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Coffee Certifications as Potential Pathways to Women's Empowerment in Costa Rica

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COFFEE CERTIFICATIONS AS POTENTIAL PATHWAYS TO WOMEN'S

EMPOWERMENT IN COSTA RICA

By

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Abstract

  The market for certified coffee is rapidly expanding and influencing the environmental, economic, and social conditions of global coffee production. Overarching goals of coffee certification schemes, such as fair trade, include encouraging sustainable production practices and promoting equitable trade relations that enhance economic stability and quality of life for producers. Women play a significant role in the coffee industry; yet, they typically have little control over resources and harvest proceeds and limited participation in decision-making processes. Although some certification schemes, namely Fairtrade International, include gender equality and women's empowerment initiatives, knowledge and understanding of how certifications can create pathways to women's empowerment remain limited. To address this gap in knowledge, this research consists of a case study comparing two coffee organizations in Costa Rica: CoopeAgri, a mixed-gender fair trade-certified cooperative, and ASOMOBI, an all-women's non-fair trade-certified association. Qualitative methods were employed to obtain in-depth data exploring women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry and their perspectives on certification schemes and empowerment. Data was analyzed using Jo Rowlands' (1995) framework conceptualizing empowerment as a result of cultivating forms of "positive power." Results suggest that while certification schemes minimally contribute to some components of empowerment, primarily through increased incomes and access to resources in organizations, economic and social factors (e.g. low consumer demand for certified coffee, persistence of traditional gender roles) limit certifications' capacity to create pathways to empowerment. This study also explores how the scale and structure (i.e. women-only versus mixed-gender) of local organizations influence their ability to facilitate women's empowerment. Results indicate that smaller-scale, women-only settings may be more effective for creating pathways to empowerment for women in the Costa Rican coffee industry. Results of this preliminary study provide a base upon which future research examining certification schemes and women's empowerment can be built.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures   Page

List of Tables   Page

Glossary of Acronyms and Spanish Words

- AMCCR – Alliance of Women in Coffee in Costa Rica (Spanish acronym)
- ASOMOBI – Association of Organized Women of Biolley (Spanish acronym)
- ATO – alternative trade organization
- BAE – Costa Rica's Blue Ecological Flag Certification (Spanish acronym)
- CDF – CoopeAgri's Family Development Committee (Spanish acronym)
- CST – Costa Rica's Sustainable Tourism Certification (Spanish acronym)
- FAO – Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- FLO – Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (comprised of the Fairtrade International certification and the FLO-CERT certifying entity)
- ICA – International Coffee Agreement
- ICAFE – Coffee Institute of Costa Rica (Spanish acronym)
- ICO – International Coffee Organization
- INEC – National Statistics and Census Institute of Costa Rica (Spanish acronym)
- ITC – International Trade Centre
- IWCA – International Women's Coffee Alliance
- MDG - Millennium Development Goals
- PILA – International Friendship Park (Spanish acronym)
- PO – participant observation
- PZ – Pérez Zeledón district
- SSI – semi-structured interview
- UN – United Nations
- UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
- WTO – World Trade Organization

- *Asociada* – female associate (women in CoopeAgri self-identify as "*asociadas*")
- *Beneficio* – Coffee processing facility where coffee fruit (cherry) is removed and green coffee beans are dried and prepared for shipment or roasting
- *Broca* – coffee borer beetle (*Hypothenemus hampei*)
- *Campesino* – farmer (noun) or rural (adjective)
- *Cantón* – geopolitical district
- *El grano de oro* – the golden grain, i.e. coffee
- *Fanega (ff)* – volume measurement of coffee cherries (1 ff cherries = 46 kg green beans)
- *Machismo* – strong "male-pride" attitudes
- *Ojo de gallo* – rooster's eye fungus (*Mycena citricolor*)
- *Roya* – coffee leaf rust fungus (*Hemileia vastatrix*)
- *Socia* – female member or partner (women in ASOMOBI self-identify as "*socias*")

I. Introduction

The coffee industry, driven by the world's second most valued commodity after oil and the most widely traded agricultural commodity, supports the livelihood of over 125 million people worldwide, of whom 25 million are small-scale producers generally living and working in substandard conditions (Fairtrade Foundation 2012). The market for certified coffee, such as fair trade[1], organic, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ, is rapidly expanding within the global industry and influencing the social, economic, and environmental conditions of coffee production around the world. The International Trade Centre (ITC) reported that 8% of all green coffee exported worldwide in 2009 carried "some form of certification of credible claim of sustainability" and estimated that this market percentage had increased to at least 24% in 2015 (Pierrot, Giovannucci, and Kasterine 2011:1; Lernoud, Potts, Sampson, Garibay, Lynch, Voora, Willer, and Wozniak 2017). Overarching goals of certification schemes include encouraging environmentally sustainable production practices and promoting equitable trade practices that enhance economic stability and quality of life for producers. The impacts on coffee producers participating in certification schemes, particularly women who are often disadvantaged in the industry, will grow with expansion of the certified coffee market.

There has been much research into the potential benefits and real-world effects of coffee certification schemes since their formal inception in the late 1980s. Though on-the-ground results of environmentally sustainable production practices differ depending on variables such as landscape matrix and specific management strategies, implementing certification standards has generally proven effective for supporting ecological conservation within agricultural

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[1]For the purpose of this research, "fair trade" (lower case) refers to the general fair trade movement and certification concept and is only capitalized in section titles; "Fairtrade" and "FLO" refer to Fairtrade International, governed by the Fairtrade Labeling Organization International (FLO), which is distinct from the Fair Trade USA certification.

communities (Blackman and Naranjo 2012; Gordon, Manson, Sundberg, and Cruz-Angón 2006; Perfecto and Vandermeer 2015). Conversely, research examining the economic and social impacts on producers participating in certification schemes has yielded mixed results due to the variety of indicators studied and the complexity of other influencing factors, such as local politics and culture (Bacon 2005; Barham and Weber 2012; Beuchelt and Zeller 2011; Valkila 2009; Sick 2008). Nonetheless, economic incentives, including guaranteed price minimums and premiums, along with social benefits provided through membership in democratically structured cooperatives continue to encourage producer participation (Jaffee 2007).

While research surrounding coffee certifications abounds, little attention has been given to their potential impacts on women in the industry, many of whom confront challenges due to socially ascribed gender roles and cultural norms (Lyon, Bezaury, and Mutersbaugh 2010). Though women's labor contributions and ownership status vary considerably by country and across levels of the production chain, the ITC states that women play a significant role in the global coffee industry, yet have little control over resources and harvest proceeds and limited decision-making authority (Scholer 2008). These constraints diminish women's capacity to exercise individual or collective power in their households, communities, and the broader coffee industry (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015). Coffee certification schemes have the potential to address these disparities and promote women's empowerment through standards that increase access to and control over resources and encourage participation in decision-making processes.

Indeed, research suggests that certification schemes, such as fair trade, may contribute to gender equality and women's empowerment; however, inadequacies remain due to external forces that limit women's participation in and ability to benefit from certification schemes (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014; Kilpatrick 2015; Lyon et al. 2010; Le Mare 2012; Rice 2010).

Although "empowerment" is difficult to define, Rowlands (1995, 1997) presents the concept as a process through which awareness of surrounding power dynamics and alternative "ways of being" ignites the development of positive personal, collective, and generative power, which then combine to overcome negative coercive power (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Studies exploring the relationship between certifications schemes and women's empowerment consistently highlight the contextual complexities of assessing certification schemes' impacts and measuring empowerment. Conclusions indicate that social, political, and economic factors play interrelated roles in both areas (Bacon 2010; Ellery 2009; Lyon et al. 2010; Rice 2010). While some certification agencies have made gender equality and women's empowerment an explicit goal, knowledge and understanding of certification schemes' capacity to potentially create "pathways to empowerment" remain limited (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:114).

To contribute to the growing body of literature and expand our understanding of the relationship between certification schemes and women's empowerment, I conducted an in-depth comparative case study of two coffee organizations in southern Costa Rica to answer the following questions:

1. What are women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry and what are their perspectives on certification schemes?
2. In what ways do certification schemes create pathways to women's empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry and what are the limitations?
3. How do local coffee organizations facilitate women's empowerment?

Research objectives included: illuminating women's experiences and perspectives in the male-dominated Costa Rican coffee industry; identifying women's perceptions of the benefits and challenges of certification schemes; determining if and how certification schemes contribute to women's empowerment; and exploring components of local organizations that may facilitate women's empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

I partnered with the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) and its Costa Rican Chapter, *La Alianza de Mujeres en Café de Costa Rica* (AMCCR), in order to accomplish these objectives. The IWCA is a 501(c)(3) non-profit that works to organize and advocate for women in the global coffee industry "from seed to cup" by providing a network of support, information-sharing, and greater access to resources (IWCA 2016). The mission of the IWCA is "to empower women in the international coffee community to achieve meaningful and sustainable lives, and to encourage and recognize the participation of women in all aspects of the coffee industry" (IWCA 2014:2). The organization works to develop chapters in producing and consuming countries to address local challenges and is currently operating in 22 countries. Additionally, the IWCA strives to build relationships among coffee-related businesses and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), creating a global platform for sharing skills, information, resources, experiences, and ideas across all levels of the production chain. The IWCA's first producing country chapter, the AMCCR, offered logistical support in Costa Rica to help me access coffee communities and connect me with women in their affiliate organizations.

Through contacts in the AMCCR, I identified two organizations to serve as study sites in the southernmost coffee producing region, the Brunca [Figure 1]. CoopeAgri is a large, mixed-gender, Fairtrade (FLO)-certified cooperative headquartered in San Isidro de El General in *Cantón* (district) Pérez Zeledón (PZ) [Figure 2]. ASOMOBI is a small, all-women's, non-fair trade-certified association located in the remote town of Biolley bordering the *Parque Internacional La Amistad* (International Friendship Park), or PILA, near the Panamanian border [Figure 2]. Focusing on these organizations allows for a comparison of women's experiences and perspectives within two distinct contexts.

The goal of this research is to provide an in-depth exploration of women's experiences and perspectives in these two organizations and identify key areas of interest and concern among study participants regarding certification schemes and women's empowerment. Results suggest that while certifications minimally contribute to some components of empowerment, primarily generative power through increased incomes and access to resources in each organization, economic and social factors (e.g. low consumer demand for certified coffee, persistence of traditional gender roles) limit certification schemes' capacity to create pathways to empowerment. This study also revealed that the scale and structure (i.e. women-only versus mixed-gender) of local organizations influence their ability to facilitate women's empowerment, indicating that smaller scale, women-only settings may be more effective for creating pathways to empowerment for women in the Costa Rican coffee industry. Results of this preliminary study provide a base upon which future research examining certification schemes and women's empowerment can be built.

II. Literature Review

2.1 The Coffee Industry:

Over 125 million people around the world depend on the coffee industry to make their living in production, trade, or retailing (Fairtrade Foundation 2012). The structure of the coffee commodity chain places much of the economic power in the hands of traders, retailers, and consumers, often excluding producers from sharing in economic benefits. The following section first describes key events in the history of the coffee industry that have created this power imbalance, and then discusses the economic and cultural significance of coffee in Costa Rica. I conclude by outlining the challenges Costa Rican coffee producers confront as a result of global market and environmental forces.

