



TPSA | CANADA-INDONESIA TRADE AND
PRIVATE SECTOR ASSISTANCE PROJECT



SUCCESS STORY

A3 Cooperative: A Women-Exclusive Cooperative

THE CHALLENGE: WOMEN COFFEE FARMERS CANNOT BECOME COOPERATIVE MEMBERS

Smallholder coffee farmers in Gayo, Aceh province, form cooperatives to help them sell their produce to both the domestic and export markets. But while any man who is a coffee farmer can easily join a cooperative, the same is not true for women coffee farmers. For a coffee farmer to be eligible for cooperative membership, he or she must legally own land. But in Gayo, land ownership is usually in the man's name, making women coffee farmers ineligible for co-op membership.

“What we learned from TPSA has inspired us to facilitate the establishment of a women's coffee cooperative (Ari Aras Awali/A3). We learned from TPSA that social and gender aspects are important to buyers in Canada and the United States. We also managed to facilitate one export shipment for A3 to a buyer from the United Kingdom. This has created more jobs for women coffee producers in Gayo.”

—Ara Siberani, Chairperson of Arinagata Cooperative

Women coffee farmers want to be members of cooperatives, as they are just as involved in coffee farming as the men in their households. They also want to enjoy the benefits that come with membership, especially if the co-op is Fairtrade certified, because they would be eligible to participate in deciding how to spend the Fairtrade premium and take advantage of training.

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Arinagata Cooperative was aware of the difficulties that women coffee farmers face. Only 17 per cent of the co-op's members are women, and its leadership is also dominated by men. Yet most of the attendees at its activities, such as village-level consultations and information meetings, are women, indicating their desire to learn and be engaged in co-op affairs. But they cannot be members of the same co-op where their husband or another man in their household is already a member, because of the land ownership requirement. Furthermore, women do not feel comfortable participating in activities when their husband or another man from their household is present.

THE SOLUTION: FORM A WOMEN-EXCLUSIVE COOPERATIVE

Ara Siberani, Chairperson of Arinagata Cooperative, wanted to help women coffee farmers become co-op members. He took the initial steps to form a separate co-op for women in 2016, asking women farmers whether they were interested in joining such a co-op. They responded enthusiastically, and Ari Aras Awali Cooperative (A3) was formed. In the Gayo language, the name means "start from flash-flowing water": to begin something with passion.



At the start of A3 Cooperative's operations in 2016, it did not perform well. Members were dropping out, and few of them felt confident taking on leadership roles or helping to manage its daily operations. Arinagata realized that it had not put in enough effort to support the young cooperative. However, TPSA's persistent advocacy on gender equality with its stakeholders inspired Arinagata to give A3 more attention. The new co-op's performance began to improve and it attracted more members. With Arinagata's help, A3 began selling coffee to the domestic market.

Arinagata was further motivated to support A3 when TPSA and Fairtrade-NAPP included the new all-women co-op in its capacity-building training workshops aimed at promoting gender-responsive co-op governance and women's leadership in coffee cooperatives. Arinagata was also motivated by the enthusiasm shown by women coffee farmers for coffee cultivation and trading.

Because A3 is still very young, it continues to be attached to Arinagata in terms of its structure and operations. Novita Sari Dewi, treasurer for Arinagata, is also general manager of A3, and Salbiah, an administrative staff member at Arinagata, is the secretary of A3. Ara Siberani was briefly a member of the A3 cooperative board, while Mahyana Sari, secretary at Arinagata, helped manage quality control and marketing at A3.

A3 Cooperative received its legal status in 2018 and has a current membership of 346 women coffee farmers, most of whom are young. Members own land either through inheritance or successful negotiation with their husbands to issue them a certificate stating that they own a portion of the family farm, as attested to by the village head.

TPSA'S SUPPORT STRENGTHENS A3 COOPERATIVE

A pilot training workshop held jointly by A3 and Arinagata co-ops, supported by TPSA and Fairtrade-NAPP, was a valuable opportunity for women farmers. Six members of A3 participated in the training, where they learned about women's leadership and gender-responsive cooperative governance. Participatory learning methods were used, so the women could share their experiences and



challenges, making the training relevant to their lives. One participant said of the training: "During the three days, I received many lessons about gender, communication, gathering together, being happy, and laughing." Another expressed hope for follow-up and the importance of women's access to broader training from the co-op: "I hope that there will be training for women on pruning so that we can do this ourselves; at present, only men know how to prune trees."



Salbiah leads part of the pilot training.

The training had a strong impact on its participants. Watini is a member delegate for her village who attended the workshop because she thought it would be an opportunity to learn to become an effective leader. She intends to share her knowledge

with other co-op members. One of the things she learned during the training was that as a leader, she should support the Fairtrade principle of "no child labour, no forced labour." She intends to encourage co-op members in her village to make use of the childcare facility that was established about two years ago but has not been fully utilized. She said, "I tell our members that young children should not be taken to the coffee farm—bring them to the childcare facility, where they will be safe. Or if you have to bring them along, don't tell them to work, as they are still very young."

Watini attended the training with her four-year-old daughter, who is fond of tagging along wherever her mother goes. The young girl was surprised to see her mother and the other training participants playing games and dancing. "Mamak is crazy," she said with a laugh. But Watini calls it a good lesson for her daughter, to show her that learning can be fun. She now feels confident in her knowledge of cooperative leadership and Fairtrade principles. Meeting other co-op members and sharing their common experiences as women coffee farmers and member delegates made her realize that she was not alone in her challenges.



Participatory games for learning.



FUTURE PLANS

As a new cooperative, A3 is focused on strengthening itself as an organization, beginning with recruitment and expansion of its membership, but also building the skills and confidence of its members to become leaders. Awareness of their rights and enhanced leadership knowledge and skills will improve cooperative governance, an important pillar in the development of a strong and healthy cooperative. For these reasons, A3 plans to conduct capacity-building activities for its members and leaders on cooperative management, coffee business skills, coffee cultivation, post-harvest activities, and leadership. The road to a strong A3 Cooperative is a long one, but the seeds planted at the pilot training on women's leadership augur well for the co-op.