

Building Community Through Collaboration

JEANINE NIYONZIMA-AROIAN and **BLANCA MARIA CASTRO** explore the impact a collaborative approach has on local community initiatives.

Women are ambitious. When International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) Chapters pursue support for projects to strengthen their local communities and improve the lives of their neighbors, their scope tends to be equally ambitious. But women are also collaborative, and it's this approach of working slowly with others to achieve change in local communities now making a visible impact across our global network.

COLLABORATION IN ACTION: IWCA BURUNDI

The power of this collaborative approach is evident in the remarkable success stories emerging from IWCA Burundi, where the joint efforts of three non-profit organizations and one for-profit organization over the past six years is resulting in significant increases in quality coffee production, premiums, community financial literacy, and reinvestment in community resources.

An initial project between IWCA Burundi and Burundi Friends International (BFI) in 2013 saw the distribution of more than 200 goats to IWCA farmers as a source of milk and manure (organic fertilizer!) to support their coffee business. The following year, a connection with Project Concern International (PCI) introduced their unique version of village savings and loan groups, Women's Empowerment (WE), to IWCA Burundi and BFI.



Women trace the road leading to their wet mill. (Photo: JNP Coffee)

Over the next three years, the groups raised US\$40,000 to begin their pilot project in the summer of 2017.

Meeting weekly, the women of IWCA Burundi learned how to save money in groups and how to make microloans to other women in their community. Combined with a first-of-a-kind premium received for their coffee from JNP Coffee – a producer, promoter, and trader of Burundi's specialty coffee – which is paid directly to the IWCA growers rather than the wet mills, the WE village savings and loan program has inspired the women of Ngozi Province to invest directly in their own future. They are building a wet mill, so that they can control the processing of their own coffee.

The collaborative approach of IWCA Burundi with local partners has led to successful business development for 135 IWCA members and 134 Burundian youth in Ngozi Province – with an expansion of 1000 new members in Gitega Province in the works!

THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Three other successful IWCA chapter case studies also have their roots in this collaborative approach. A partnership between the IWCA chapter in the Dominican Republic and a roaster in Torino, Italy will culminate in a new roasting facility run by women in Hondo Valle in the Dominican Republic. In Guatemala, a partnership with ANACAFE to produce regional grafting competitions recognizes the

meticulous work of grafting Arabica trees to Robusta roots, often seen as lowly, delicate labor, that women in Guatemala often undertake as an extra source of income to support their families.

And, of course, a collaboration between heritage Specialty Coffee Association of Europe and IWCA Rwanda to purchase land for a newly-created women's cooperative in Rulindo has grown to include partnerships with World Coffee Research, Sustainable Growers, and the International Trade Centre as they support the cooperative structure, provide training, and plant seedlings.

We invite you to learn more about our collaborative approach to making an impact in local communities – with over 50 IWCA Chapter members in attendance, we're sure to see you out on the show floor!

Visit IWCA at Booth T72 or join us at one of our activities across this year's Expo event: "Coordinating Around a Gender Lens: Actionable Solutions," an IWCA & Café Femenino joint panel (Friday, 9 AM – 10 AM in Room 251); our annual IWCA Breakfast (Saturday, 7:30 AM on Ballroom East Level 3); and the IWCA Cupping, where you will be able to taste 30 coffees from across our global network (Sunday, 8 AM – 9:45 AM in Room 204B).