

From agency to empowerment: women farmers' experiences of a fairtrade coffee cooperative in Guatemala

Alissa Bilfield^{†*}, David Seal[◇] & Diego Rose[◇]

[†] *McGuire Center for Entrepreneurship, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ, USA.*

[◇] *Global Community Health and Behavioral Sciences, Tulane University, New Orleans, LA, USA.*

*Corresponding author. Email: abilfield@email.arizona.edu

Through the feminization in agriculture over the last decades, more women have been taking on formal roles in cash crop agriculture, including as members and leaders in cooperatives. Yet minimal research has sought to understand the dynamics of women's participation based on their own accounts. This paper explores the lived experiences of Mayan women coffee cooperative members in the Western Highlands of Guatemala through their own perspectives. Two visual participatory research methods were combined with semi-structured interviews to generate grass-roots level perspectives on complex social and behavioral phenomena within this difficult to reach population. This study finds that through women's formal participation as cooperative members, they not only gain enhanced access to critical resources and improve their food security, but also develop agency at the individual level and become empowered through the institutional structure of the cooperative and its link to a larger federation.

Keywords: Fair Trade, Gender, Coffee Cooperatives, Empowerment, Guatemala.

Introduction

It is currently estimated that one-third of coffee cooperative members are women, and there is a growing variety of fair-trade coffee brands that market "women-grown coffee". While women coffee producers have long been marginalized as invisible labor in the coffee production process, in the last few decades they have been taking on formal roles in the coffee supply chain as cooperative members and leaders within the context of "the feminization of agriculture" (FAO 2010; Lastarria-Cornhiel 2008; Lyon, Bezaury, and Mutersbaugh 2010; Pattnaik et al. 2018). As more women are taking on formal roles in agricultural cash crop industries such as coffee, there is a need to understand the dynamics of their participation and the reality of their lived experiences. Extensive efforts have been made to quantify and measure women's agency and empowerment in agriculture (Alkire et al. 2013; Malapit et al. 2015; Manyamba and Hendriks 2014). While these quantitative efforts to establish a measurement tool for women's empowerment in agriculture has been critical, there has been limited research that explores the dynamics of women's lived experiences in agricultural organizations at the individual level through their own perspectives (Jaffee 2007; Lyon, Mutersbaugh, and Worthen 2016).

This paper attempts to address this gap in the literature by using multiple qualitative participatory methods to explore the central research question of how cooperative membership

has shaped women coffee producers' lived experience at the household and institutional level within the framework of the capabilities approach. In addition, this paper seeks to explore how women's participation as coffee cooperative members and leaders has shaped the development of their agency at the individual level and the dynamics of their empowerment, through the opportunity structures of the cooperative and federation. Understanding their perspectives and their lived experience can help to inform the creation of more effective institutional structures that support the expansion of women's agency in agriculture and their empowerment at the institutional level through organizational structures such as cooperatives and federations.

Literature Review

The feminization of agriculture has been tied to the intentional inclusion of women in agricultural development strategies that address rural poverty. Since the 1970s, there has been an evolution in focus within the international development community towards more integrated approaches that address the interrelated conditions of poverty, health, and nutrition at the household level. A large body of research has emerged that suggests the importance of intra-household consumption and nutrition due to the gendered dynamics of food distribution and decision-making around resources within the family, as summarized in an extensive systematic review by Haddad et al. (1996)

that analyzed 43 different studies around the world, including in Guatemala. A vast body of literature on gender, agriculture, and development has amassed over the last half century, pointing towards the critical importance of ending gender-based discrimination and empowering women as a way to achieve a “multiplier effect” in development that addresses the intertwined determinants of poverty (Blumberg 1988; Cole et al. 2014; Haddad et al. 1996; Kabeer 2013; Smith et al. 2003; World Bank 2016). A large portion of this research has and continues to focus on intra-household resource distribution and control over household income, as a mirror to the broader development literature (Blumberg 1988; Dwyer and Bruce 1988; Gummerson and Schneider 2013; Thomas and Chen 1994; Udry 1996). At its core, this body of research has focused on the connection between women’s empowerment in agriculture and improvements in health, nutrition, and livelihoods at the household level.

As women step into formal roles as producers and cooperative members, they continue to have less access to productive resources such as land, inputs, information, credit and technical assistance, which has resulted in a “gender gap” in agriculture (FAO 2010; Rocheleau 1988). A variety of studies and reports have demonstrated that closing this gap could not only benefit agricultural production and lead to economic growth and increased food security, but that it could also contribute to community development through gender-sensitive interventions that have been shown to improve women’s overall wellbeing, in addition to enhancing child welfare and education (Fairtrade Foundation 2015; Malapit et al. 2015). Research has also shown that addressing the gender gap in agriculture requires more than just a focus on improving women’s access to enhanced economic opportunities and material goods and services. It is also essential to concurrently address women’s capabilities, which include autonomy, agency, empowerment, and abilities at the individual level. Decades of research have linked women’s agency and empowerment and enhanced access to resources with improved health, education, and economic outcomes for themselves and their families (Blumberg 1988; FAO 2012; Gummerson and Schneider 2013; Haddad 1992; Johnson et al. 2016; Katz 1992; Quisumbing et al. 1995; Smith et al. 2003; Thomas and Chen 1994).

