

OVERVIEW

In February of 2016, RGC teamed up with **Solidaridad**¹ to implement the *Las Rosas Women's Coffee Project* (formerly known as *Las Marias Gender Project*) which benefits 300 women coffee growers and their families, all of whom are members of the *Association of Women Coffee Growers of West of Huila (Asociación de Mujeres Cafeteras del Occidente del Huila)*.

This initiative is guided by two main components: **Financial Literacy** and **Women's Participation** (a component of gender equity), to improve their farming operations and the quality of life for their families.

1. Financial management

- Raise awareness about healthy financial habits
- Creation and implementation of a **Revolving Credit Fund**

2. Women's Participation

- Recognize the **role of women** in coffee production and improve their access to financial resources and decision making power

Within the component of women's participation, the *Gender Action Learning for Sustainability* methodology (aptly nicknamed GALS) has been used to monitor the current state of gender equity within the group and to identify aspects such as: roles and functions of family members in coffee cultivation, land tenure, financial management, and decision making.

The implementation of this methodology helps the community to, "develop new visions for relationships between women and men as equal partners, and implement changes in gender inequalities in resources and power." (<http://www.galsatscale.net/>)



Las Rosas
Coffee
ASOCIACIÓN DE
MUJERES CAFETERAS
DEL OCCIDENTE DEL HUILA

THE PROCESS

Between September 2016 and August 2017, the following activities were accomplished:

¹ Solidaridad is an organization with over 45 years of experience creating sustainable supply chains from producer to final consumer, currently is leading the Sustainable Trade Platform in Colombia from which RGC Coffee is partner. (<http://comerciosostenible.org/en>)

- ✓ **Creation of the revolving credit fund**
 - Defining the revolving fund, its guidelines, and its legal framework
 - Disbursing first loans among participating farmers
- ✓ **Training**
 - Conducting multiple community workshops with sometimes up to 400 participants, including women, their husbands, and their children
 - Hosting workshops centered around setting financial goals, family budgeting, savings plans, financial and non-financial resources, and deciding whether to save or borrow
 - Administration of the **revolving fund** and related software was taught to the operations team and the group's board of directors
- ✓ **Women's Participation and Workshops**
 - 25 women participated in a gender role dynamics workshop
 - 400 project members participated in the *Vision Journey* workshops
- ✓ **Coffee Quality Reinforcement**
 - 400 growers attended 4 workshops about good *post-harvest practices*
 - 167 **post-harvest kits** were distributed

THE INVESTMENT

RGC invested \$30,619 USD in the project, both as a cash premium and as a project premium covering funds for the revolving fund, logistic expenses, and post-harvest kits. An additional \$5,000 USD went towards technical coordination and administration.

SOLIDARIDAD co-funded the project by donating \$29,000 USD to the revolving fund and to technical support.

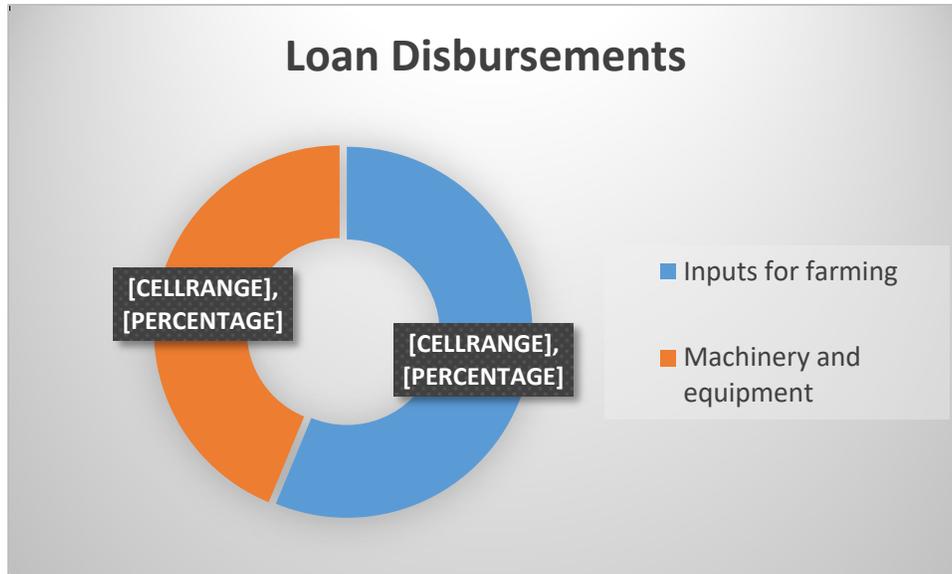


RESULTS

1. Revolving Fund

- a. As of August 23, 2017, **89 credits have been disbursed** to the beneficiary partners. The total amount borrowed is \$15,760 USD, equivalent to 75% of the resources provided as seed capital. The capital recovery amounts to \$3,467 USD.

