

Equal Exchange

Equal Exchange challenged mainstream Fairtrade to illustrate how female coffee farmers can have access to the main choices as men. Despite women doing most of the work on coffee farms they often had very little influence. Equal Exchange co-operative decided to take action, and make positive difference to women in need of empowerment.

Equal Exchange was born in 1979 when three female voluntary workers returned to Edinburgh after working on aids projects in different parts of Africa. A worker co-operative was later formed, buying Fairtrade coffee from Bukoba, Tanzania. Today, the ethical coffee can be found in independent retailers and supermarkets. Can coffee empower women across the world? Yes, it can.

Norma Gaeda Pavia is a member of the Sopexxa Co-operative, located in Nicaragua. Joining five fellow female farmers, Norma was lucky to be able to empower a further 283 farmers, who all receive fair, pay, with additional premium as the coffee is produced wholly by female farmers. “As housewives we didn’t value ourselves, we didn’t know how to. We want to give value and viability to the important work that women do and which has been traditionally ignored. We no longer want to be forgotten or ignored” comments Norma Gaeda.

By improving women’s statuses in the coffee farming, and Fairtrade movement, Equal Exchange believe that the capacity for independent action will improve. Equal Exchange believes that women tell the most vivid and personal stories illustrating the positive change, and impact Fairtrade can have.

Equal Exchange proudly champion the Coffee Grown by Women ranges; sourcing coffee which has been farmed across three continents from co-operatives made up wholly of women farmers. Blended from the finest beans from Uganda, Nicaragua, and Peru, Coffee Grown by Women illustrates the breadth of the global co-operative movement. Blends include the ‘Womens farmers’, and the ‘Mt Elgon Gumutindo AA’ – all of which can be purchased online. Did you know co-operatives produce 75% of all Fairtrade goods, of which 80% are made up of female farmers?

Gumutindo Co-operative in Uganda consists of four women directors on its seven person board. The co-operative is made up a good proportion of women employees; with a 50/50 split.

Source: <http://www.uk.coop/womenschallenge/casestudies/equal-exchange>