As research and practice in international development and gender equity has evolved, there has been an increased focus on Amartya Sen’s capabilities approach (1980), which embraces the connection between an individual’s autonomy, agency, and skills as being central to their development and empowerment. Emerging research has begun to ask these more nuanced questions around capabilities that drive to the root of creating more sustainable human development. These questions focus not just on resource distribution, but on the overall concept of human capability (Nussbaum 1999; Sen 1980). Martha Nussbaum’s adaptation (1999) presents a gendered version of Sen’s original questions from his framework of the capabilities approach and states: “the question is not ‘how satisfied is this woman’, or ‘how in the way of resources is this woman’, but rather, ‘what is she actually able to do’”. This more holistic focus on approaching gender disparities through the perspective of a person’s autonomy, agency, and abilities, rather than simply their assets, is key

not only at the household level, but also as women begin to play more formal roles in agriculture in developing countries.

Agency and empowerment are two key concepts central to the capabilities approach. Amartya Sen defines agency as “what a person is free to do and achieve in pursuit of whatever goals or values he or she regards as important” (Sen 1999). Empowerment is a concept that is closely linked to agency, and various definitions of the term have been compiled and summarized by Ibrahim and Alkire (2007) in a meta-analysis. They found that while there is a variety of nuanced definitions of the term, empowerment can be described best as exhibiting two central components. The first component can be considered as an expansion of agency, or the ability to act on behalf of what you value and have reason to value, and the second component of empowerment focuses on the institutional environment, which offers people the actual opportunity to exert agency to one’s full potential (Alsop and Heinsohn 2005; Malhotra et al. 2002). Whereas agency uniquely lies within the realm of the individual, with empowerment the necessary precondition for achieving one’s full potential lies in an opportunity structure, or institutional capacity (Ibrahim and Alkire 2007).

An entire body of literature has sought to quantify and measure women’s agency and empowerment in agriculture through tools like the Women’s Empowerment in Agriculture Index (Alkire et al. 2013; Malapit et al. 2015; Manyamba and Hendriks 2014). This index builds on recent research to develop indicators of agency and empowerment from predecessors in the field (Narayan 2005; Alsop et al. 2006; Ibrahim and Alkire 2007). Based on the Alkire-Foster method (Alkire and Foster 2011), the WEAI is an aggregate index reported at the country or regional level, based on individual-level data collected through interviews. However, there has been less research that has focused on understanding how women’s participation as coffee cooperative members and leaders has shaped the development of their agency at the individual level and the dynamics of their empowerment, through the opportunity structures of the cooperative. Understanding their perspectives and their lived experience can help to inform the creation of more effective institutional structures that support the expansion of women’s agency in agriculture and their empowerment at the institutional level through organizational structures within institutions that aim to support gender equity.

Methods

This research was approved by the Institutional Review Board of Tulane University and the Institutional Review Board of the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP) in Guatemala. The research discussed in this paper was conducted as part of a larger study that included data collection from supply chain stakeholders and both men and women cooperative members. This larger study had three central aims, and this paper presents the results of one of these aims, which was to understand the lived experience of women cooperative members through their own perspectives, utilizing multiple visual participatory methods. For this portion of the study, which is the focus

of this paper, a total of fifteen women cooperative members were recruited to participate using maximum variation purposive sampling, a method that provides variation in perspectives through the recruitment of participants with a diversity in demographic characteristics, specifically age, education level, marital status, leadership experience, and membership time in the cooperative (Creswell 2013; Morse 1994; Morse 2000; Patton 2002). Recruitment took place through the federation leadership.

For this portion of the study, women cooperative members were recruited to participate from a cooperative association that is part of a larger agricultural federation. The federation is comprised of 2,000 members from eight cooperatives in six different departments in the Western Highlands of Guatemala. This cooperative has been formally established for 10 years with 170 members from the Maya Mam ethnic group, located throughout the higher altitude highlands in close proximity to the northern border with Mexico in the Huehuetenango Department. One-third of the producers are female, and the other two-thirds are male. The average age range of producers is 40–65 years of age and the majority have a primary level of education. Each family of producers lives in a rural setting, and is comprised of 5–9 individuals, working on an average of 1 hectare (2.5 acres) of land per family. Approximately 70 percent of the producer families depend completely on agricultural activities for their livelihoods. The specific demographics of the women coffee cooperative members are listed in Table 1.

Three trained female research assistants from the producer community facilitated the data generation process with female participants, which included obtaining informed consent, collecting the data from multiple qualitative methods in the local Mam language, and then translating the results in Mam back into Spanish. Informed consent was obtained orally for participation in the study, which included the use of audio recording and visual data (drawn images and photographs) in research publications. The trained research assistants obtained the oral consent and then formalized this consent through written forms for each participant before beginning data generation using multiple methods including life landscape drawings, photography from the Photovoice method, and reflections from semi-structured interviews. Life landscape drawings were gathered as part of the semi-structured interview process, where at the beginning of their interviews, study participants were prompted to draw pictures

of their homes, lives, and the resources that were important to them. These drawings were used by research assistants to build rapport and trust for the interview process, and to give study participants a platform with which to reference and answer questions related to their lived experiences as coffee producers and householders. In addition, these drawings were also collected to contribute to the data triangulation process by validating information gathered through the interview process, while also providing a visual medium in which to understand the participants’ lives from their own perspectives (Hirsch and Philbin 2016).