2.1.a The Global Coffee Industry

Within the last half century, the coffee industry has undergone rapid growth to become the world's second most highly valued commodity after oil and the most widely traded agricultural commodity (Pierrot et al. 2011). The International Coffee Organization (ICO) states that both production and consumption of coffee have increased over the past 50 years, and the total consumption value was an estimated US$173.4 billion in 2012 (ICO 2014). While global production capabilities may soon become limited by the availability of suitable land and industry capacity, consumption is predicted to increase, particularly within emerging markets (ICO 2014). Not only are new markets growing in many developing countries as living standards rise, but

niche markets for specialty and certified coffee are expanding, indicating that coffee will continue to play a significant role in the global economy (ICO 2014).

As the coffee industry grows, so do concerns related to economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Many current challenges relate to the complex history of regulation among the various industry components. Following guidelines set forth by the 1948 Havana Charter of the United Nations (UN) on international commodity regulations, the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) was established in 1962 (Auld 2010). This intergovernmental agreement used quality standards as well as quotas based on comparisons between target prices and market prices in an attempt to "regulate world trade in coffee to control the volatility and level of coffee prices" (Auld 2010:217-218). A number of political and economic processes, including changes in U.S. foreign policy in Latin America and shifts in economic development in Brazil and Indonesia towards "export led growth," led to the collapse of the ICA in 1989 (Bacon 2005:498; Jaffee 2012). Deregulation of the coffee industry paved the way for increased liberalization and privatization.

Along with the demise of the international regulatory system, government support within producing countries declined (Auld 2010; Bacon 2005). The disintegration of government intervention not only left certain functions within the industry "unaddressed and underfunded," but also marked a shift in economic power from producing countries and farmers to concentrated interests in the roasting and retailing sectors in consuming countries (Auld 2010:218; Bacon 2005). Moreover, the liberalization of the industry led to an increase in coffee production while demand remained stagnant, resulting in a global coffee surplus and a dramatic drop in prices paid to producers (Bacon 2005). These forces triggered two major coffee crisis periods from 1990-1993 and again from 1998-2004. During these years, prices for green (unroasted) coffee fell

below production costs, employment in the coffee sector fell, and declining export revenues created debt and subsequent foreclosures on many farms and export companies (Bacon 2005; Beuchelt and Zeller 2011). Muradian and Pelupessy (2005:2030) point out that while deregulation may have led to improved production efficiency through increased competition and removal of market distortions, "market failures" due to "excessive market control by intermediary agents" still exist at the expense of both producer and consumer interests.

2.1.b Coffee in Costa Rica

Since coffee's introduction to Costa Rica in the early 1800s, "*el grano de oro*," or "the golden grain," has been an integral part of the country's economy and culture. Costa Rica was the first Central American country to establish a thriving coffee industry (ICAFE 2016). Following independence in 1821, both local and national government policies enthusiastically supported coffee cultivation as a means of fostering economic and social development (ICAFE 2016). Recognizing coffee's potential as a cash crop, municipalities encouraged producers by distributing coffee plants for free, and the government promoted several waves of migration and establishment of coffee farms by "investing in infrastructure" and "providing access to land" (Sick 1998:191). New roads not only allowed people to leave the Central Valley and settle other regions, but also provided access to ports for export to South America and Europe. Between 1840 and 1890, coffee was the sole export of Costa Rica, and its revenues contributed greatly to the development of infrastructure, the establishment of public universities, and the construction of many culturally significant sites, including the famed *Teatro Nacional* (National Theater) in the capital city of San José (Ronchi 2002).

Coffee has since declined in national economic importance, giving way to other cash crops, tourism, and industrial sectors (Sick 2008). Though it constituted only 3.1% of export revenue in 2016, the coffee sector employs 8% of the country's workforce in production, processing, exporting, and more recently, roasting and retailing (Nieters, Grabs, Jimenez, and Alpizar 2015; Simoes, Landry, Hidalgo, and Teng 2017). The *Instituto del Café de Costa Rica* (ICAFE) estimated there were roughly 78,000 small-scale coffee producers in Costa Rica in 2007 (Sick 2008). This number has likely declined in the past decade due to land conversion and increased outmigration from rural communities in search of better education and employment opportunities; yet, coffee production remains significant to Costa Rican culture. Contributing just 1.3% of global coffee exports in 2016, Costa Rica can no longer compete with countries like Brazil and Colombia in terms of quantity. Rather, to remain competitive in global markets, Costa Rica takes pride in its production of high quality *Arabica* varieties, and national laws prohibit the production of lower quality *Robusta* coffee (Simoes et al. 2017; ICAFE 2016).

Unlike other Latin American countries where various political and economic factors "enabled elites to enact coercive reforms" that led to the development of large-scale plantations, Costa Rica's coffee is still predominantly grown by small-scale producers (Sick 1997:257). ICAFE estimates that 92% of Costa Rican coffee producers own ≤5 hectares (ha), collectively representing 44% of land in coffee production. Six percent own medium-sized farms between 5.1-20 ha (21% of land), and only 2% own more than 20 ha (35% of land) (ICAFE 2016). Compared to other countries, Costa Rican "small family farmers have come to form a large and relatively prosperous middle class, sharing the rewards of coffee production with large farmers, processors, and exporters" (Sick 1997:257). This is largely due to national industry regulation, state-sponsored social investments, and political support of small-scale producers' rights (Sick

2008). However, despite relatively high support and prosperity, Costa Rican coffee producers remain vulnerable to economic and environmental uncertainties.

2.1.c Challenges for Costa Rican Coffee Producers

Costa Rica was not immune to the ramifications of the global coffee crises: between 2000-2005, the cost of production per pound was around US$1; yet, the average price received by producers fluctuated between US$0.46/lb. and US$0.89/lb. (Babin 2015). Though prices paid to producers have increased (average US$1.74/lb. in 2012), Costa Ricans face higher production costs than those in neighboring countries, mostly due to environmental and social standards mandated by the government (Calderón 2016; ICO 2016). For example, if a Costa Rican producer hires laborers, he or she is required by law to provide "social insurance payments" in addition to wages (Sick 1997:264). This added cost is rarely factored into the price paid to Costa Rican producers who face competition from neighboring countries where type and quality of coffee are similar, but labor costs are lower.

Furthermore, coffee producers are battling increasingly severe disease outbreaks and irregular weather patterns, which affect production yields and chemical and labor inputs. Outbreaks of *broca* (coffee borer beetle), *roya* (coffee leaf rust fungus), and *ojo de gallo* (rooster's eye fungus) can lead to devastating declines in a coffee farm's production. Often, the only choices are to fumigate with expensive agrochemicals or remove (and perhaps replace) coffee plants, which can represent the loss of a 20+ year investment. Producers also face shifting and unpredictable weather, making it difficult to plan farm management activities such as fertilizing and pruning. Moreover, because changes in temperature and rainfall affect rates of coffee cherry maturation, the cherries on each plant no longer ripen at the same time. Thus,

pickers must pass through the fields multiple times per season to harvest ripe cherries, which requires more time, energy, and money (if hiring laborers). Volatile and often low prices coupled with increasing costs of production leave many small-scale farmers with little to no profit. For example, during the 2015-2016 harvest year, average costs of production were US$115/*fanega*[2] while the average price received by producers was US$128/*fanega* (ICAFE 2016). These averages do not reflect cost variations from specific disease and weather events or differences in transportation and labor requirements that can leave some producers with no profits from coffee.

The challenges Costa Rican coffee producers have faced in recent decades have prompted various strategic responses including "land-use change and coffee abandonment, coffee agroecosystem transformation, and alternative marketing," the last of which includes involvement in certification schemes like fair trade (Babin 2015:101). The demise of the ICA and ensuing crashes in the coffee market coincided with both the formal organization of the fair trade movement and with growing concerns among consumers regarding social and environmental standards of coffee production (Jaffee 2007). Thus, the stage was set for coffee to become the first and most prominent fair trade commodity.

2.2 Certification Schemes:

Following the collapse of the ICA, certification schemes developed in an attempt to address power imbalances in the free market with alternative forms of "social regulation" that promulgate more equitable trade relationships between producers and consumers (Raynolds 2012:276). Many certification schemes aim to "empower producers" while also promoting

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[2]*Fanega* (ff): volume measurement of coffee cherries; 1 ff cherries = 46 kg green coffee beans after processing

environmental sustainability (Fair Trade USA 2017; Fairtrade International 2017; Jaffee 2007). Though there are numerous types of certification schemes on the market today, fair trade is of the most interest in this research for three reasons. First, the fair trade movement initiated the concept of using labels to communicate a verifiable set of standards of production and trade practices; thus, all other certifications developed from the fair trade movement, and many are based on its underlying principles. Second, CoopeAgri is certified by Fairtrade International (FLO), and ASOMOBI is interested in pursuing a fair trade certification. Third, as discussed in section 2.4, Fairtrade International explicitly identifies "women's empowerment in producer organizations" as a key goal of the certification agency (Fairtrade International 2016). Other certifications are cited and examined in relation to CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI, but the fair trade certification model is the focus of discussion.

In order to better understand certification schemes' role in creating potential pathways to women's empowerment in the coffee industry, it is first necessary to understand the overall function and goals as well as the recognized benefits and limitations of certifications. The following section outlines the history of the fair trade movement, how coffee became the central commodity for certification, and points of ongoing debate about the purpose and efficacy of certification schemes. I next examine how certifications function within a free market economy and review the main benefits and limitations from research to date. Finally, I discuss certification schemes in the context of the Costa Rican coffee industry.

2.2.a The Rise of the Fair Trade Movement

The fair trade movement was born out of alternative trade organizations (ATOs), which were developed to create markets that connected consumers with impoverished producers as well

as to combat the political corruption and inequality that dominated the global economic system (Arnould, Plastina and Ball 2009; Jaffee 2007). ATOs began informally in the 1940s, predominantly through church-based charity groups in Europe and the U.S., and expanded in the 1960s and 1970s to more organized, secular networks focused on "local development and empowerment through trade" (Jaffee 2007:12). Though much of the initial focus of ATOs was on craft products, agricultural commodities like coffee and tea had a presence in these niche markets. Amidst mounting concerns about unequal terms of international trade between the global North and South, small disjointed ATOs grew rapidly "to the point where [they] began to take on movement status" (Jaffee 2007:12).

The pivotal moment for the fair trade movement came in 1988 when a Dutch NGO and a cooperative of indigenous coffee producers in Oaxaca, Mexico, joined together to form the Max Havelaar label (Dragusanu, Giovannucci, and Nunn 2014; Jaffee 2012). This label, or seal communicating certain standards of production to consumers, created an alternative market for the cooperative's producers that allowed them to avoid many of the middlemen in the supply chain and thereby capture more revenue (Jaffee 2012). Additionally, the NGO mandated that companies wishing to use the label to market their processed coffee must "pay farmers the fair trade price and offer pre-harvest financing" (Auld 2010:219). The Max Havelaar label initiated the mechanisms that would later be employed in broader fair trade certification standards, and it positioned coffee at the forefront of the movement.

