



FLP MEETING COLOMBIA 2015
Learning from the experience



SHARED LEARNING EVENT FOR IDH FIELD
LEVEL PROJECT IMPLEMENTING PARTNERS IN
COLOMBIA

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Coffee Program (SCP) is a global, public-private, pre-competitive initiative involving trade and industry partners, local governments, NGOs, and standard-setting organizations operating in the coffee sector. It aims to help scale-up sustainable coffee production practices and global sourcing by aligning stakeholder investment in producer support programs, in order to improve farmers' livelihood, build resilience in an ever-changing market, and increase sustainably grown coffee to meet the growing demand.

PURPOSE OF HOLDING A SHARED LEARNING EVENT

It is important for Implementing Partners and IDH to be informed on which activities or strategies are most effective at achieving the stated objectives and desired performance indicators when implementing the Field Level Projects (FLP) in the SCP. A meeting to present these experiences to every Implementing Partner (IP) provides an opportunity to jointly improve the impact of the SCP in Colombia.

The event took place on December 3, 2015 in the city of Pereira, Risaralda and was attended by 26 representatives (see list of participants in Annex 1).

26
Attendees

Representatives of:
ECOM, FNC, Cafexport, Pur
Projet, TechnoServe, Carcafé,
IDH, Nespresso, and Solidaridad

EVENT OBJECTIVES

For Implementing Partners

To share experiences and complement knowledge in order to promote farmers' transition from traditional coffee farming to sustainable coffee production. It is also important to have a direct connection with IDH, and these kinds of events can increase a sense of ownership among FLP implementing partners.

For IDH

To facilitate a shared learning process based on the implementation experiences of the FLPs in Colombia and general knowledge that is fundamental for accomplishing the proposed goals.

EXPECTED RESULTS

- Document relevant experiences about the FLPs in Colombia.
- Facilitate dialogue and an exchange of knowledge among implementers.
- Identify opportunities for improvement in the FLPs in operation.
- Promote collaboration and networking among implementers.
- Strengthen interaction between implementers, IDH, and Solidaridad.
- Improvement of the implementation of the field level activities due to lessons learned.

2. EVENT ORGANIZATION PROCESS

The process began by reviewing the report on a similar workshop IDH held in Vietnam, which served as a source for the main ideas on preparing and running the event, which would need to be adapted to the local Colombian context.

The objectives this event would fulfill for both IDH and implementers, an agenda of topics, a list of possible participants, and the event methodology were proposed and submitted for approval to IDH.

The theme of the event was selected by analyzing the results of a survey of the implementers' perceptions on what knowledge they were willing to share, what they hoped to learn, and what topic they wished to discuss with their peers, among which the following were mentioned:

- Technology adoption in the Colombian context
- Gender equity and youth (coffee farming as a family business)
- **Climate change adaptation and mitigation in the coffee sector**
- Technology applied to the coffee sector

All of the participants were open to sharing their experience in different topics, such as training methods, access to finance, technology used by agricultural extension agents,

coordination between actors, and project implementation issues.

The survey results are grouped below by the topics each IP wished to share and hoped to learn:

FLP-IP	WILLING TO SHARE	LEARNING EXPECTATIONS
ECOM	Ways to train producers (motivation).	Better M&E and data collection methods. Initiatives to teach GAP to producers. Coordinating efforts.
TNS	Approach for access to finance.	Brainstorm on the overall risks in the coffee sector. Discuss the risks we face with generational turnover.
FNC	Production of coffee trees and technical assistance from the Extension Service. Using the Agroclimatic Platform to give recommendations to producers.	
Carcafé	Participation of the technical team in the department of Cundinamarca.	A different educational model based on ongoing assistance and experimental training.
Cafexport	Coordination with the partners involved in project implementation. Use of project resources. Issues in implementing some planned activities.	Build upon experiences and find joint solutions to problems in future projects. Envision ideas that can help develop and improve the partners involved in the supply chain.
PUR	Relationship with local partners for project implementation. Coherent and effective actions to address climate events such as El Niño.	Learn practices and methodologies from others, especially about working with smallholder organizations.