In combination with the interviews and drawings, photo narratives and reflections from a subsequent Photovoice study were collected from the 15 female cooperative members using the Photovoice method. The Photovoice method, formalized through the SHOWED technique, has three main goals: (1) enable individuals to record the resources that they have and to document their lives; (2) promote critical dialogue through group discussion; and (3) eventually inform decision-makers (Wang and Burris 1997). The SHOWED acronym represents the main questions in the technique as established by Wang and Burris, which are as follows:

1. What do you **S**ee here?
2. What is really **H**appening here?
3. How does this relate to **O**ur lives?
4. **W**hy does this condition exist?
5. How can we become **E**mpowered through our new understanding?
6. What can we **D**o about it?

At the end of each semi-structured interview, the research assistants gave each woman a camera, accompanied with a demonstration and instructions on how to use the camera, and then prompted them to take photographs from their perspective of their homes, farms, and community using the overarching logic of the SHOWED technique, which has been validated in Spanish as the VENCER method (Baquero et al. 2014). The English and Spanish versions of this Photovoice method as used in this study are displayed in Table 2.

Through this technique, participants are prompted to take photographs of their lives and then asked to choose the photographs that are most salient to them and to reflect on the meaning of these photographs from an individual and community level perspective in a focus group setting. After the semi-structured interviews, the women were given three weeks to take pictures. Separate consent was obtained for participation in the photo narrative aspect of the study, and permission for subsequent use of the photographs was obtained from the women participants, which included approval to use the photography in any presentations or publications. The women reconvened after a three-week period of documenting their lives through photography. Each woman was given a set of copies of her photographs to keep, along with a photo album for preserving them. Focus groups were facilitated over the course of two days with three groups of five women. These groups were each facilitated by one of the research assistants. Each participant was asked to review their photographs and to select 3-5 photographs to

Category	Mean	Range
Age (years)	38.2	20-62
Education (years)	4.6	0-9
Family (members)	8.4	3-13
Cooperative Membership (years)	5	0.5-10
		Frequency
Marital Status	Single	6
	Married	6
	Widowed	3
Leadership Role	Yes	8
	No	7

Table 1 Demographics of women cooperative members. (*n*=15)

		English			Spanish
S	See	What do you see in the photos?	V	Ver	¿Qué es lo que vemos en la foto?
H	Happening	What is happening in the photo?	E	Explicar que sucede	Explica. ¿Que sucede en la foto?
O	Our lives	How does this relate to our lives?	N	Nuestras vidas	¿En que se relaciona a nuestras vidas? ¿Cómo nos sentimos al respecto?
W	Why	Why does this situation, concern, or strength exist?	C	Causa(s)	¿Cual o cuales son las causas por las que esto sucede?
E	Empower Educate	How can we empower the community and ourselves to address this? How can we educate others about this reality?	E	Empoderar Educar	¿Cómo podemos empoderar a la comunidad o a nosotros/as mismos/as? ¿Cómo podemos educar a sensibilizar a otros sobre la realidad?
D	Do	What can we do to improve the situation or enhance these strengths?	R	Resolver	¿Qué podemos hacer y cómo podemos resolver esto en nuestras vidas?

Table 2 Photovoice focus group guide: SHOWED with VENCER Spanish translation.

share and discuss in the focus group. While one research assistant was facilitating a focus group, another would take notes from Mam into Spanish. Each focus group session was an hour and a half in length. Research assistants guided the participants through a reflection of their individual photographs and discussion surrounding the photos identified as most emblematic by the participants. The focus group facilitators utilized an adapted version of the VENCER guide that was adapted into Mam by the research assistants, who worked together to ensure consistency of the oral translation. The research assistants used a similar technique to the semi-structured interviews for facilitating the focus groups and recording the results of the focus groups. One research assistant would record the notes in Spanish as another research assistant was facilitating the focus group in Mam. The reflections that had been written down in Spanish were then confirmed with focus group participants.

The images and text from the data generation process were coded simultaneously in three rounds. The initial interview data was immediately translated orally from Mam into Spanish by the research assistants. Once the Spanish language translations were complete, the translations were validated by a native Spanish speaker from Guatemala before the first round of coding was conducted. This first round of coding was exploratory and was informed by insights gained during the translation process of the interview notes that were taken in Spanish. Through the process of translating the Spanish interview notes into English, initial categories emerged from the data as it was reviewed manually. During the following rounds of coding, excerpts of text and images of significance were highlighted and tagged thematically through an iterative process. Once the initial round of iterative, or open coding was complete, the codes were reviewed, refined, and merged where necessary to account for any gaps or redundancies. In some instances, codes were expanded to include subcategories. In other instances, similar codes were merged together to create larger categories. In addition to analyzing the

data collectively to gain thematic insights, the investigator also analyzed the data by participant, triangulating the text, life landscape drawing, and Photovoice images from each individual. The multiple rounds of coding allowed for the distillation of the relationships amongst codes, yielding a deeper understanding of the underlying phenomena (Birks and Mills 2015; Saldaña 2016).