Coffee's status as both a globally valuable commodity and an important cash crop for roughly 25 million farmers allowed fair trade to move from marginalized specialty shops to the mainstream market (Jaffee 2007). Following in the footsteps of the Netherlands, other countries across Western Europe began forming organizations to "promote and certify fair trade products,"

and sales of certified coffee increased quickly (Jaffee 2007:14). The movement spread and in 1997, the Fairtrade Labeling Organizations International (FLO) was formed as the worldwide third-party certification entity; FLO later divided into Fairtrade International, which sets the standards, and FLO-CERT, which ensures compliance (Jaffee 2007). Though slower to catch on, the fair trade movement also grew in North America through the 1990s, and the first fair trade-certified coffee was sold in the U.S. in 1998 under a new certification entity called Transfair USA, now known as Fair Trade USA (Jaffee 2012). The development of Transfair USA and its inclusion in FLO in 1999 marked a crucial juncture for the fair trade movement and led to many of the issues and tensions facing fair trade today (Jaffee 2012).

The key point of ongoing contention highlighted by Transfair USA joining FLO is the debate over mainstreaming fair trade-certified products, an issue that is particularly salient in the coffee sector. For those who adhere to the alternative trade model that dominated the initial expansion of fair trade, the label should "only be available to small-scale producers" and smaller "mission-driven" companies that sell 100% fair trade products (Dragusanu et al. 2014:218; Jaffee 2012:107). On the other hand, the strategy of Transfair USA was to "increase the volume of fair trade sales through conventional retail venues and under existing commercial brands" (Jaffee 2012:103). Between 2000-2001, under pressure from human rights activists in the U.S., Starbucks negotiated a deal with Transfair USA to sell fair trade-certified coffee in all of its retail locations (Jaffee 2012). Other national specialty roasting companies were soon licensed to sell fair trade-certified coffee, and this trend quickly expanded to international mass-market firms, most notably the world's biggest coffee trader, Nestlé (Jaffee 2012).

A main concern for fair trade movement groups and companies committed to selling 100% fair trade products was that the licensing agreements between large corporations and

certification agencies did not specify the volume of fair trade coffee that had to be purchased in order to use the fair trade label. Indeed, initial sales volumes by these companies were negligible, and there were no "binding commitments to volume growth" (Jaffee 2012:107). The potential for "fair-washing," or the use of the fair trade label to boost corporations' images of social responsibility without making any significant changes in their business practices, is a lynchpin in the divisions within the fair trade movement (Jaffee 2012:107). Disagreements about the role of mass-market firms and large producers in the fair trade-certified coffee market led to Transfair USA's departure from FLO in 2012 and the creation of a parallel but distinct certification agency and label, Fair Trade USA (Dragusanu et al. 2014). Jaffee (2012:110) characterizes this and other controversies in fair trade policy as a "dilution of standards" that will continue to pose challenges to the fair trade movement.

2.2.b Fair Trade as a Market Approach

To better understand some of the challenges of fair trade, it is helpful to understand how the philosophy of the fair trade movement relates to the ideals of free trade and an "autonomous self-regulating market" on an international scale (Raynolds 2012:277). Many academics grapple with how fair trade as a form of voluntary social regulation functions both within and at odds with a market structure driven by capitalism and globalization. Referencing the arguments put forth in the 1940s by economic historian Karl Polanyi, Jaffee (2007:18-19; 2012:96) describes how the Industrial Revolution signified the "advent of the market economy," which is "dis-embedded" from the social and moral relations of "reciprocity and redistribution" that historically governed human economies. Instead, price signals and economic logic govern the market economy, effectively externalizing social and environmental values (Jaffee 2007). A

principal counterforce to the purported social and environmental degradation from unrestricted market dominance is state regulation on trade, represented on a global level by international governing bodies such as the UN and the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Jaffee 2012; Raynolds 2012).

However, as previously discussed, the collapse of the ICA in 1989 marked the end of broad-scale state governance in the coffee sector. The shift away from state regulation allowed for private entities, such as retailing firms, to "play a more significant role than either states or super-state bodies such as the WTO in regulating and restructuring global markets" (Jaffee 2012:97). The liberalization of the coffee industry reduced barriers to international trade, but in doing so, diminished social and moral relations, created volatile market prices, and increased inequality in the distribution of economic power (Auld 2010; Bacon 2005). In the absence of government oversight, private governance schemes, like certifications, have emerged as tools for regulating social and environmental externalities in the market economy (Raynolds 2012).

These alternative types of private market regulation, of which fair trade is an example, can "position non-corporate actors as moral overseers who govern economic activity often through standard-based certification and labeling procedures" (Raynolds 2012:276). Although "private" distinguishes this method of market regulation from a state-governed system, Raynolds (2012:276) asserts that it is more aptly deemed a form of "social regulation," incorporating both public and private sector actors. The paradox of fair trade lies in its unique position as both an alternative trade movement based on equity and respect and a multi-institutional regulation system operating within a market economy. Many view fair trade as a promising method for re-embedding social and moral relations into economic exchanges; however, market-driven forces influence fair trade's role in international trade (Jaffee 2012; Raynolds 2012).

2.2.c Benefits and Limitations of Fair Trade in the Certified Coffee Market

Coffee was the first product to be certified as fair trade and remains one of the top three certified commodities in terms of both volume and sales (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014). As such, certified coffee serves as a representative commodity for examining the intended benefits of fair trade as well as its limitations. Furthermore, the growth of fair trade-certified coffee has led to the development of other types of certification schemes, such as organic, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ. These offer additional opportunities for fostering social and environmental responsibility in international commodity trade, but the variations in standards can create tensions within the certified coffee market.

Fair trade certification offers numerous social and financial incentives to "economically disadvantaged" producers (Beuchelt and Zeller 2011:1316). The following is a list of the most common standards required by fair trade certification agreements between traders and producers (Bacon 2005; Dragusanu et al. 2014; Jaffee 2007):

1. A guaranteed minimum price that covers the costs of sustainable production and livelihoods (fair wages)

2. A price premium for social development

3. Contracts that encourage long-term trade relationships, planning, and stability

4. Access to advance crop financing/pre-harvest credit

5. Participation in democratically structured cooperatives or associations

6. Safe, non-exploitative working conditions

7. Public accountability and financial transparency

8. Financial and technical assistance

9. Environmentally sustainable practices that protect worker health and safety

The two most prominent standards for producers are the price minimum and social premium. The price minimum is intended to reduce risk from market fluctuations by ensuring a set price paid to producers if world prices fall below this minimum. When world market prices are higher, traders must pay the world price; moreover, producers and traders can always negotiate higher prices based on quality and other product differentiations (Dragusanu et al. 2014). Traders pay an additional social premium to cooperatives, and producers decide democratically how to utilize these funds in community development projects. Examples include shared resources (e.g. machinery, facilities, infrastructure), training in farming or business practices, and investments in education and healthcare (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014). All standards aim to enhance "dialogue, transparency, and respect" in trade partnerships, leading to "greater equity in international trade" (Wills n.d.).

Despite the possible advantages of these standards, fair trade certification has its limits in providing benefits to producers. For example, the minimum price guarantee can act as a price floor that creates problems for both certified producers and producers wanting to enter the fair trade market. When the minimum price is above the market price, uncertified producers have an incentive to enter the certified coffee market due to the promise of higher prices for the same volume and quality of coffee (Dragusanu et al. 2014). The risk to the fair trade model is that free entry into a market without an increase in demand will lead to a surplus and the dissipation of rents to the point where financial benefits just equal the costs of production (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007). Indeed, empirical evidence shows that the supply of fair trade-certified coffee consistently exceeded consumer demand between 2008-2014 (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014; Kilpatrick 2015; Potts, Lynch, Wilkings, Huppé, Cunningham, and Voora 2014). Thus, producers have no guarantee how much of their fair trade-certified coffee can be sold as such,

and they typically must sell well over half of their crop to conventional markets (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Kilpatrick 2015; Weber 2007).

There are barriers to entering the fair trade-certified coffee market that can prevent the dissipation of economic benefits. The focus of some fair trade certification agencies, like Fairtrade International, on small-scale family farms reduces competition from large plantations (Dragusanu et al. 2014). Another major barrier to entry is the associated costs of certification, such as cooperative membership fees, payments to certification agencies, and possible capital investments needed to comply with production standards. As opposed to the farm size limit that presumably supports small-scale producers, costs for participation can further marginalize disadvantaged producers who could benefit the most from fair trade certification. In a sense, these barriers act as a double-edged sword for producers, either protecting those who enter the market early from increased competition for a limited number of fair trade contracts, or threatening to exclude marginalized producers who are the intended beneficiaries of fair trade certification schemes (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007).

Another possible problem within the fair trade model is the role of cooperatives. Fair trade standards dictate a democratic organization for community decision-making processes, particularly with regards to how the social premium is used. The administration is supposed to demonstrate accountability and financial transparency in facilitating sales and distributing the revenue from premiums (Dragusanu et al. 2014). Moreover, fair trade aims to eliminate "unnecessary" middlemen, which leaves cooperatives to take on the tasks previously performed by a host of supply chain intermediaries (Weber 2007:111). The costs of buying, sorting, processing, and selling the coffee crop can "consume much of the higher fair trade price before it reaches growers," especially if management is inefficient (Weber 2007:111). Dragusanu et al.

(2014:231) emphasize that the higher financial stakes of certification coupled with issues of communication, transparency, and "lack of knowledge about fair trade on the part of the farmers" can "erode trust and increase tensions within a cooperative." Some producers may elect to sell their crop to the local market instead of to their fair trade cooperative if financial and interpersonal problems persist (Weber 2007).

A final source of tension within the fair trade movement involves the proliferation of other coffee certification schemes. Following fair trade's model for re-embedding morals and values into trade partnerships, different certification schemes emerged to address concerns about land-use, ecological conservation, and agricultural management practices (Auld 2010). General goals aim to benefit producers, consumers, and supply chain intermediaries through the promotion of environmentally sustainable production practices, improved standards of human health and food safety, and better business practices in the coffee industry (Auld 2010). Producers who want access to the social and economic advantages of certification schemes may benefit from having more options to choose the set of standards best suited to their conditions. Furthermore, dual certification, such as fair trade/organic, not only allows for possible increases in prices and premiums, but can result in additional product differentiation, thus minimizing some of the issues created by a surplus of fair trade-certified coffee (Weber 2001).

However, some argue that the abundance of certification schemes negatively affects the principles and goals of the fair trade movement. One concern is that the "distinct yet overlapping requirements" create confusion and added burden for producers, inhibiting certification schemes' economic effectiveness (Dragusanu et al. 2014:227). In addition, as opposed to fair trade's stringent standards focused on small-scale producers, many of the newer certifications target the mainstream industry and require only "minimum standards…on the social, environmental, and

economic performance of coffee cultivation" (Muradian and Pelupessy 2005:2036). Opponents of multiple certification schemes echo the concerns of those opposed to licensing the use of labels to big corporations, arguing that a "dilution of standards" threatens the original mission of the fair trade movement (Jaffee 2012:110).