The theme selected for learning was **adaptation and mitigation of climate change in the coffee sector**. The Risaralda Coffee Growers Committee, who has extensive experience using and implementing information from Cenicafe’s Agroclimatic Platform at the local level, was invited to present the most relevant and influential aspects for the regional coffee growing area. The Committee had also recently participated in an exchange of knowledge of the Coffee & Climate Platform in Central America and Brazil on this issue, and therefore the information was certain to be timely and pertinent.

EVENT IDENTITY

An event identity was designed for branding purposes, to standardize reporting formats, and to share information on each project through posters. Each implementing partner was consulted on the

key facts and figures to be presented in their project poster during several meetings prior to the event.

The products designed were: event logo, identification badge for each participant, presentation format, tablecloths for roundtable discussions, decorative materials for the venue, a QR code card for post-event access to materials, and banners with an overview of the projects.

SELECTION OF PRESENTATION TOPICS

Based on the knowledge that Solidaridad, as the National Coordinator, has of the projects and on the learning expectations revealed by the pre-event participant survey, each implementing partner was consulted on which topics to present at the event. During this process the IPs were also asked the following project-specific questions:

FLP-Cafexport

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- What motivated the youth to participate?
- What is their vision for coffee farming?
- How do they participate in the daily farm activities?
- What were the expectations for working with them?

FLP-Carcafé

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- Why had this region been neglected prior to this project?
- What were the main challenges Carcafe encountered and how were these challenges addressed?
- How have the producers responded?
- Describe the training component and any challenges encountered.

FLP-ECOM

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- What innovative components on soil management does the project have?
- What have you proved of your approach in the field implementation?
- Were farmers familiar with this practice or is it new to them?
- Has productivity changed as a result?
- What are the do's and don'ts on soil management from the farmer's perspective?

FLP-FNC, Nescafé

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- What was the cause of low productivity found in the project area?
- Why didn't producers renovate their coffee fields?
- How can a renovation project become sustainable over time without subsidies?

FLP- Pur Projet

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- What does the landscape concept mean in coffee farming?
- What previous agroforestry knowledge did farmers and extension agents have?
- How do the models proposed by PUR differ from traditional management models in the project area?
- What is the monitoring and follow-up process for a model at 40 years?

FLP-TechnoServe

- What issue(s) did the project confront and how was it resolved?
- What was the reason for installing a centralized wet mill?
- What were the main challenges and how have they been solved?
- How has the group changed since the project began?
- Describe the training component and any challenges encountered.

THE VALUE OF A PROFESSIONAL FACILITATOR

It was important that the attendees build strong relationships and work in sync during this event, and this was achieved with the support of a professional facilitator. The role included setting time limits on participation, providing opportunities for questions, synthesizing learning experiences, and arranging discussion sessions on the theme chosen by the participants (see meeting agenda in Annex 2).

The facilitator contributed dynamism, impartiality, cordiality, and order throughout the event. Through the facilitation techniques, the attendees were able to recognize and summarize the learning experience and engage in proactive discussions.

3. EVENT SESSIONS

MORNING SESSION: PRESENTATIONS

The IDH representative Paul Klein Hofmeijer opened by presenting the key issues of the SCP through 2020 and indicating the approach the SCP has outlined in two areas: the National Platform and a National Curriculum, which is a strategy to address key sustainability issues that affect actors in all of Colombia and other countries in the scope of the Sustainable Coffee Program. Currently, the SCP is focused on the following topics: climate change, fertilization, soil management, training, and methodologies to align concepts. Issues to be addressed in the future will include: productivity and efficiency in coffee production, soil conservation and fertilization (long-term goals), adaptation to climate change, gender, and future coffee-growing generations.