Results

The major domains related to the capabilities approach that emerged from the triangulated interviews, drawings, and photographs centered around individual capabilities, cooperative membership benefits, and women's roles in the community. These categories were drawn from 87 pieces of data including 15 semi-structured interviews, 15 photo narrative reflections, 15 life drawings, and 42 photographs. Table 3 provides the major results of the coding analysis and shows 4 superordinate and 26 subordinate categories that emerged from the analysis process. Out of 315 excerpts, 69 were allocated to individual capabilities, 155 to membership, and 91 referred to women's roles in the household and community. Table 3 indicates the number of subcategories associated with each of the major categories, highlighting the complexity and richness of the women producers' reflections on their lived experiences. The depth of their experiences is explored further through an analysis of each major category.

Individual capabilities

Within this category, women revealed their own reflections about their abilities and skills and the way in which they seek out opportunities to improve upon their own individual agency and self-efficacy. Many women spoke about how through their participation in the cooperative and other community-based

Major Categories	Subcategories	Associated Concepts
Individual Capabilities	Individual self-efficacy Hopes and opportunities Active participation Individuality/Independent thinking	Material resources, opportunities, and self-efficacy
Membership	Programs and workshops Diversification Sustainable livelihoods Food sovereignty Technical assistance	Social and material benefits of being a member in the cooperative and community organizations Maintaining a self-sufficient life
Women's Roles	Landowner Farmer Weaver Domestic work Equity Good/happy life	Roles of women in the household and the community Change in gender norms

Table 3 Major categories of women coffee producers' lived experiences elicited from life landscape drawings and Photovoice.

organizations they have been able to improve their individual capabilities through education and training by gaining knowledge and expertise. Participants also spoke of a broader change in how women contribute to their households and communities, and some made direct observations about a shift in gender norms over time. Various subcategories which arose from this main topic include individual self-efficacy, financial independence, hopes and opportunities, women's individuality, and active participation in the community and organizations.

Many women reflected on the opportunities they have been given through the cooperative and other community-based organizations to develop their individual skills and self-confidence:

As cooperative members we are given support in training to become more confident and fearless and to understand that women farmers' work is the same as men's.

(Interview with participant 1, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Not only did participants mention gaining technical skills, but they also highlighted gaining an understanding and appreciation of gender equity with respect to their roles as coffee producers.

Individual capabilities were often enhanced by membership benefits, highlighting the intertwined nature of these categories. This interrelationship demonstrates how the cooperative has served as a vehicle for personal development, and in some cases has given them the ability to improve themselves and their families, through workshops, trainings, and other monetary and non-monetary benefits. For example, one participant commented:

The cooperative has given us a lot of help to get started. I am a single parent, and now I am able to help my children have a better future.

(Interview with participant 10, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Another subtheme that arose was related to women's individuality and the dynamics of their participation in the community. Many women observed that it is often hard for women to take the first step of participating in meetings or organizations due to their own individual shyness, fear, or lack of self-confidence, combined with the need to seek permission from their spouse or other male family members to participate in activities outside of the home. Although entrenched gender roles and unequal power differentials still persist, various respondents reflected on the overall change in their community related to women's participation:

Before, the women were very scared, and they did not participate in meetings. Over time, it is no longer the same now, and women have become more active through the workshops and training they have received as members in the cooperative and the federation.

(Interview with participant 7, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Some women concurred that they felt empowered and enlightened about their rights as individuals once they were able to participate in community organizations, whether these were women's groups, community development organizations, or the cooperative.

I think that every woman must have the opportunity to participate in their community and outside the home, and to be able to become a member in any institution, to know more about their rights and to become more fearless so they can express their ideas and use their voice and so that their perspectives are taken into account.

(Interview with participant 9, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

The category of individual capabilities highlights several key themes that add a depth of understanding to phenomena occurring at the individual level, as participants reflected on the dynamic process through which women initially may have lacked

agency and confidence. Through their participation they developed self-awareness of their own individuality, autonomy, and equality with men. The source of this development was exposure to new ideas through workshops on gender sensitization and general participation as formal members in the cooperative.

Membership

The membership category describes the dynamics of membership and the benefits derived from formal participation. One of the primary benefits mentioned by many of the respondents was the price given for coffee, and the benefit of being able to use this profit to improve their production processes as coffee farmers to diversify their income base and to augment their household resources. Various women shared how their profits as producers have contributed to their household welfare. One woman explained that:

With the profits from my coffee, I have started a small shop, and I am also able to buy basic necessities like sugar, soap, corn, and beans. My family's prosperity is more stable as a result of being a member of the cooperative. I have also received vegetable seeds for planting a family garden and fruit trees.

(Interview with participant 15, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Other women shared that they use their profits to improve the quality and quantity of their coffee production. One woman described that she had been able to increase her coffee production by buying land:

I have been able to buy a small piece of land to plant coffee in addition to what I already have, and this is how I have chosen to use the profit that I have earned from the harvest.