2.2.d Coffee Certification Schemes in Costa Rica

According to Fairtrade International, Costa Rica has consistently ranked among the top 10 countries in terms of FLO-certified coffee production in recent years (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014; Kilpatrick 2015). In 2012, roughly 32% of the country's total coffee production was "standard compliant" with international certification schemes (fair trade, organic, Rainforest Alliance, and UTZ), and fair trade accounted for the majority of Costa Rica's certified coffee (Potts et al. 2014:179). Participation in fair trade and other certification schemes is increasingly popular in Costa Rica as the national industry seeks market differentiation to compensate for the country's relatively low quantity. As mentioned, costs of production in Costa Rica are high compared to neighboring countries; therefore, certifications offer a method of capturing these market externalities in higher prices paid to coffee producers and processors.

In addition to the prevalence of international certification schemes, the Costa Rican government sponsors two national certifications for sustainability: *La Bandera Azul Ecológica* (Blue Ecological Flag, or BAE) for agriculture (e.g. coffee), businesses, and institutions, and *La Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turística* (Certification for Sustainable Tourism, or CST) for tourism. Moreover, Costa Rica is rolling out a national label, *Esencial Costa Rica* (Essential Costa Rica), as a nation-wide marketing tool for products and services, like coffee and tourism (Calderón 2016). It is evident that despite ongoing challenges within the fair trade movement and

potential points of contention among different coffee certification schemes, this form of

alternative marketing will continue to play an important part the Costa Rican coffee industry.

2.3 Women's Empowerment – A Theoretical Framework:

Women's empowerment has been a central topic within the international development

community for decades (Braidotti, Charkiewicz, Hausler, and Wieringa 1994). Although many

national governments, intergovernmental agencies, and NGOs, including certification agencies,

often state women's empowerment as a critical component for sustainable development and

improved wellbeing for families and communities, "empowerment" remains difficult to define.

Thus, measuring if and how organizations and initiatives effectively promote empowerment

proves challenging. Despite the ambiguity, commonalities emerge in researchers' definitions and

approaches. This section first outlines the empowerment framework I drew upon in my research,

providing both a theoretical description as well as empirical evidence of how this framework has

been applied in other studies. I next explain why understanding "empowerment" remains

important in discussions of women and gender, particularly in agriculture. Finally, I describe

barriers to women's empowerment identified in the literature, specifically in the context of the

Costa Rican coffee industry.

2.3.a Unpacking Empowerment

Despite frequent use of the term "empowerment" by numerous governments and

organizations, including certification agencies, as well as its considerable presence in scholarly

literature, a consensus on its exact meaning has proven difficult to reach in political, activist, and

academic realms. Said-Allsopp and Tallontire (2015:115) attribute the "vagueness" of the term

to the "multi-faceted, context-defined, and specific nature of the empowerment process."

Furthermore, Rowlands (1995:101) ascribes the confusion surrounding "empowerment" to

disputes over the meaning of the "root-concept – power." Rowlands (1995, 1997) conceptualizes

"empowerment" as a combination of three forms of "positive power": "power within," or

personal power, "power with," or collective power, and "power to," or generative power. The

development of all three types of positive power creates a "situation of empowerment" and

enhances one's ability to "overcome people's exercise of negative 'power over,'" or "coercive

power" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116, 118). I chose Rowlands' framework because it

has provided the basis for other studies exploring empowerment, and, as noted by researchers, its

flexibility has allowed it to be applied to various contexts and expanded to incorporate emergent

components identified through ongoing research (Ellery 2009; Khumalo, McKay, and Freimund

2015; Le Mare 2012; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015).

Indeed, a few additional aspects of "empowerment" that "seem to be generally accepted

in the literature" warrant consideration in this study. (Mosedale 2005:244). The first is that

"empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party; [r]ather, those who would become

empowered must claim it" (Mosedale 2005:244). Another key element is that empowerment

must be understood as "an ongoing process rather than a product" or "final goal" (Mosedale

2005:244). Finally, Rowlands (1995, 1997) notes that a necessary component in initiating the

process of empowerment is awareness of surrounding power dynamics, one's position within

those contexts, and viable alternatives.

Rowlands' framework has been applied to on-the-ground examinations of how women

experience empowerment. For example, Said-Allsopp and Tallontire (2015:117) found that

Kenyan women employed in non-traditional paid labor sectors experience "power within" by recognizing their own abilities to enact change, challenging social norms, and gaining the "courage to do previously unimaginable things." Researchers noted that an increased sense of "power within" is crucial for cultivating collective "power with" in order to accomplish common goals, which in turn can promote "power within" other individuals (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:118). Building on both "power within" and "power with," women increase their individual "power to" enhance their "self-reliance and financial independence," as well as their ability to exercise agency in their personal lives (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). However, creating "pathways to empowerment" depends heavily on the structure and support of the employment environment, suggesting that external social, political, and economic factors play a key role in the empowerment process (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:114).

Another study by Khumalo et al. (2015) examined the nuances of the empowerment process in relation to social constructs of "respectability" and being a "real woman" in Namibia. Women identify five common qualities of a "real woman," which together create a complex social system that can both promote and diminish empowerment. Social norms such as marriage, collaborating with other women, and emphasizing "livelihood provision, hard work, and education" can increase all three forms of positive power through enhanced access to resources and connections within the community (Khumalo et al. 2015:53). Conversely, these same conditions can reduce women's awareness of alternatives and their ability to make choices. This study again highlights the context-driven complexities of women's experiences of empowerment, and identifies a need to define empowerment in a way that "accommodates women's different priorities" (Khumalo et al. 2015:54).

2.3.b Women's Empowerment – Why It Matters

The common, and sometimes careless, use of the word "empowerment" in international development in recent decades has led some scholars to criticize the term as "a mere buzzword" that "risks becoming degraded and valueless" (Ellery 2009:33; Rowlands 1995:106). Yet, others argue that "if used precisely and deliberately" within a well-defined context, it remains a relevant and meaningful concept (Ellery 2009; Rowlands 1995:106). Indeed, empowerment language continues to be used in the policies and initiatives of many governments and organizations, including certification agencies. Thus, there is a need to better understand the "multiple meanings and measurements" of empowerment and how these are applied with regards to elevating women from their subordinate position in society (Ellery 2009:32; Braidiotti et al. 1994).

In 2000, the UN identified "gender equality and women's empowerment" as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), defining "gender equality" as resulting "from the absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities and the equal allocation of resources or benefits or in access to services" (Gopal, Wakeman, and Carlsson n.d.; UN 2015). While significant improvements have been made, especially in primary education, "disparities persist" in higher levels of education, access to paid employment, participation in the labor force, and political representation among women worldwide (UN 2015:28). The UN set a new "Agenda for Sustainable Development" in October 2015, and again named "gender equality and empowerment for all women and girls" as one of 17 re-envisioned goals (UN 2015:18). Specific target areas include ending discrimination and violence, recognizing and valuing unpaid work, and ensuring access to economic resources and opportunities for participation at all levels of decision-making processes (UN 2015).

Women play a significant role in global agriculture, particularly in developing countries where they contribute on average 43% of labor; yet, women "lack the resources and opportunities to make the most productive use of their time" (FAO 2011:3). For example, women's involvement in the coffee industry varies considerably by country and across levels of the production chain; however, an ITC report estimates that globally women account for an average of 70% of the workforce involved in field-work, harvesting, and sorting (Scholer 2008). Women's ownership status is even more difficult to determine and again varies by country, but "on average women own around 15% of land, traded produce, and companies related to coffee" within the global industry (Scholer 2008:33). This report suggests that, as in many other agricultural industries, women make substantial contributions in coffee production and sales; yet, they have little control over resources related to production (e.g. land, harvest proceeds) or participation in decision-making processes in coffee companies and organizations. Moreover, these data may in fact underrepresent the disparity between women's work and ownership status as many women and girls "make up a large proportion of 'hidden' [unpaid] and family workers, and consequently are excluded from labor force data" (Fairtrade International 2016:6).

The UN's Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) estimates that if this "gender gap" in agriculture were closed, women "could increase yields on their farm by 20-30%," thereby "increasing agricultural productivity, reducing poverty and hunger, and promoting economic growth" (FAO 2011:3, 5). Furthermore, evidence from around the world consistently shows that closing the "gender gap" enhances women's social and economic power and that "families benefit when women have greater status and power within the household" (FAO 2011:43). Studies indicate that women invest as much as 90% of income they control into their families and communities (versus an average of 35-40% invested by men), significantly contributing to

improved health standards, child nutrition, education, and overall economic growth (UN 2015).

Therefore, women's empowerment in agricultural sectors is critical not only for securing their

equal rights, but also because doing so leads to more stable, prosperous, and sustainable

households and communities (UN 2015).

2.3.c Barriers to Women's Empowerment

Despite the myriad benefits to families, communities, and society as a whole, gender

equality and women's empowerment remain hindered due to cultural norms and adherence to

socially constructed gender roles. The World Bank defines gender roles as "learned behaviors in

a given society, community, or other special group; that condition which activities, tasks, and

responsibilities are perceived as male and female" (Gopal et al. n.d.). Women simultaneously

fulfill "triple gender roles" ("reproductive, productive, and community managing"), often

resulting in competing claims on their time (Gopal et al. n.d.; Moser 1989:1801). In contrast,

men's gender roles can be categorized as "either productive or community politics," which they

carry out "sequentially" (Gopal et al. n.d.). These differences in gender roles can potentially

inhibit women's participation in activities outside the home and limit their decision-making

authority.

Cultural norms and gender roles persist in households, communities, and organizations

and can lead to direct and/or indirect discrimination that restricts women's access to and control

over resources. According to the World Bank, *resources* can be "economic: such as land or

equipment; political: such as representation, leadership, and legal structures; social: such as

childcare, family planning, and education; and also time—a critical but often scarce resource"

(Gopal et al. n.d.). Within this context, *access* refers to "the opportunity to make use of

something," and *control* refers to "the ability to define its use and impose that definition on others" (Gopal et al. n.d.). Denied access to and control over resources in addition to exclusion from decision-making processes represent manifestations of negative "power over." These barriers impede "women's socioeconomic advancement" and their ability to achieve "greater self-reliance and financial independence," thereby diminishing their capacity to exercise individual or collective power and inhibiting the empowerment process (Lyon et al. 2010:99; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116).

Despite Costa Rica's democratic social model, political support for women, and high rates of female enrollment in education, opportunities for women remain limited, and gender inequality persists (Chant 2008; Osborne 2013). For example, according to Costa Rica's National Statistics and Census Institute (INEC), women in the agricultural sector only earned 78.7% of what their male counterparts did in 2004 (Chant 2008). Such disparities can be partially attributed to the expectation that women perform all domestic duties, often resulting in greater involvement in the informal employment sector and less recognition of the value of their work (Chant 2008; Moser 1989). Additionally, *machismo* culture, or a "strong sense of masculine pride," permeates the country, especially rural communities, and is "associated with disempowering or restricting the behaviors of women" (Osborne 2013:268).