- b. As demonstrated in the chart below, 56% of the credits went towards inputs for farming and 44% for machinery and equipment.



The revolving fund is still in its early phase and has been **in operation since February 2017**.

RGC and Solidaridad are closely monitoring progress and are receiving feedback from the beneficiaries in order to make adjustments as required.

2. Training results

An important highlight from the training sessions were their ability to bring people together. These sessions exceeded expectations for participation, not only for women, but also for their husbands and children. Women that participated in the project concluded that training activities contributed to the consolidation and strengthening of the association.

For the **financial management** component, three training modules were designed and executed. These modules are ready to be replicated with other groups and projects. The modules designed were:

- ✓ *Life Goals and Money Management*
- ✓ *Family Budgeting, Savings Plans, and How to Use Financial and Non-Financial Resources*
- ✓ *Saving or Borrowing? : A Collective Family Decision*



Volunteers participated in an exercise that established the guidelines of how the revolving fund would work. This democratic process also created a greater sense of collaboration and belonging among the group members, who felt their interests were being met.

To address women's participation, the *Gender Action*

Learning for Sustainability (GALS) methodology made it possible to recognize the contributions women and men have on the coffee farm, identify the structure of household expenditure by gender, and analyze inequalities in land ownership and decision-making within the family. These results showed each family which areas they need to prioritize in order to achieve gender Equity, and to recognize the contributions that women make within the coffee sector. It is important to highlight that this exercise included many of the group members' husbands.

In order to harmonize the efforts of each organization and to avoid duplication of activities, the participating organizations coordinated their efforts and communicated closely with one-another. We are proud to say that many of the methodologies developed in this project will serve as a template for future efforts.

3. Commercial results

RGC promoted the *Las Rosas Women's Coffee Project* and the story of commercial viability based on a foundation of gender equity. This work has made room in the Canadian and US markets among roasters that recognize the social impact of working with women in coffee, its effects on family prosperity and in the fight against poverty.



In 2017 RGC has committed to buy 1,925 bags (70 Kg), which will generate a sustainability premium of \$26,732 USD to be invested in a new phase of the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

- ✓ Linking husbands to project activities **strengthens the family unit**. It was very uplifting to observe both men and women being flexible in assuming roles that are not traditionally associated with their gender. Examples of situations observed: men taking care of children and cooking while their wives attended training, and women actively participating in the cultivation and marketing of coffee.
- ✓ Working with women's associations that have a previously established social network among participants helps to build relationships and ensures their continued participation. In other projects, women were chosen at random and did not share common interests, and thus did not complete the training.
- ✓ The software package created and implemented by Solidaridad to manage the revolving fund must be updated to be more user-friendly. Currently the program requires significant personalized monitoring and input from numerous people, which makes its administration less than straightforward.
- ✓ For projects with a significant training component, like this one, it is necessary to ensure the same group of women participate in all the training activities, since it is a learning process that is cumulative with content that requires exercise and repetition.
- ✓ With multiple organizations assisting the community, it was essential to distinguish the roles with all parties, so that efforts are not duplicated and resources are not wasted. In this specific case the coordination was done between: *Canadian Cooperative Association's 'Project Impact' and Gestando (implementation partner for 'Project Impact'), the Inter-American Development Bank Cooperation Project, La CAIXA Foundation, CADEFIHUILA, and Universidad Cooperativa.*
- ✓ In most cases, sustainable coffee programs require **renewed roaster support** to ensure the continuity of the project and the continued advancement of the growers' community.
- ✓ By having a **solid business case**, additional resources are being invested in the communities, thus elevating farmers from poverty and promoting prosperity. This is the RGC methodology.

NEXT STEPS

RGC will be working on the second phase of the project starting with another community workshop. The goal is to further improve the existing framework and to identify new hot spots to focus on. This plan will include continued enhancements to the Revolving Fund, one of the cornerstones of the Las Rosas Women's Coffee Project.