(Interview with participant 3, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Many women also referenced using a portion of their profits to support the family by buying household necessities, paying school fees, or purchasing supplies for the children's schooling. One woman described that:

In my case, when I sell my harvest to the cooperative, I am able to buy the supplies I need to help me support my family and to help pay for the things my sons need for school.

(Interview with participant 11, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Supporting previous research that has shown women are more likely to reinvest their earnings into the family, these women shared the various ways they have chosen to channel their profits for income diversification, household improvement, and their children's education and wellbeing.

While many women members discussed receiving a better price for coffee, or having higher profits from their coffee sales, there was also a strong focus on the non-monetary benefits of participation. This included access to educational programs on nutrition, gender equity, and financial management as well as participation in food sovereignty projects where members received training and materials for building family vegetable

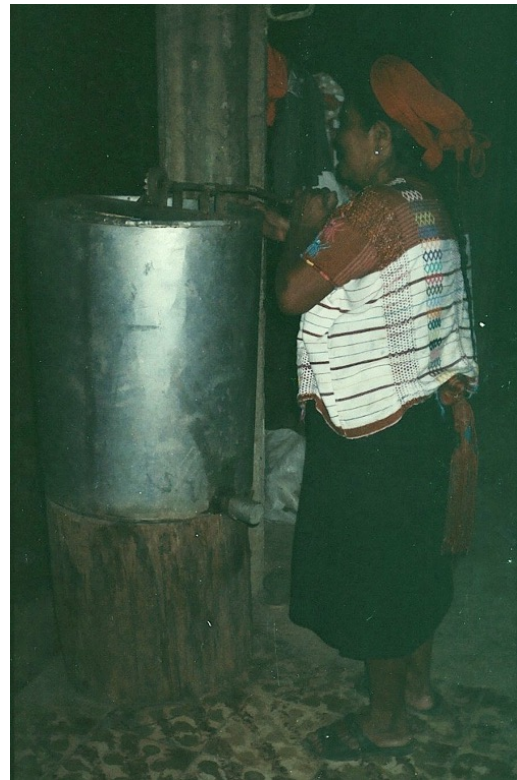


Figure 1 Participant 5 extracting honey from where her family stores the processed nectar from their apiary boxes, a project supported by the cooperative.

gardens, planting fruit trees, raising goats and/or chickens, bee-keeping for honey production, and cultivating medicinal plants. Technical assistance was also a benefit that was important to many members, and this topic was closely tied with the desire to produce quality organic coffee and becoming better coffee farmers. One participant summed up the overall benefits of being a cooperative member:

As a member of the cooperative I receive a lot of benefits, including a good price for my coffee, opportunities like mini projects, training on important topics related to taking care of coffee so that I can produce good quality coffee. As a woman coffee producer, the cooperative has helped me by giving workshops on coffee and giving benefits for good development.

(Interview with participant 13, Western Guatemala, 2017)

In addition to technical assistance, various respondents also mentioned access to educational programs related to gender sensitivity, nutrition and food sovereignty. One participant shared that what she valued most were the trainings:



Figure 2 Participant 1 with her children between rows of coffee saplings growing on her land.

My most important experience has been through the trainings that I have been able to attend, where I have been exposed to many new ideas and given seeds to plant my own family garden so that I can help provide a better diet for my family.

(Interview with participant 8, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Overall, there were sentiments that through both the profits from their coffee production and the non-monetary benefits, their participation and membership in the cooperative has been a lever for personal growth and allowed them to maintain their lifestyles as farmers. One respondent reflected on this by commenting:

These benefits that we receive help us to be independent criollo producers. Our life and our work are our lifestyle, and this is very important for us.

(Interview with participant 1, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Figures 1 and 2 highlight some of the benefits of membership, where women farmers depicted themselves processing honey from an apiary project and crouching among coffee saplings for sale as part of a market diversification project through the cooperative.

The topic of food sovereignty was closely tied to discussions of membership benefits and was a common theme that women producers referenced as they discussed the non-monetary benefits of being members in the cooperative and how it has given them access to resources that augment their ability to produce food and herbs for the household. Representations of food sovereignty were commonly represented in the life landscape drawings and photographs. As opposed to food security, which is focused on food access, food sovereignty refers to self-determined food production. Food sovereignty is therefore about focusing on food producers and self-sufficiency through food production, rather than on consumers and consumption (FAO 1996; Wittman et al. 2010). Many women producers described these benefits. One



Figure 3 Life landscape drawing from participant 13, highlighting the agricultural biodiversity of her homestead that supports increased food sovereignty.

woman spoke specifically about support she received to start a family garden:

I have benefited from the different projects. For example, we have been given vegetable seeds to have a family garden to be able to make our own products and consume them after the harvest.