The coffee industry in Costa Rica has traditionally been considered the "domain of men," who hold most of the responsibility (and power) in farm management, coffee sales, and control of coffee income while women "provide crucial domestic support through maintenance of home and family" (Sick 1998:193). This gendered division of labor is engrained in Costa Rican coffee culture such that many women "consistently avoid routine agricultural work [in coffee fields]" and view their domestic duties as a "realization of a desired standard of living [that] reflects on

28

the status of the family" (Sick 1998:194). As a consequence of limited labor contributions to production, women typically have less control over resources like land and income (Sick 1998). Gender inequalities go beyond the farm and are evident from the lack of women's participation and representation along the Costa Rican supply chain, from processing facilities to export companies (Lieberman, Wickham and Chilcott 2015). Although some women have adopted different attitudes about coffee fieldwork and a few now hold positions of power and leadership, the Costa Rican coffee industry continues to be dominated by men.

2.4 Certification Schemes and Empowerment:

Certification agencies, such as Fairtrade International, suggest that certification schemes promote women's empowerment. These claims have some support in academic research; however, both agencies and scholars acknowledge certifications' limitations, emphasizing the need to better understand the complexities of "empowerment" within international organizations as well as local communities (Ellery 2009; Kilpatrick and Freund 2014; Lyon et al. 2015; Rice 2010; Ronchi 2002). The aforementioned social and cultural barriers along with inadequacies in certification standards limit women's ability to fully participate in and reap the benefits of certification schemes, thus inhibiting certifications' capacity to create pathways to empowerment (Ellery 2009; Kilpatrick 2015; Lyon et al. 2015). As fair trade is the certification scheme of most interest in this study and the model upon which other certifications have developed, this section first describes fair trade's approach to gender equality and women's empowerment and then discusses two studies that explored the relationship between fair trade certification and women's empowerment in Latin American coffee organizations.

2.4.a Gender and Women's Empowerment in Fair Trade

In order to explore if and how certifications create pathways to women's empowerment,

it is important to first examine how certification agencies approach issues of gender and

empowerment. Fair Trade USA promotes overall "producer empowerment" and includes policies

that prohibit discrimination within certified organizations based on gender, among other things;

yet, it lacks directed goals, objectives, and strategies specifically related to gender and women's

empowerment (Fair Trade USA 2017). Conversely, Fairtrade International names "gender" as

one of five key challenges confronting farmers and workers across all of its certified products,

alongside issues such as climate change and workers' rights (Fairtrade International 2017).

Adopting definitions from the UN, World Bank, and European Commission, Fairtrade

International states:

> "Gender" refers to the socially ascribed characteristics and opportunities associated with
> being a man or a woman, and the relationships between them. In contrast, sex refers to
> the physical characteristics and differences between males and females as determined by
> biology. (Fairtrade International 2016:23)

Again drawing from inter-governmental organizations, the certification agency defines

"empowerment" in the following way:

> "Empowerment" is the process of enhancing the capacity of individuals or groups to
> make choices and to transform them into actions and outcomes. Women's empowerment
> implies an expansion in women's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where
> this ability was denied to them. (Fairtrade International 2016:23)

Within its gender program, Fairtrade International seeks to "tackle unequal power relations,"

"[build] women's and girls' power and autonomy," and "go beyond women's participation in

activities and institutions to challenge accepted gender patterns and structures" (Fairtrade

International 2016). Certification standards aim to prevent gender inequality and discrimination

in FLO-certified organizations with criteria such as zero tolerance for "sexually intimidating,

abusive, or exploitative" behavior; non-discriminatory recruitment and membership guidelines; and setting "maternity leave, social security provisions, and non-mandatory benefits according to national law or according to collective bargaining agreements and regulations where they exist" (Fairtrade International 2016).

Moreover, Fairtrade International is implementing new policies and programs targeted at "closing the gender gap in agriculture" (Fairtrade International 2016:4). In 2015, Fairtrade International hired its first full-time gender expert, and in 2016, it published a revised five-year Gender Strategy in order to "set a clear direction and approach for Fairtrade's global work on gender" (Fairtrade International 2016:4). Specific objectives include "strengthen[ing] the capacity of producer networks and producer organizations to develop and implement gender policies and programs at a local, regional, or national level" and "develop[ing] market and business engagement opportunities and implement[ing] initiatives aimed at enhancing the empowerment of women and girls in value chains" (Fairtrade International 2016:15-16). These objectives are further broken down into "strategic activities" and assigned to "responsible actors" along the fair trade supply chain (Fairtrade International 2016:17). Fairtrade's Gender Strategy appears to be one of the most directed and comprehensive approaches to issues of gender equality and women's empowerment within a certification agency; however, as a relatively new initiative, impacts are thus far unclear. At the time of my field research, there was no mention of this initiative among producers or employees of the FLO-certified cooperative, CoopeAgri, indicating that it had not yet been introduced there.

As noted by researchers and Fairtrade International itself, the certification agency "needs to do more to support women's development and empowerment" and acknowledges that "due its focus on export or 'cash' crops, Fairtrade may even be unintentionally reinforcing existing

gender inequalities in the agricultural sector" (Kilpatrick 2015:29; Fairtrade International 2016:4). In accordance with the body of literature on gender and agriculture, Fairtrade International points out that with most cash crops, such as coffee, "production tends to be male-dominated," while women tend to focus on food crops, and "even though women are often heavily involved in growing, harvesting, and processing, their work is seldom fully recognized and rewarded" (Fairtrade International 2016:6). The certification agency recognizes other challenges to women's empowerment including: "prevailing gender norms" that "present barriers to women's participation;" the effects of "intra-household gender relations on distribution of resources;" standards and requirements that may "increase the workload of women, adding to their already high work burden;" lack of women's representation in leadership and management positions; and the "lack of explicit gender policies and implementation strategies" (Fairtrade International 2016:7). Finally, Fairtrade International underscores women's heterogeneity and the complexity of "women's empowerment," saying:

> Gender is one of several variables that determine power relations and social inequalities, which result from an intricate web of contextual factors such as race, class, religious or ethnic identity, and disability. In addition, social issues encompassed in agricultural value chains differ according to region, country, and local context, and they continue to evolve and become more complex. While Fairtrade's approach focuses mostly on changes in attitudes, practices, and policies in agricultural production and trade, it also necessitates broader transformations in political and social life. (Fairtrade International 2016)

While there are "many examples across the Fairtrade system of good practices adopted in the promotion of gender equality," research exploring the real-world effects on women's empowerment has produced mixed results (Fairtrade International 2016). As with studies on the general impacts of fair trade on producers, this is partly due to variations in context. Nonetheless, these studies, including the two described below, offer more detailed insight into the challenges

and limitations that could be addressed by fair trade certification agencies and examined in research such as my own.

2.4.b Fair Trade/Organic Coffee Organizations in Mexico and Guatemala

In one of the few studies examining coffee certifications' impacts on women, Lyon et al. (2010) investigated the recent increase of women's participation in fair trade/organic-certified producer organizations in Mexico and Guatemala. They found that while certification networks can potentially "remedy widespread and historic exclusions by providing women with information and social contacts," organizational efforts to include women were limited by the perpetuation of biased cultural norms and traditional gender roles (Lyon et al. 2010:99). Fair trade/organic standards did improve women's access to market channels and their participation in community-level production activities, but these benefits did not transfer to other employment options along the supply chain or to leadership opportunities in certified organizations. In addition, some certification requirements inadvertently marginalized women:

1. Attending meetings after dark was problematic for women due to fears of harassment and/or limitations by social customs.

2. Participation in organizational activities and decision-making procedures was difficult for women who had domestic/childcare responsibilities.

3. Spanish-language requirements for proper documentation and inspection routines excluded more women than men, particularly older indigenous women.

In terms of economic earnings, Lyon et al. (2010) found that certification schemes benefited women when conventional markets paid women less than men and when women obtained farm operator status. Researchers concluded that participation in certification networks

"can provide relative benefits to women" through "increased access to cash" and "greater control over farm practices," which contribute to increased generative power (Lyon et al. 2010:93,102). Nevertheless, researchers expressed uncertainty about the true long-term effects of women's participation in certification schemes, stating that benefits or limitations depend on the program's compatibility with local social and economic practices. Lyon et al. (2010) emphasize the need to further assess potential contradictory effects of fair trade/organic certification schemes for women.

2.4.c Fair Trade in an All-Women's Coffee Organization in Peru

In her master's thesis, Ellery (2009) investigated the relationship between fair trade certification and women's empowerment in an all-women's coffee cooperative in Peru. Ellery, like other researchers reviewed here, concluded that fair-trade certification's contributions to empowerment are indirect. She instead found the main factors promoting women's empowerment in this cooperative to be "a unique combination of strong and creative leadership, support from external agents, support from the general community, and the fact that women are collectively organized," none of which are directly related to the fair trade certification (Ellery 2009:129). Using an empowerment framework similar to Rowlands', Ellery identified empirical evidence of women's experiences of empowerment due to their involvement in an all-women's cooperative including: awareness of *machismo* attitudes; greater understanding of their rights and status as women ("power within"); collective mobilization ("power with"); and increased access to resources and information and more decision-making power ("power to").

Furthermore, Ellery suggests more research in the areas of women-only groups and the role of men in women's empowerment. She reflects on the debate between creating separate women-only groups and integrating women into mixed-gender settings (Ellery 2009:59-60):

> Research suggests that women experience a variety of barriers…as well as oppression from male participants that limit their access to development programs. However, participation can also be limited in women-only programs in situations where the women experience opposition from their husbands and/or require their husbands' consent. Clearly there are limitations to both approaches, each of which can be more or less of an issue depending on the specific context of the situation…The key difference in outcomes between each of these strategies is related to the control that is exercised over resources. The literature indicates that women-only groups acquire resources as a collective group, which allows them to manage and control them...Mixed-gender programs, however, may give women easier access to resources normally controlled by men, but it will likely be more difficult for the women to achieve control over those resources.

Indeed, other scholars have examined the effectiveness of women-only versus mixed-gender initiatives in addressing women's needs and concerns. For example, after considering opposing arguments, Mead (2007:48-49) asserts that based on her research on nonprofit programs in Boston, women-only programs "can offer some advantages that universal programs…cannot," such as "avoiding feeling like the 'other'," "feeling safe and being safe," and "women and girls [being] in charge." However, despite the success of some women-only initiatives, particularly those that "eventually become situated in mainstream institutions," they have also been noted for "having small budgets and being given low priority by governments" as well as focusing on "traditional domestic activities" (Peña, Webb, and Haddad 1996:8-10).