As a preliminary step towards the creation of a National Curriculum, which is presently in the consensus-building stage, in 2016 a curriculum will be developed at the regional level for the issue of soil conservation and fertilization. This will serve as a pilot project to coordinate actors involved with coffee growers, with the aim of laying the groundwork on shared content and methodologies that will meet the needs of producers.

Following the IDH presentation, each implementing partner gave a 20-minute presentation of their project, covering the topics previously agreed upon with the National Coordinator and responding to questions from other participants.

Highlights from the presentations of each implementing partner are listed below. Noteworthy lessons learned they shared are marked in **brown text**.

FLP- ECOM

“Coffee growers adopt practices when they participate in the process of developing the tools, for example making coffee berry borer traps.”

“Established plots that apply a complete formula of high-quality chemical fertilizers plus the addition of organic matter have demonstrated a 20% increase in productivity in 1.5 years.”

“The coffee farmers are tired of receiving training.”

FLP-TechnoServe

“In Huila, TechnoServe seeks to demonstrate that the model of a centralized wet mill is profitable and sustainable, given that it improves the quality and consistency of coffee, increases farmers’ income by paying higher prices and reducing costs, and builds the local capacity to run the community mill as a business.”

“Capacity building for access to finance is crucial for strengthening producer organizations. Upon evaluating the different types of credit, the group learned that they must be capitalized in order to take out a loan. Once the group stopped speculating on coffee, their risk profile stabilized and they were able to apply for higher credit lines.”

FLP- Carcafé

“This used to be an area with low manual labor availability in rural areas, low credibility of institutions, and low productivity due to aging crops.”

“We have optimized implementation times in large-scale activities with producers.”

“Coffee farmers perceive the program as an opportunity to improve their farms with the support of technical assistance.”

FLP- Nescafé

“Delivering 31 million seedlings achieved an impact of renovating more than 4,000 hectares.”

“Since the material producers receive is of excellent quality, there is less loss of material in the field. This is linked with sustainability because:

- *The coffee farmer and his family stay in business.*
- *The business achieves financial sustainability.”*

“Fertilizer application is about 50% efficient, due to losses from such factors as leaching, devitrification, erosion, and runoff.”

FLP- Pur Projet

“The project is designed over a 40-year timeline, which accounts for its long-term assimilation by the communities, and it seeks to guarantee land tenure and the development of sustainable supply chains (wood, fruits, etc.).”

“The efficiency of the diagnostic and plot identification phase can be improved when project technicians use the FNC’s Coffee Information System (SICA).”

FLP- Cafexport

“Young producers want to implement actions on their farms that yield high-quality coffee.”

“96 youth were trained in basic quality concepts and 6 of them are now employed in laboratories (one works in the field).”

*“Creating **synergy and aligning the parties** was one difficulty we faced... trying to reach agreements and coordinate the actors in the supply chain towards fulfillment of the project objectives and activitie.”*

To close the morning session, and as a prelude to the afternoon discussion session, Cesar Pineda, leader of the FNC extension service in the department of Risaralda, gave a presentation on adaptation to climate change in the coffee sector.

The key takeaway messages and recommendations from this presentation were:

- This year the dry season in Colombia, running from late 2015 to early 2016, will coincide with the El Niño phenomenon in its phase of maximum intensity, signaling a more critical dry season than usual.

Negative Impacts of El Niño on Coffee Cultivation

- A reduced water supply combined with higher temperatures will limit crop growth in both newly planted coffee fields and lots in production, as well as impede fertilization and planting activities.
- An increase in the maximum temperature levels to above 26°C affects the plant’s photosynthetic activity and favors the spread of coffee berry borer, red spider mites, and coffee leaf miner.

Positive Impacts of El Niño on Coffee Cultivation

- Most of the central coffee-growing region will see a positive impact: increased sunlight, concentrated flowering period, and reduced pressure from diseases like coffee rust.
- In Colombia each hourly increment of sunshine represents drying time for 1.69 to 4.03 kilograms of dry parchment coffee, with an average of 2.55 kilos per hour of sunshine.