(Interview with participant 10, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

However, an unanticipated finding that several respondents mentioned was the limitations of their food production at the household level, due to either a lack of consistent water supply or a lack of land to produce enough of the basics such as corn and beans. This echoes current commentary on food sovereignty, not as a fixed state, but rather as a living process undergirded by complexity (Iles and Montenegro de Wit 2015). While there was a focus on increased food sovereignty, some women also commented that they still need to procure food from other sources outside of the home. The concept of food sovereignty also came through in the majority of each woman's life drawings and photographs, where images of homestead lives were depicted with not only the coffee orchards but fruit trees, family gardens, domesticated farm animals, and other resources that augment food sovereignty at the household level. Ultimately, the majority of women shared their desire to live a life with their family supported by earning a living off the land through coffee production and other subsistence food resources that they produce, from honey to vegetables to milk, eggs, and meat from their domesticated animals. This theme is exemplified by the life landscape drawing created by participant 13 in Figure 3.

In addition, participant 4 demonstrates this theme in her photograph pictured below in Figure 4 of her nanny goat and their kids, which she received as part of a combined food sovereignty and livelihood diversification project supported by the cooperative.



Figure 4 Participant 4 took a photograph of her nanny goat with its kids and a stack of firewood in the background.



Figure 5 Participant 11 preparing the daily tortillas in her home.

Women's Roles

Through the topic of women's roles in the community, respondents discussed the broader changes in gender norms that they have observed at the individual and community level. There was repeated reference to women "losing their fear", gaining confidence, and being more apt to participate in organizations outside the home. Respondents described this process as happening through opportunities to participate in women's groups, community development groups, and other informal community-based groups. However, some mentioned the household tensions that their participation in events and meetings outside the home had at the household level, and more specifically with their spouses. Some referenced needing to stay home to care for domestic chores or having to ask permission to attend these types of opportunities and being turned down by their spouses. A few respondents reflected on this topic, offering different insights into the dynamics of women's formal participation in organizations and events outside of the home. One woman observed the impact that trainings in the co-op have had on her experience:

Many women in my community want to take part in different workshops and trainings, but because of their domestic work, they cannot attend. Many women do not have the courage to ask permission from their husbands to let them out and share their experiences. Since I started in co-op training, I have learned many things through training, especially that all women have a right to be free.

(Interview with participant 12, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Women were proud to identify as coffee producers and active members of their communities. They shared their pride in the work that they do in this role. They also expressed an awareness of the opportunity, independence, and financial freedom that being a coffee producer has afforded them. Coffee was a constant in the visual representations as well, from the drawings to the photography.

Some respondents also commented that women do the same work as men in relation to the coffee harvest, and referenced

equity with men and the right of women to be autonomous, independent thinkers while working together with fellow producers and family members. These ideas also came through in the sub-theme on equity. One woman shared her thoughts on how women are not inferior to men but in fact equally as capable:

Women are not the weaker sex. We have the same abilities to do many different jobs as men and especially related to all of the skills that are necessary for the coffee harvest.

(Interview with participant 7, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Another woman also shared these sentiments and reflected on the importance of collaboration between men and women family members throughout the coffee production process:

We have the same obligations as men, and the cooperative has helped us to work together with men and women. My brothers and I work as a team, and it is important to work together to get the job done.

(Interview with participant 10, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Various women also discussed the importance of maintaining their lifestyle and roles as homestead farmers and the diversity of additional roles that women play in the household and within the community. As homestead farmers living in remote rural areas, women producers shared that they are not only in charge of overseeing the coffee harvest process but that they also tend to the family gardens, care for and administer medicinal plants, harvest fruit from fruit trees, tend to animals including goats, chickens, and pets, serve as beekeepers in charge of honey production, and weave clothing for themselves and other family members.

They also recorded these roles in their life drawings and through their photography, highlighting their work in a variety of areas. Through their interviews and photographs, women demonstrated that they are also largely in charge of domestic work including laundry, cooking, and caring for children and other family members. Figures 5–7 highlight the variety of domestic work that women are responsible for at the household level.



Figure 6 Participant 12 giving her baby her daily bath in warm water.

The multiplicity of women's roles is evident through the triangulation of the photography, drawings, and semi-structured interview responses. Although many respondents made reference to expanded personal opportunities that have benefited their families and created small shifts of power in their households and communities, they also made clear that women are still responsible for the domestic work, work that has traditionally been the domain of women.

While women participants in this study acknowledged these challenges, they also reflected on the significant benefits of their participation. More specifically, they commented on how they have expanded their own sense of themselves and their perception of what women are capable of and how women should be treated. Challenges at the household level related to their participation represent a difficult and yet essential part of the process of change. Their collective reflections describe this process as a shifting of gender roles. One woman observed that:

There has been a change in my community. Before, the women were very scared, and they did not participate in meetings. Over time, it is no longer the same, and now women have become more active through the workshops and training they have received as members. The cooperative has also had the vision to integrate grassroots organizations in order to increase the participation of women within the cooperative so that we can have access to markets for coffee – in the Fairtrade and local markets, and [markets for] other products.

(Interview with participant 7, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

While some women focused on being included and participating as formal members in the cooperative, other women described becoming involved in different groups. These experiences have allowed them to develop and expand their sense of self-efficacy and gain leadership skills. A younger woman was proud to share:



Figure 7 Participant 15 weaving a *corte*, a traditional Mayan wrap skirt.

In my community I am the president of the youth ministry. I have gotten involved because they give me training to be a leader in my community.