Amidst ongoing debates about the efficacy of "separate[ing] women into women-only initiatives or integrat[ing] into male-dominated or mixed-gender strategies" with regards to enhancing women's empowerment, Ellery (2009:139) argues for greater consideration of "interventions that will garner the support of men." Due to gender roles and "different socialization of women and girls" compared to men and boys, women and girls experience the

impacts of "public problems" as well as proposed solutions and available opportunities differently; these differences must be taken into account and addressed in mixed-gender initiatives (Mead 2007:46). Furthermore, as mentioned above, men can influence women's participation in women-only programs depending on household level circumstances. Ellery (2009:143) calls for an additional component within the empowerment framework known as "the role of men" to encourage researchers to examine this dynamic more closely.

2.5 Justification:

The main conclusions of these studies are consistent with other studies that highlight the complexities of determining pathways to women's empowerment and reinforce that local social, political, and economic factors play an important role in the empowerment process (Khumalo et al. 2015; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015). Moreover, although some certification schemes have made women's empowerment a priority, knowledge and understanding of certification schemes' capacity to influence social and economic conditions for women and contribute to empowerment remain limited (Bacon 2010; Ellery 2009; Fairtrade International 2016; Lyon et al. 2010; Rice 2010). Empowerment "cannot be bestowed," and thus it is crucial to understand its complexities from the perspectives of "those who would become empowered (Mosedale 2005:244). To address the gap in knowledge and add to the growing body of literature examining the relationship between certification schemes and women's empowerment in the coffee industry, my research consists of an in-depth case study comparing two coffee organizations in southern Costa Rica, CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI. The following section describes my study sites and discusses the qualitative methods I employed in my research.

III. Study Sites: Two Coffee Organizations in Costa Rica's Brunca Region

This research consists of a comparative case-study in order to obtain rich, detailed, and contextual data regarding women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry and their perspectives on certification schemes and empowerment. Through my connections with the AMCCR, I first spent five weeks traveling to different coffee-producing regions (Brunca, Orosi, Tarrazú, and Valle Central Occidental) to gain a broad understanding of the coffee industry, women's roles in coffee communities, and the function of certification schemes in Costa Rican coffee organizations [Figure 1]. In addition to personal observations, I conducted pilot interviews in each region, and in doing so, identified CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI as appropriate study sites.

As described below, the decision to focus on CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI was made to enable a comparison between a large, mixed-gender, fair trade-certified cooperative (CoopeAgri) and a small, all-women's, non-fair trade-certified association (ASOMOBI). Although these two organizations are located in different provinces (San José and Puntarenas, respectively), both are in the Brunca coffee region, and share similar climatic and topographic conditions that influence coffee production and produce bean characteristics unique to southern Costa Rica [Figure 1]. Furthermore, as the youngest coffee-producing region, the Brunca is populated mostly by first, second, and third-generation migrants, bringing what Sick (1993:174) calls a "frontier atmosphere" to the region. Coffee production in the Brunca is dominated by small-scale family farms; large plantations are even scarcer here than in the rest of Costa Rica. Thus, in addition to similar environmental conditions, people in the Brunca share a relatively recent pioneer history and a proud *campesino*[3] identity.

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[3] "*Campesino*" roughly translates as "farmer" [noun] or "rural" [adjective], but also carries a more nuanced cultural significance difficult to directly translate into English.

3.1 CoopeAgri:

CoopeAgri was founded in 1962 to overcome production and marketing challenges of small-scale coffee producers in *Cantón* Pérez Zeledón (PZ) [Figure 2] (CoopeAgri 2016). Over the past five decades, CoopeAgri has grown from 391 associates and one small *beneficio* (coffee processing facility) to over 8,500 associates, of which about 7,500 are coffee producers, and a diverse range of commercial activities (CoopeAgri 2016). In addition to two large *beneficios* where coffee is processed for export as green beans as well as roasted and packaged for domestic sales, CoopeAgri produces and markets other agricultural products such as sugarcane, organic manure, and most recently, cacao and plantains from experimental plots (Fairtrade Foundation 2016; Calderón 2016). CoopeAgri also owns and operates supermarkets, equipment supply warehouses, hardware stores, and a gas station. With its headquarters in San Isidro de El General, the most populous city in the Brunca region and the capital of *Cantón* PZ, CoopeAgri has become one of the largest and most well-known cooperatives in Costa Rica, reaching about "35,000 farmers, workers, and their family members" (Fairtrade Foundation 2016).

I chose CoopeAgri as one of my focal organizations due to both its fair trade certification and its women's committee, the Comité de Desarrollo de la Familia (Family Development Committee), or CDF. CoopeAgri has been fair trade-certified for sugarcane since 1998 and for coffee since 2004 under the Fairtrade International[4] certification scheme, referred to henceforth as "Fairtrade" or "FLO" (Calderón 2016). All of CoopeAgri's associates are certified under the cooperative, meaning that 100% of the sugarcane and coffee produced is FLO-certified. In

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[4]CoopeAgri was certified under Fairtrade International (FLO) before Transfair USA (now Fair Trade USA) split from this group in 2012. Fair Trade USA is not a recognized certification label among international fair trade groups, and Fair Trade USA-certified products cannot be sold as FLO-certified. However, CoopeAgri can sell FLO-certified coffee to U.S. markets via initiatives recognized by FLO-CERT, such as Fairtrade America. When CoopeAgri participants speak of fair trade, they are referring to the Fairtrade International (FLO) certification.

addition to Fairtrade, CoopeAgri helps associates interested in producing organic coffee pursue this certification and is in the process of obtaining the national label, *Esencial Costa Rica*, for its domestic coffee brands (Calderón 2016).

CoopeAgri is the only cooperative in Costa Rica to have a committee specifically for women, the CDF. In CoopeAgri's early days, the wives of male cooperative leaders formed the Committee of Women, which developed into the CDF around 1980, as a way to more actively involve women. Women currently comprise about 43% of the cooperative's associates and hold roughly 200 of the 800 permanent and temporary job positions within CoopeAgri (Calderón 2016). Though men still dominate most high-level positions, women occupy a few key leadership roles, including secretary of the seven-member Board of Directors. Thus, CoopeAgri provides an opportunity to explore women's experiences and perspectives on certifications and empowerment within the context of a large, mixed-gender cooperative that has both a fair trade certification and a distinctive women's committee.

3.2 ASOMOBI (*Asociación de Mujeres Organizadas de Biolley*):

ASOMOBI, or the Association of Organized Women of Biolley, was founded in the late 1990s by a small group of women seeking to improve the lives of their families and community in a remote area of southern Costa Rica [Figure 2] (ASOMOBI 2016). ASOMOBI has since expanded from 19 founders to 37 members. Beginning with a small, rustic processing and roasting facility, ASOMOBI now consists of a modern micro-*beneficio*, a roasting and packaging facility, and a tourism lodge complete with bunkrooms, a communal kitchen, and meeting spaces. Aside from coffee, ASOMOBI supports its members in other income-generating

activities including eco-tourism, handicrafts, honey, and most recently, a wine making project.

ASOMOBI's facilities are located in Biolley, a small, rural community situated near the border

of the *Parque Internacional La Amistad* (International Friendship Park), or PILA, Costa Rica's

largest national park and a UNESCO World Heritage Site jointly managed by Costa Rica and

Panama (ASOMOBI 2016).

I selected ASOMOBI as my second focal organization for two reasons: first, it does not

have a fair trade certification, and second, it is recognized on the national and international level

as one of the most successful women's organizations in Costa Rica (Lieberman et al. 2015).

ASOMOBI carries national certifications of sustainability for both coffee production (BAE) and

tourism (CST), but its lack of fair trade certification allows for a comparison with the views of

CoopeAgri's FLO-certified female associates. Moreover, ASOMOBI's members are interested

in the possibility of obtaining internationally recognized certifications, particularly fair trade,

adding valuable insight into women's motivations for and concerns about pursuing such

certifications. Lastly, ASOMOBI is a small association founded and led by women, enabling

exploration of if and how women experience empowerment within an all-women's organization

compared to the mixed-gender setting of CoopeAgri.

In summary, the two organizations are united by the geography, environment, and culture

of the Brunca region, but have different management and certification histories. Analyzing the

experiences and perspectives of women in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI sheds light on their

perceived and actualized benefits and challenges regarding certifications, particularly fair trade.

Furthermore, focusing on CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI allows for a comparison of the roles of

different types of organizations in women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

Figure 1. Costa Rica's Coffee Producing Regions and Study Site Locations

Base map source: Café Imports. 2015. Retrieved October 13, 2015, from www.cafeimports.com/blog/
Modified October 23, 2017, to reflect study site locations

Figure 2. Detailed Study Site Locations within the Brunca Region

CoopeAgri's headquarters are located in San Isidro de El General (blue marker), the capital city of *Cantón* Pérez Zeledón (outlined in bold white), within the San José province. CoopeAgri's associates live throughout the *cantón*.

ASOMOBI is located in the town of Biolley (red marker) in *Cantón* Buenos Aires within the Puntarenas province. ASOMOBI's members live in and around Biolley.

IV. Methods: A Qualitative Approach

I employed qualitative research methods, including participant observation (PO), semi-structured interviews (SSIs), and document analysis. Unlike quantitative research that seeks "causal determination, prediction, and generalization of findings," qualitative research aims to "understand phenomena in context-specific settings" and extrapolate findings to "similar situations" (Golafshani 2003:600). My chosen methods provide flexibility to delve into the topics of most interest to participants and to obtain detailed, contextual data from interviews as well as personal experiences (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). Qualitative methods may facilitate a deeper understanding of women's "lived experiences" and illuminate women's voices, which have been largely overlooked within the coffee industry and in discussions of certification schemes (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:279; Longhurst 2010; Rogers and Way 2015). This approach enables an in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on certification schemes and the role of the two different organizations in participants' lives.

4.1 Participant Observation (PO):

Participant observation involves "spending time being, living, or working with people or communities in order to understand them" and was a valuable means of gathering both preliminary data that informed site selection and ongoing data from personal involvement with each organization (Laurier 2010:116). Throughout field research, I kept detailed notes and made daily reflections on my experiences for later use in data analysis. Field research took place between September-December, 2016, and February-March, 2017, allowing me to witness and

participate in multiple stages of the coffee harvest and processing season. I spent two days picking coffee with one of my host families in *Cantón* PZ, and also helped women in ASOMOBI with hand-sorting coffee beans for quality and packaging roasted coffee for delivery to buyers. Throughout my travels, I observed various methods and scales of coffee processing, ranging from large, industrial *beneficios* and mechanized drying, roasting, and packaging facilities to micro-*beneficios* and household-level processing operations. My experiences harvesting, processing, and packaging coffee not only contributed to my own reflections on the strategies and challenges of working in the coffee industry, but also strengthened my relationships with the women around me through shared labor and informal conversations.