Main Recommendations

- Plant rapid-growth shade trees when transplanting the seedlings.
- Fertilize coffee ahead of schedule in November.
- Perform integrated weed management by controlling only for high-interference weeds (i.e. aggressive, widely spread, rapid growth, compete for nutrients and root space with coffee). Keep groundcover on the paths between coffee rows and spread mulch only around the bases of the trees.
- For pest management of the coffee berry borer, it is very important to follow harvest sanitation practices: make several passes among the trees to pick all the ripe cherries, use a fiber bag dedicated for harvesting and keep it closed while in the coffee plantation, weigh the coffee twice a day, and deposit coffee in a funnel with a sealed lid.

During each presentation, the participants were encouraged to participate by writing down their observations on Post-It notes and posting them on a designated wall, forming a “word cloud” of knowledge. After the last presentation, the facilitator guided the group in organizing and consolidating the topics posted into categories of the most prevalent themes. Through this methodology, the group identified the main conclusions, extracted ideas for the discussion session, and generated additional questions to ask the implementing partners.

MOST RECURRING THEMES:

Training. There is a general feeling that the producers are being over-assisted, leading them to get tired of receiving training sessions. The strategy suggested is to approach the producer always in a positive manner, using demonstration plots and building tools together. An important

question was posed that merits further discussion: Is it that coffee farmers are tired of being trained, or that the training topics are not pertinent?

It was also recognized that the quality of technical assistance should be improved. Areas for improvement include placing more emphasis on concepts of climate change, creating a long-term vision, transmitting scientific information in a simple manner, and overall ensuring that projects are aligned with community expectations.

All of the participants agreed that the producer’s economic sustainability is a priority training topic, and therefore technical teams need to strengthen their knowledge of: controlling production costs, markets, fortifying governance, risk reduction, farmer loyalty, and decision making. To bring about change, technical assistants must also be very proficient at communicating with producers and companies.

Nutrition of Coffee Fields. Two needs identified are to make better use of by-products like pulp and to further train technicians on fertilization with micronutrients, trace elements, and non-chemical alternatives. Erosion is considered a critical topic, and the importance of implementing an agroforestry project was stressed. To address this topic, it was suggested that fertilizer manufacturers be invited to a future shared learning event.

In response to an announcement made during the 2015 Coffee Congress, a significant issue was raised: Given the panorama of low coffee prices and incentives from the government, how can producers be convinced to adapt adequate fertilization practices?

Cooperation. The participants noted that IDH’s proposal for a National Curriculum is pertinent for achieving cooperation, since it seeks to align different sectors and organizations toward a common goal. They also expressed an interest in learning more about the Service Delivery Model (SDM).

At the level of each project, it was emphasized that alignment between all the parties is necessary and that everyone involved should be familiar with the project document, from the manager down to the extension workers.

Sustainability. This issue requires collaboration among producers, extension workers, buyers, and cuppers, coupled with the work of institutions or

initiatives like the Platform for Sustainable Trade (PCS). The first opinion to take into account, however, must be of the producer. Farmers tend to declare that their agricultural activities are not dignified, and in our work with coffee producers we need to make them feel that their work is recognized, valuable, and worthy of pride.

The Central Mill project is seen as one way to achieve sustainability in the coffee business. Sustainability must be worked toward and understood at a landscape level.

It was observed that a labor shortage has caused production costs to rise. Given the importance of this issue for long-term sustainability, and its link with generational turnover, it was proposed as a discussion topic for a future event.

Sociocultural Context of Coffee Growers. The technicians must carry out their work plans alongside the producers, taking into consideration that the socioeconomic characteristics of a coffee growing region influence production practices and the relationship with each coffee farmer or community.

The participants also feel a widespread concern about generational turnover, an issue that prompted a question for future discussion: How can the coffee growing culture be maintained if the business is barely economically viable at present and offers youth less profitability than other employment options?