(Interview with participant 8, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

One of the older participants observed a shift in opportunities for women over time in her community:

I think that with the passage of time we have seen many changes for the roles of women. I am an example of this in my community. I am the president of a community development organization as well the leader of a women's group.

(Interview with participant 15, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Others have received opportunities to become involved in their community through their success and experience in the cooperative. One participant shared how being a cooperative member has propelled her into other roles in the larger coffee federation and in her community:

Working in the coffee industry, I have done very well as a member in the cooperative. What the woman does in the community is to work, for example she has a position on the women's committee of the coffee federation and also on a water committee and they give her the opportunity to work on different kinds of committees in my community, for example, I am on the board of the church.

(Interview with participant 9, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

As a point of reference, the organizational diagram for the coffee federation has been listed in Figure 8 to demonstrate the committees involved in technical assistance and training, in addition to the women's committee, as mentioned by the above participant.

Several women concluded that gender norms can shift when women are role models at the household and community level. One woman shared her determination regarding women's rights:

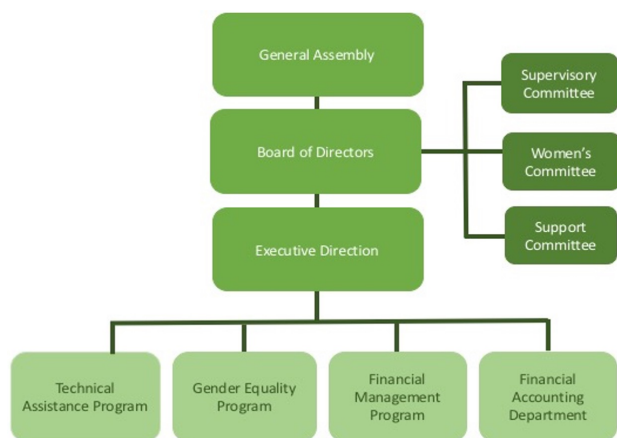


Figure 8 Organizational diagram of the coffee federation. (Source: coffee federation website, 2016; anonymized.)

and their important role in modeling gender equity in the home as a vehicle for intergenerational gender norm transference:

I think every woman has the right to participate in different activities so that we can model this for our children. Then, when they grow up, they will not be sexist machistas. Also, with the support of the association we can incubate many projects to improve our families and develop our communities. (Interview with participant 1, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Another participant reflected on the importance of women's relational autonomy and their rights to independence:

I think it is very important that all women participate in different activities so that they can be independent of their husbands and can leave without any problem. Nobody should violate their rights. (Interview with participant 2, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

This same participant went on to talk about the value of group efficacy and the benefits associated with being cooperative members:

Through the co-op our group of women has been able to develop more and more partnerships, and through the workshops and trainings we are able to learn about and discover how to pursue different types of entrepreneurship opportunities that can help us to have a better way of life. (Interview with participant 2, Western Guatemala, April 2017)

Through the sequential use of these visual methods, the respondents were able to portray and vocalize their roles in the process of shifting both interpersonal gender norms in their homes, organizations, and community, and organizational gender norms in the cooperative and its federation, as well as in the coffee supply chain at large. Moreover, their reflections demonstrate that they are inspired by their involvement in community organizations, including the cooperative, and see formal orga-

nization as a way to increase their household level prosperity through the adoption of enhanced strategies for food sovereignty, often interlinked with livelihood sustainability. In addition, they shared their understanding of a dynamic intergenerational process by which gender norms are changing through their role modeling at the household level and their formal participation at the organizational level.

Discussion

The results from this research describe the dynamics of a process of change from agency to empowerment grounded in the perspectives of the women cooperative members. As previously cited, agency is what a person is free to do or achieve, while empowerment focuses on the level of freedom that an institutional environment provides for individuals to express their agency. As evidenced by the data, this process is not linear, but rather is shaped by the interplay between an individual's capabilities, their relational interactions, and the presence of institutional opportunity structures. Perhaps most importantly, these results shed light on how the organizational structures of the cooperative and the federation support women's further expansion of agency, leading to empowerment through their formal participation as members and leaders. This process initiates at the individual level when women gain the opportunity to participate in organized activities outside of the home in both informal groups and formal organizations such as the cooperative and the federation. Through these opportunities, women have the capacity to develop their capabilities, including enhancing their autonomy, agency, and skills through their participation in events and organizations outside of the home. In a positive feedback cycle that promotes the development of agency at the individual level, they then gain knowledge, skills, and financial power and further increase their self-confidence and autonomy. Empowered by new knowledge, skills, and resources, they are then able to provide more resources for their family while improving their own lives as well. Their growing self-efficacy changes the way they operate in the home and further enhances their capabilities: this may include demanding more freedom, making decisions, deciding how to spend money, and choosing to participate in other organizations outside of the home as members and leaders. Perhaps most importantly, they describe an evolution from agency to empowerment as a result of their formal membership in the cooperative and participation in the coffee federation. Not only do both of these entities provide the basic organizational support for their equal enrollment as formal members but these organizations also employ a formal emphasis on gender equity and provide training on gender sensitization. The dynamics of this process of change from agency to empowerment relayed by the women cooperative members connects back to the framework of the capabilities approach and highlights the importance of this framework for creating effective institutions that support the development of women's capabilities in the formal agricultural sector and beyond.