Furthermore, I attended meetings and social gatherings with women in the CDF and ASOMOBI, gaining insight into the logistical and interpersonal dynamics of each group. For example, I was invited to join CDF coordinators on a *paseo*, or leisure outing, attended one of their trainings, and accompanied committee leaders to a CDF-sponsored community program. Additionally, my host family took me to numerous cultural events that celebrated the *campesino* traditions of *Cantón* PZ. At ASOMOBI, I sat in on meetings with the board and the production committee. I attended a training session on making *flor de Jamaica* (hibiscus) wine, a project one of the members has recently undertaken, and helped prepare an experimental batch. In my capacity as a volunteer, I researched and presented an overview of various international certification schemes, including fair trade, to ASOMOBI's leaders who wanted to know how requirements and potential benefits would apply should they choose to pursue these schemes. This experience revealed to me the complicated process of certification for producers and small organizations and contributed valuable insight into the barriers and challenges of international

certification schemes. Finally, as in *Cantón* PZ, I was invited to participate in social events, including weekend outings and hikes to areas that are part of ASOMOBI's tourism projects.

During both preliminary travels to the different coffee regions and time spent at CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI, I shared in the routines of daily life with numerous women and their families who opened their homes to me. The majority of these families were identified through contacts in the AMCCR or, in the case of ASOMOBI, selected by the organization's members as willing and able to host a visitor. Many families had experience in hosting foreigners, though not necessarily a researcher. At CoopeAgri, I lived with one the CDF leaders, and also had brief stays with three other female associates (a board member, another CDF leader, and a woman I met by chance in the headquarters lobby). These three women live in different communities than my main host family and were able to introduce me to additional interview participants I may not have otherwise met. During my first visit to Biolley, I stayed with one of ASOMOBI's founders who has connections to the AMCCR. For my second, more extended visit, ASOMOBI's members decided I would stay with another founder based on a raffle system that they use to place volunteers and visitors in homestays. In addition to time spent harvesting and processing coffee and attending meetings and social gatherings, these homestays allowed me to develop deeper relationships with women from each organization. Therefore, PO not only contributed data from personal experiences, but also helped me identify and connect with interview participants, possibly resulting in more open interviews.

Although PO was an important method of data collection throughout fieldwork, there are some limitations. First, my ability to attend events and participate in activities was largely determined by where, when, and with whom I was living, making "broad coverage" difficult, especially as a single researcher, and creating potential biases in the events and activities to

which I had access (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:257). Second, my presence as a researcher in meetings, at social events, and in women's homes may have influenced participants' behavior in unpredictable ways (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). Lastly, all of these experiences were interpreted through my perspective as the researcher, which brings potential biases from my personal views, values, and attitudes. Nonetheless, PO added insight into women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry, their involvement in their organizations and communities, and their relationships with their families and fellow organization members, generating data that could not have been gained through other methods.

4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews (SSIs):

The flexible and open-ended nature of SSIs allows for in-depth exploration of women's experiences and perspectives within their respective organizations (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011; Longhurst 2010). SSIs facilitate obtaining factual and descriptive data on participants' backgrounds and coffee production, as well as their feelings and opinions on the benefits and challenges of certifications and their involvement in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI (Krannich and Humphrey 1986). I developed an interview guide to ensure that specific topics were covered with all participants, but open-ended questions enabled conversations to explore what was most important to each participant (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

Interview participants were selected via chain referral: initial contacts in the AMCCR connected me with affiliated individuals in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI who agreed to be interviewed and also introduced me to other potential interview participants in each organization. Due to logistical constraints, participants were selected through convenience sampling, such that

I interviewed the most available and accessible women (Rice 2003). This sampling method resulted in the majority of participants being representative of more active and more informed members rather than a random sample of all female organization members. While a non-random and small sample makes it impossible to draw "statistically rigorous" generalizations, it is appropriate within a case study for "understanding patterns in *how* women *experience*" life in the Costa Rican coffee industry and the meanings they attribute to certification schemes and empowerment (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:45; Rice 2003:232).

The total number of interview participants in this study is 26: 16 female associates of CoopeAgri and 10 members of ASOMOBI. Women from CoopeAgri self-identify as *asociadas* of the cooperative, so the English translation "associates" is used to refer to participants from CoopeAgri. Likewise, women from ASOMOBI call themselves *socias*, which can mean either "members" or "partners;" a founder confirmed that "members" is the most appropriate translation. Nineteen participants, 15 from CoopeAgri and 4 from ASOMOBI, currently have land in coffee production. For reasons discussed below, one participant from CoopeAgri and three from ASOMOBI cut their coffee plants and are not currently producing. However, the woman from CoopeAgri remains an honorary associate, and all three from ASOMOBI are employed there and/or serve on committees. One of the women from ASOMOBI hopes her family will replant with new coffee varieties this year. The three remaining participants from ASOMOBI never had land in coffee production, but either worked as hired labor on coffee farms or grew up in a family that produced coffee. All three have been intimately involved with ASOMOBI from the beginning (one is a founder, two are daughters of founders) and are currently employed by and/or serve on committees within ASOMOBI. Therefore, every participant is directly involved in the coffee industry through membership in her organization.

My interview guide was informed by a similar study of women, coffee certifications, and empowerment in a Peruvian cooperative (Ellery 2009). I began by conducting pilot interviews during the first five weeks of travel, which aided in gathering preliminary information, selecting study sites, and enhancing my general understanding of the Costa Rican coffee industry. With the exception of information provided by key informants in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI, data from pilot interviews is not included in the results of this study because these interviews were not as detailed or robust as later interviews and did not address all of the main topics of interest. Rather, pilot interviews helped me refine the interview guide to reflect relevant topics and adjust for local terms and understandings of concepts within these coffee communities. The final interview guide included: general questions regarding personal and family background, household structure, coffee production, and other livelihood strategies; each participant's involvement with her respective organization; thoughts and feelings regarding empowerment; and opinions regarding the benefits and challenges of coffee certification schemes [Appendices A and B]. Though every interview touched on these same broad topics, individual questions were modified as needed to fit each interview. For example, some interviews included additional questions if a participant held a certain role within her organization.

In October 2016, I conducted pilot interviews with 10 female associates of CoopeAgri, three of whom are leaders in the cooperative and the CDF. These three women, along with one male cooperative employee, served as key informants based on their knowledge of CoopeAgri, the CDF, and certification schemes (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). I returned to CoopeAgri in November, conducted follow-up interviews with the three female key informants, and interviewed 13 additional female associates. These 16 interviews, along with relevant information from initial key informant interviews, constitute the SSI data analyzed from

CoopeAgri. Five participants are neighbors of key informants and are not involved in the CDF; six are CDF coordinators for their own communities (out of 21 community coordinators total). I met another associate by chance at CoopeAgri's headquarters; she agreed to be interviewed and also introduced me to one more female associate in her community. These two women have no direct connection to the CDF. Interviews ranged from 11-70 minutes. These 16 interview participants represent eight communities and five of the eleven districts within *Cantón* PZ.

In September 2016, I conducted pilot interviews with five members of ASOMOBI, three of whom also served as key informants due to their roles within the organization. I returned to volunteer with ASOMOBI in February 2017, and conducted interviews with seven more members in addition to follow-up interviews with the three key informants. These 10 interviews and relevant information from initial key informant interviews comprise the SSI data analyzed from ASOMOBI. Three participants are founders, three are currently employed full-time, two work part-time or seasonally, eight serve on the board or in other committees (unpaid positions), and all 10 regularly volunteer their time with ASOMOBI. Interviews ranged from 40-80 minutes. Nine participants live in the village of Biolley within walking distance of ASOMOBI; the remaining participant does not live within walking distance, but is a full-time employee. Thus, all participants have regular and easy access to ASOMOBI and are consequently more involved than other members who live farther away and are not regularly employed there.

I conducted interviews in Spanish and audio-recorded all interviews with the verbal consent of each participant. I am proficient in Spanish; however, since it is my second language, recording interviews helped me focus fully on the conversation without the distraction of note taking and aided in later translation, transcription, and analysis. Immediately following each interview, I took notes on the time, location, and other pertinent details such as how I was

introduced to the participant and whether or not anyone else was present in the interview setting. While I strove to keep interviews as private as possible to reduce factors that could influence a participant's responses, circumstances did not always allow for this. Notes on interviews accompanied my reflections from participant observation to supplement interview data.

I transcribed the majority of interviews verbatim into Spanish and then translated relevant sections into English. This proved to be extremely time-consuming; so, later interviews were translated and transcribed simultaneously into English. All recordings were saved for reference throughout analysis, but deleted at the conclusion of the project to protect participant anonymity. Data presented as direct quotations reflect my interpretation of participants' responses such that word-for-word translation from Spanish has been modified to make sense in colloquial English. Ellipses are used to indicate when quotes have been condensed to improve sentence flow. To protect participants' anonymity, each interview has been assigned a code indicating the study site and participant number. For example, PZ1 indicates participant number 1 from CoopeAgri (Pérez Zeledón), and BIO1 indicates participant number 1 from ASOMOBI (Biolley). When necessary and with participants' permission, I disclose their positions within their respective organization.

There are some limitations with the use of semi-structured interviews that warrant consideration. There exists potential bias because questions were formulated and responses were interpreted from my position as a foreign researcher; therefore, my personal views, values, and attitudes inevitably affected which questions were asked, how they were asked, and how data was analyzed. Another source of bias in interviews can come from "poorly articulated questions," which is of particular concern working in a second language (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:257). Measures to reduce the influence of these biases included conducting pilot interviews

to help modify interview guides (i.e. question addition/elimination, order, phrasing, vocabulary) and asking follow-up questions to clear up areas of confusion during interviews. A final possible limitation of interviews is misinterpretation from "poor recall" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:257). The use of an audio-recorder helped reduce this risk by providing direct reference to participants' responses throughout analysis; however, the presence of a recorder may have made some participants uncomfortable and less willing to openly share their experiences and opinions.

4.3 Document Analysis:

To supplement data from PO and SSIs, I analyzed documents pertaining to each organization. I translated and took notes on relevant sections of CoopeAgri's website and its 2015 Annual Report. Additionally, I reviewed ASOMOBI's promotional materials as well as a documentary centering on the organization, *A Small Section of the World* (Lieberman et al. 2015). While information from these sources augmented and reinforced SSI and PO data, limitations of document analysis include biases of these documents' creators, as well as the inability to ask follow-up questions or clarify information with the authors and filmmakers (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011).

4.4 Data Analysis:

Analysis was an iterative process that accompanied data collection and continued after fieldwork was completed. For example, pilot interviews provided a basic understanding of how each organization functions and the role of certification schemes, which aided in developing

interview guides. Similarly, my reflections from participant observation helped to develop more specific interview questions to elicit detailed insight. I began transcribing interviews while still in the field, and could therefore bring up additional questions in later interviews, seek clarification in informal conversations, and make note of what to pay particular attention to during ongoing participant observation. While the small, non-random sample precludes statistical analysis, descriptive information regarding age, level of education, marital status, and land ownership status were compiled to reflect the demographics of interview participants and contribute to a better understanding of the context in which these women live and work.

