



A Story of Hope

Esperanza Dionisio was the first woman manager of a coffee cooperative in Peru. Her story opens up opportunities to encourage women's leadership in commodity entrepreneurship.

The Pangoa Cooperative is a partner of the National Coffee Board, a valued stakeholder supporting the Coffee National Action Plan to improve coffee's competitiveness and sustainability in Peru, with a strong gender focus.



Located on the hillsides where the Amazonian forest meets the Andes mountain range, the Pangoa District is blessed with rain, fertile soil, and a tropical climate that seldom falls below 23 degrees Celsius, ideal for coffee and cocoa cultivation.

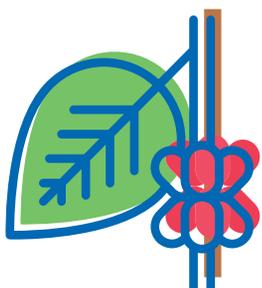
Here is where Esperanza (or Hope, as her name translates in English) Dionisio works as the first female manager of the Pangoa Cooperative for over 20 years.

When she first started the cooperative was in a financial crisis: "We owed one million dollars, we had to fix the accounts of the Central Coffee Cooperatives of Peru, and the cooperative's hydroelectric system", she remembers. Drawing on all of her leadership and managerial skills as well as her vision of how the coffee cooperative could be in future, Esperanza managed to keep the cooperative afloat. Today, it is a leading coffee exporter with organic and fair-trade certification that employs more than 700 people. Under her leadership, the cooperative has become a developmental force for the province of Satipo, in Junín.

But the path to success was not easy. Esperanza, like many women from the Peruvian countryside, had to overcome many obstacles to forge a place in the world of coffee production. She remembers that when she started working as a technical assistant, the men watched her with wonder and suspicion: "As a woman, I had to work twice as hard as a man to show that I was capable."

Concerned about the low value placed on women's contribution as farmers, workers, and entrepreneurs in the coffee sector, in 1997 Esperanza developed the Women's Committee of Pangoa Cooperative (CODEMU). She was determined to promote women's leadership, empowerment and training.

Esperanza knew that this was crucial in a region where the majority of women are employed in agriculture, and female farmers earn almost 50 per cent less than their male counterparts. Women also account for 75 per cent of the adult illiterate population and own less than 25 per cent of the land.



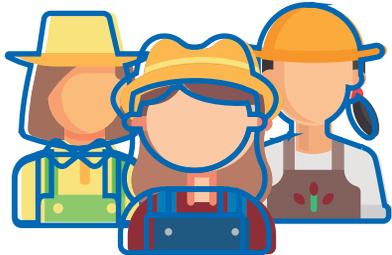
"At the beginning, we started by training women to increase their self-esteem," she explains. "There was a lot of alcoholism and they were complaining that their husbands mistreated them. We would tell them: you have to love yourself first and demand respect."

Thanks to this Committee

training in business management, gender equality and leadership has been provided to many women in the region, along with microcredit funds for women to improve their coffee production, their homes, and to diversify their incomes. For these women, participating in this training has meant personal growth and development.

“It has changed my life,”

says Emma Perez, vice-president of the Women’s Committee. “Before, I was dedicated only to my home and my children, but since I started participating in the training, my worldview has changed, and I have started to value myself, to develop as a person,” she explains. **“Now I have my own business.”**



CODEMU’s work has enabled women members of the cooperative to achieve empowerment and access decision-making spaces previously denied to them. Now, they are leaders and occupy positions in different areas of the cooperative’s governing body.

In 2016, England’s Taylors of Harrogate, a roasting company that buys coffee from the cooperative learnt about Esperanza’s work to empower women. They decided to create a limited edition coffee produced by women in her name. Sales profits were given directly back into CODEMU’s activities. “It is a great honor to have been on this label, and it is an acknowledgement to all the women farmers around the world” said Esperanza.

Inspired by this, the cooperative has now developed a coffee brand produced by indigenous women, called Warrior, in honor of their efforts to cultivate an environmentally sustainable coffee.

Esperanza not only promotes women’s empowerment, but also organic coffee produced in harmony with the forest. She has witnessed how, in the last few decades, vast areas have been deforested to introduce crops such as pineapple or ginger. “All these areas were originally forests, that’s life, the natural cycle. We have to learn to produce under the forest, research possible compatible crops, not just introduce crops for money,” she explains.

For Esperanza, one outstanding issue is the need to define a governance model and strengthen the institutional framework to guide the sector. For her, the Coffee National Action Plan, developed under UNDP GCP’s methodology, will fulfil an important role in the definition of a joint vision – one that benefits and promotes the participation of all actors along the supply chain, including women.



Supporting Partners



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Departamento Federal de Economía,
Formación e Investigación DEFI
Secretaría de Estado para Asuntos Económicos SECO