustained, scalable results.


As we move forward, we must continue to challenge the traditional barriers women face and advocate for holistic solutions that empower them at every level. The transformation seen in regions of San Martin,, and Huanuco in Peru is a powerful reminder that investing in women creates ripples of change that benefit entire communities. It's time to scale these solutions because when women thrive, everyone thrives.

About TechnoServe

TechnoServe is committed to transforming agricultural value chains by fostering inclusive and sustainable growth. Through initiatives like the CAFE and Mujeres CAFE programs, we work with smallholder farmers, particularly women, to address systemic barriers and create pathways to economic empowerment. By increasing women’s access to leadership opportunities, financial resources, and inclusive organizational structures, we help build resilient communities and more equitable coffee supply chains.

For over five decades, TechnoServe has partnered with farmers and entrepreneurs to fight global poverty. With local teams embedded in more than 30 countries across Africa, Latin America, and South Asia, we leverage business solutions to create a lasting impact.

In 2023, our work improved the lives of 3.4 million people, helping them generate \$485 million in additional income. Notably, 42% of those impacted were women – demonstrating our ongoing commitment to gender inclusion and equality in agriculture and beyond.



“ Mujeres capaces de cultivos alternos “ /
“Women capable of alternative crops”
(Image: Enelda Velázquez Córdoba)



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