General Questions

- How can costs be reduced in inclement weather?
- How can we increase the soil's resistance to adverse weather conditions?
- How can we positively influence cultural change or processes?
- Can a producer be expected to easily adopt a practice overnight?
- Is a productive proposal necessarily a development proposal?
- How can involving producers in the coffee business develop economic sustainability?
- What is the appropriate number of farmers to assign each technician?

Additional questions directed to a specific project were sent to the appropriate representative, and their responses will be included in the public report (see Annex 3).

AFTERNOON SESSION: GROUP DISCUSSION ON CLIMATE CHANGE

Four (4) discussion groups of five (5) participants each were formed to initiate a constructive dialogue on alternative ways of handling the issue of climate change adaptation in each of the projects. The facilitator asked the participants to share their conclusions by responding to the questions that Solidaridad had prepared.

Entertainment was provided by two professional baristas who demonstrated different preparation methods using coffee sourced from the regions of the projects. The informal atmosphere during this part of the session allowed the members of the implementing companies to socialize and network.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS AND EXTRACTS OF GROUP RESPONSES

Question: We work with an agricultural product and are experiencing a constantly changing climate, which makes us wonder what we can do to be better prepared for extreme weather events. Consider the fieldwork of the team of technical assistants in your projects. Coffee growers see them as a source of agricultural support and guidance for many of their problems. However, right now farmers are focused entirely on the changing climate and phenomena like El Niño that present a threat to their livelihoods. **Do the field technicians know how vulnerable the production systems in their work area are to events like El Niño or La Niña? What information do they use to make this analysis?**

“The answer is, yes they know it, and they use information from the Colombian Coffee Grower’s Manual and early warning systems. Farmers interact with other sources of information, such as traditional or esoteric knowledge, the phases of the moon, or religion, which also have an influence on the farmer’s understanding of the phenomenon. In the end, the producer weighs all of this information to see how to respond on the farm.”

“...Even though today we have critical knowledge of the topic, an agroclimatic network, and any other number of sources for understanding phenomenon such as El Niño, all of that information lacks credibility. Despite all of the sources we currently have in the technical community, in the Extension Service we are not treated with credibility. In spite of all the information we have, we can not provide an answer to a producer’s question or confidently reach a decision on which action to take...”

“...Today we can talk about the variability because we are experiencing [phenomena like] El Niño and La Niña, but as for actual climate change, I don’t know. I think that it has not yet been incorporated in a real way in any kind of project. We all concentrate on El Niño and La Niña, but the phenomenon of [climate] change seems to remain unclear...”

“...We must take responsibility for handling this information, to tell the producers that [growing coffee under] shade is not bad, to suggest planting around the field edges. It’s not just about the trees, though. Managing the coffee plant nutrition is very important, and things like saving energy and separating types of trash at home are some of the many actions that can help minimize the variability and change in the future.”

Question: Consider the income of coffee producers, which even under normal weather conditions has a very slim profit margin. The measures to deal with extreme weather conditions require additional management practices that affect production costs. **What could you tell a producer who asks for advice on what to do now? Are these recommendations within the reach of the producer to implement?**

““If a coffee producer asks me today what to do respective of El Niño, we have to look at what the producer has, and since we are already acting a bit reactive, there is little you can do if the farmer did not prepare ahead of time for El Niño.”

“...That producer is involved with different organizations and obtains information from different sources, and so the producer sums up all this information and makes a decision about the farm. To think that the producer will follow the path dictated by an extension worker or organization is a bit naive. Therefore, the first challenge we face, at least among us organizations that serve the same region, is how to ensure a certain level of coordination...”

“... Another point is that there are some people in exporting organizations or in the FNC doing great things, but we aren’t learning from these positive experiences. We are very resistant to identify the good that can be found within us and learn from it...”

“When they say that the farmer is tired of receiving so much training, is it really about the quantity of sessions or more that we are talking only about what interests us instead of what they want to hear?”

“...The institutions have the knowledge, but putting it into action is a major weakness. We can have all the answers and plan how something should be properly implemented, but when it comes time to do so we fail in delivering the message...”