However, this process is not linear or without complication and struggle. As outlined by the women themselves, and echoed

in the literature, even though the feminization of agriculture has brought new opportunities for women, these have come alongside challenges related to increased time poverty and tension at the household and community level. Even as women are moving into these new roles, they still must contend with the expectations of traditional gender roles until perspectives shift at the household level amongst family members (Abdelali-Martini and Dey de Pryck 2015; Allen and Sachs 2007). Within the coffee industry, recent research from Mexico confirms that while there have been significant advances in women's participation in the Fair-trade coffee sector, as exhibited by the results of this research as well, women coffee producers experience significant time poverty due to the fact that they continue to be responsible for a disproportionate share of domestic work (Lyon, Mutersbaugh, and Worthen 2016). This reality has been echoed in the literature on agriculture more broadly as well as within other industries where women are beginning to have access to opportunities for paid labor. So, while progress for women continues along the spectrum of the capabilities approach, as they expand their agency and become more empowered, they must simultaneously navigate the socio-structural impediments to gender equity.

Nonetheless, the theory of change from agency to empowerment described by women coffee cooperative members highlights a process that mirrors the capabilities approach. For women in various contexts, these socio-culturally constructed realities influence their behavior, their level of self-efficacy, and their potential to reach their full capabilities as individuals (Bandura and Bussey 1999; Nussbaum 1999). As this process evolves, there is a complex evolution from agency to empowerment that necessitates a simultaneous focus on human development at the individual and collective level within institutions. This process is also negotiated at the relational level, alongside pervasive familial expectations, belief systems, and social practices that are rooted in socio-culturally entrenched notions of gender. Ultimately, through the opportunity structures provided by the coffee cooperative and its larger federation, women cooperative members have gained access to a critical foundation not only for achieving greater food sovereignty, livelihood sustainability, and enhanced knowledge and expertise, but for becoming more autonomous and achieving greater equity at the household, community, and organizational levels, moving from agency towards empowerment.

Limitations

This research has limitations, which are primarily related to the study design, language barriers, and the respondent selection process. As with all research, the positionality of the primary investigator, the researcher, in addition to the interviewers, has had an unavoidable influence on relationships with study participants and community members. Even though "insider" research assistants were facilitating the data generation process itself, the presence of the primary investigator as a female outsider from the United States may have had an influence on the participants' responses. In addition, respondents may have felt pressure due to loyalty to positively portray the institutions of which they are

members, which should also be taken into account when considering the data generated from this study. These limitations were minimized through data triangulation, which included multiple avenues of data generation. Challenges with language may have also proven to be a limitation as the research was primarily conducted in Mam, with Spanish used secondarily, and the data translated into English for analysis. The relatively small sample size also has limited the depth of understanding.

Limitations also include ethical issues regarding participation incentives. Although these were determined in conjunction with the cooperative leadership and the research team, incentives nonetheless may have influenced participation in the study. To address any potential drawbacks from this aspect of the study design, the use of participatory methods, and specifically Photovoice, which allowed the participants to independently generate data about their lived experiences from their own perspectives, provided a more immediate and direct window into the lives of the participants while still respecting their privacy.

Conclusion

The goal of this study has been to explore the lived experiences of Mayan women coffee producers in the western highlands of Guatemala, and to understand how the dynamics of their membership in an agricultural cooperative influence the expansion of their agency and empowerment. The findings from this research support previous studies that confirm that women members value the monetary and non-monetary benefits of being cooperative members, including access to education programs, technical assistance, and projects that enhance their food sovereignty. In addition, the findings suggest that through formal participation in agricultural institutions, women cooperative members gain increased technical expertise and access to resources. Perhaps more importantly, this research suggests that through their participation, women cooperative members develop agency and enhanced self-efficacy in addition to gaining leadership opportunities and an expanded awareness of their own autonomy and gender equity.

Women cooperative members' reflections echo the academic definitions of empowerment, pointing to the critical importance of opportunity structures that create the environmental and socio-cultural preconditions necessary for agency, and then empowerment, to be achieved. These findings have important implications for programs and policies aimed at women in agricultural cooperatives, women producers, and gender and development schemes more broadly. This research demonstrates that women producers highly value the opportunities they receive as members of agricultural organizations to improve their knowledge and technical skills. This study demonstrates the perceived benefits of integrating opportunities for agricultural training and livelihood development with gender sensitization workshops and leadership opportunities for women cooperative members.

Perhaps most significantly, through their interactions in the cooperative as members and leaders and their formal training in gender sensitization, women members have been able to gain

perspective on their situation as women and the importance of gender equity. Agricultural cooperatives and organizations that serve producers can integrate not only technical assistance and financial training for the populations they serve, but also gender sensitization training that can contribute to the development of agency and empowerment at the individual level and more equitable gender norms amongst women and men, their families, and the organizations of which they are members. Perhaps most compelling is the potential for institutions and organizations to intentionally implement programs and policies to support not only women's equal participation and their access to critical resources but their development of agency, leading to empowerment, through these formal structures.

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