“One thing that we have seen here is the question of how to take advantage that the farmer’s awareness has been raised in the short term in order to plan for the long-term. How then could we leverage that, to point out what has happened to another coffee grower and ask if the farmer can find a solution, even though it hasn’t affected his farm yet. Often when I am working on raising awareness I don’t know what to do next, but those are the moments to build upon.”

Question: In the near future, climate change is likely to manifest itself in soil degradation and loss of organic matter on the slopes of the Andes, an area where coffee is grown in Colombia. **With this in mind, are we advising producers to follow good fertilization practices focused on the plants? What recommendations do we make for enriching the soil again? What other soil conditions and crop management techniques, besides a chemical soil test, are being considered in the advice we give to farmers?**

“Well, the bottom line is that there is a lot of information but little application. Soil is not treated as a fundamental topic of its own merit, because all of the processes focus only on fertilization. Within the guidelines we touch on only the basics, like using by-products, but we have not worked much on processing these materials beyond the concept of composting everyone always recommends. But when we start talking about incorporating microbiology in the tropics, I really think more research is needed.”

“...The response that more research is needed is just an excuse for the cursory investigations we perform. We do not do an in-depth search to see if another organization has already done work in this area or look into secondary resources. We avoid doing that deeper level of research and merely want to do a superficial search and hope to find the precise article...”

“When the Extension Service began, it was founded on the need for soil conservation in the coffee zone, which was published in the 1958 Coffee Grower’s Manual. The issue lost its importance and was reduced to a topic, and not even of conservation; by I think the ‘68 or ‘70 Coffee Grower’s Manual, the issue of soil conservation had disappeared.”

Question: Imagine a producer who needs a technical recommendation because the coffee leaves have withered during an abnormal period of drought and now the plantation is dying. Furthermore, the latest news bulletin reported that the dry season will continue for another two months. **As a company that benefits from this coffee supply, how can you act to prevent this type of situation from occurring? Are the technical assistants sufficiently trained at present to deal with problems like this and others related to producing coffee in a changing climate? If not, what are we doing to improve their knowledge and skills?**

“A thoroughly planned response is required; it’s not enough to put together a technological package or simply copy a set of practices being developed somewhere where the problem may be worse. Participation is fundamental, in the sense that often the coffee growers already have the solution or part of the answer to the problem. If the response is not linked to the culture of coffee growers, or if the technological solution is divorced from that culture, then it has a high probability of failure.”

“...We drew a parallel with earthquake drills in buildings. You have to establish and go over action plans, or emergency plans, so that everyone knows exactly what to do at the first sign that something is going to happen, whether rain or drought. But this has to be done beforehand, because when it is already happening it is too late. They need to know how to respond, and have already run enough drills in the demonstration plots to be prepared by the time it occurs...”

4. CONCLUSIONS AND FOLLOW-UP

CONCLUSIONS

As this was the first shared learning exercise at the country level, the degree of participation was noteworthy. We wish to thank everyone involved for their information, commitment, and willingness to share. The knowledge generated from this event will be useful for implementation of the field level projects.

All of the participants agreed that work in the coffee sector should be done jointly among the actors in the chain.

The issue of generational turnover is relevant and demands an urgent response.

The skills required of technical assistants and the training given to producers need to be reevaluated.

SUGGESTIONS FOR A FUTURE EVENT

As part of the closing activities, the participants were asked for input on how to improve for the next event. Some of the ideas were:

- Come informed with a better background knowledge of other projects.
- Include experiences from other areas or countries where IDH works.
- Keep in touch with implementers and maintain the discussion periodically before the annual meeting.
- Organize discussion groups for each field level project.
- Extend it to a two-day event to provide more opportunities for implementers to discuss and plan future collaboration.
- Invite local farmers from the area of one of the projects or take a field trip as an additional activity.
- Include other actors who also provide extension services to coffee producers, and add water management, soil conservation, and generational turnover as future discussion topics.



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