Following data collection, I began analysis with open coding to identify categories within the data (Cope 2003). I then selectively coded and organized data into "core themes," some of which were predetermined by Rowlands' empowerment framework while others emerged from the data (Cope 2003:452). For example, a sense of self-confidence is an indicator of "power within;" therefore, I coded data that reflected women's feelings of self-confidence accordingly (Ellery 2009; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015; Rowlands 1995). Other themes, such as specific benefits and challenges of certification schemes, were not preconceived, but rather were generated from the data. Lastly, I employed focused coding to build analytical categories from topical categories (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011). For example, some of the challenges women explicitly discussed represent implicit forms of men's "power over" women.

4.5 Establishing Credibility:

Credibility can be established in qualitative research via triangulation of methods, which involves using multiple methods to "get at the same research questions and [look] for

convergence in research findings" (Ellery 2009; Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:51). The use of PO, SSIs, and document analysis allowed me to cross-examine findings. For example, I was able to clarify my interpretation of what happened in meetings through additional interview questions and informal conversations, and confirm and augment factual responses from interviews (e.g. organization history) with data from documents. Additionally, because qualitative research aims to illuminate multiple truths, utilizing different methods enhanced my ability to obtain a variety of perspectives. Data gained through informal conversations and personal experiences revealed insights that would have been impossible to achieve through interviews alone. Probing and follow-up questions in interviews helped to elicit more detailed and in-depth responses and discuss the meanings and understandings of key terms and concepts with individual participants. For example, pilot interviews and informal conversations were necessary to determine that asking "*En su opinion, qué significa 'estar empoderada'*?" ("In your opinion, what does it mean 'to be empowered'?") was the best way to get at what "empowerment" means to participants[5]. Though results of case studies are not generalizable, noting similarities among findings can attest to "transferability" of "conclusions from one case to another based on fittingness," or the "'similarity between…contexts'" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:262).

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[5] As with the English "empowerment," "*empoderada*" is derived from the root word for power, "*poder*."

V. Results and Discussion

5.1 Women's Experiences in the Costa Rican Coffee Industry:

This section addresses the first part of Research Question #1: What are women's experiences in the Costa Rican coffee industry? Answering this question serves to illuminate women's voices, understand the contexts in which participants live and work, and examine how their varied backgrounds and experiences influence components of the empowerment process. I begin by outlining participants' backgrounds, including details on age, level of education, marital status, and land ownership status, and then consider how these factors relate to empowerment. Next, I describe the challenges participants face in the coffee industry in general and as women, and discuss how these challenges, particularly gender roles and cultural norms, represent manifestations of negative "power over" women in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

5.1.a. Participants' Backgrounds

Participants represent a range of ages, levels of education, marital statuses, and land ownership statuses. Participants from CoopeAgri range in age from 30s-70s, with almost two thirds in their 40s and 50s. Participants from ASOMOBI range from 20s-70s, with half in their 40s and 50s [Figure 3]. The majority of participants from CoopeAgri (14 out of 16) finished primary school (6 years, compulsory); of these, one completed two years of high school and one earned her high school diploma (5-6 years beyond primary). All 10 participants from ASOMOBI finished primary school; six completed high school, and of these, five went on to university, and two earned a degree [Figure 4]. No one in their 60s or 70s has studied beyond primary school,

and those who attended university are in their 20s-40s. Differences in levels of education across age groups may be partially attributed to relatively recent government policies that make higher education more accessible through scholarships and distance learning. Rural families especially are investing more in their children's education since increasing land scarcity makes it unlikely that they will be able to provide them with adequate inheritances in adulthood (Sick 1997). As Costa Rica's economy shifts away from small-scale agriculture towards technology and service-based industries, higher education is often viewed as necessary for a well-paying job.

Figure 3.

Age Range of Participants

CoopeAgri (Total: 16)
ASOMOBI (Total: 10)

X-axis: Age Range (20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, 60s, 70s)
Y-axis: Number of Participants (Total: 26)

Figure 4.

Highest Level of Education of Participants

CoopeAgri (Total: 16)
ASOMOBI (Total: 10)

X-axis: Level of Education Completed (Some Primary, Finished Primary, Some High School, Finished High School, Some University, Finished University)
Y-axis: Number of Participants (Total: 26)

Participants also represent diverse household structures. Of the 16 participants from CoopeAgri, 13 are married, two are divorced, and one is widowed. Of the 10 participants from ASOMOBI, four are married, four are divorced, and two are single [Figure 5]. With the exception of one young woman from ASOMOBI, all participants have children (range = 1 – 8 children; average = 3 children). Many families live with or near parents and/or adult children, highlighting the cultural importance of close family ties, particularly in rural communities. In cases where children have moved away, the most common reason given among participants was that they left the countryside for education and employment opportunities in cities or abroad. Migration, especially of young people, appears to be an ongoing trend among Costa Rican coffee-producing households to "alleviate pressures on household resources and provide additional income" (Sick1997:269).

Figure 5.

Marital Status of Participants (Total: 26)

- Married: 17 (13 CoopeAgri; 4 ASOMOBI)
- Divorced: 6 (2 CoopeAgri; 4 ASOMOBI)
- Single: 2 (ASOMOBI)
- Widowed: 1 (CoopeAgri)
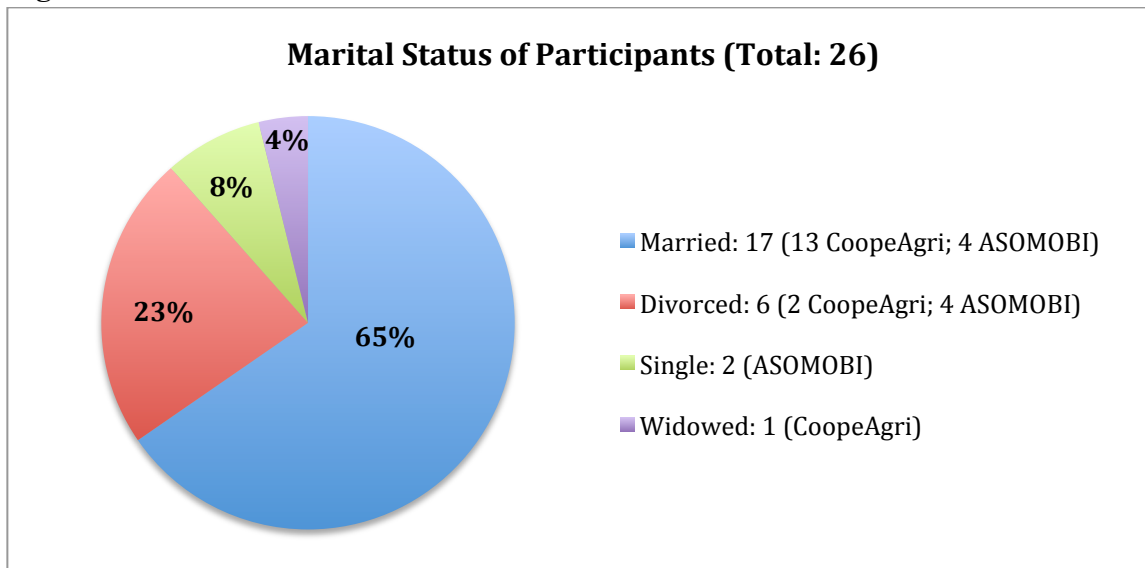
The Brunca has always been a region dominated by small-scale producers with ≤5ha. Average farm size among participants who have (19) or had (4) land in coffee production is 2.35ha, with 12 farms being 1ha or less, and eight being between 1.1-5ha. Three participants,

two from CoopeAgri and one from ASOMOBI, have medium-scale farms between 7-10 ha

[Figure 6]. Two participants from CoopeAgri own their land (both inherited), four have partial

ownership (mix of inheritances and purchases), and 10 do not have any land ownership status.

Three participants from ASOMOBI own their land (one inherited, two purchased) and seven do

not [Figure 7]. Four of the 17 non-landowners used to own part or all of their land, but have

transferred it to their children via inheritances. In summary, within my sample of 26 women,

34% own land (19% fully, 15% partially) and 66% have no land ownership status. Typically, the

land belongs instead to a male relative (e.g. husband, father, son, brother), though two women

transferred land to both daughters and sons. This finding of unequal land ownership status

between men and women is consistent with other studies in Costa Rica and throughout Latin

America (Ellery 2009; Lyon et al. 2010; Sick 1998).

Women described partial ownership status in various ways. According to one woman, she

has "a part in [her] name and [her] husband has another," further explaining that one part is her

husband's inheritance and the other they bought (PZ16). In this instance, it appears that she and

her husband purchased the land together, but that this is the "part in [her] name" (PZ16). Another

participant explained that she and her husband each have inheritances from their families, and

that they, too, "bought a little piece to make it bigger"; however, it is unclear under whose name

this additional land was purchased (PZ2). A third woman, when asked who owns the land, said,

"One part is mine, the other part my husband's" (PZ14). When later asked how the land was

acquired, she stated, "I got the land when I married because the land was my husband's" (PZ14).

To clarify, I asked if she also has an inheritance, and she explained: "I have a small plot that's

mine, an inheritance from my dad, but the majority of the land we have is the inheritance of my

husband" (PZ14). A final participant explained, "The owner of the tiny lot where we live is me,

and my husband has a tiny piece, they're inheritances" (PZ10). She implied that her husband owns the land where the coffee is grown, but when questioned further, she indicated that the coffee itself is considered to be "for everyone in the house, for all the expenses of the house" (PZ10).

This final response highlights the nuanced nature of land ownership, ownership of coffee produced on the land, and control over harvest income. Land ownership is not a requirement to be an associate of CoopeAgri. To belong to the cooperative, an individual must turn in a minimum of 10ff of coffee per year under his or her name and pay a small membership fee, which is returned after a certain number of years and is regarded as a savings investment (PZ14; PZ16). Multiple members of a household can turn in a portion of their family's coffee and thereby be associates of the cooperative. As discussed at greater length below, many participants in this study "own" coffee "on paper" in order to belong to CoopeAgri and have access to cooperative benefits. The details of control over farm management and income from coffee are complex and vary by household. ASOMOBI has no land ownership or harvest requirements for membership. Women instead bring two letters of recommendation, pay an initial membership fee that can be paid over the course of two years and/or offset by volunteer work, and pay a small annual fee for continued membership (BIO5; BIO9).

Participants also vary in how long they have been part of their respective organizations. CoopeAgri participants range from 5 – 30+ years in the cooperative. Nearly all said that they have family members who were or are associates (e.g. husband, parents) and that this influenced their decision to join. Three participants from ASOMOBI founded the organization 20 years ago, and the others have been members between 6 – 19 years. Five participants are relatives of the founders and two had friends in ASOMOBI who encouraged them to become members.

Figure 6. [6]

Land in Coffee Production in Hectares (ha)

- CoopeAgri (Total: 16)
- ASOMOBI (Total: 7)

Number of Participants (Total: 23)

Small-Scale (≤5ha)

Medium-Scale (5.1-20ha)

Farm Size (ha)

Figure 7.

Land Ownership Status of Participants (Total: 26)

- Owns Land: 5 (2 CoopeAgri; 3 ASOMOBI)
- Partial Ownership: 4 (CoopeAgri)
- Does Not Own Land: 17 (10 CoopeAgri; 7 ASOMOBI)

19%
15%
66%

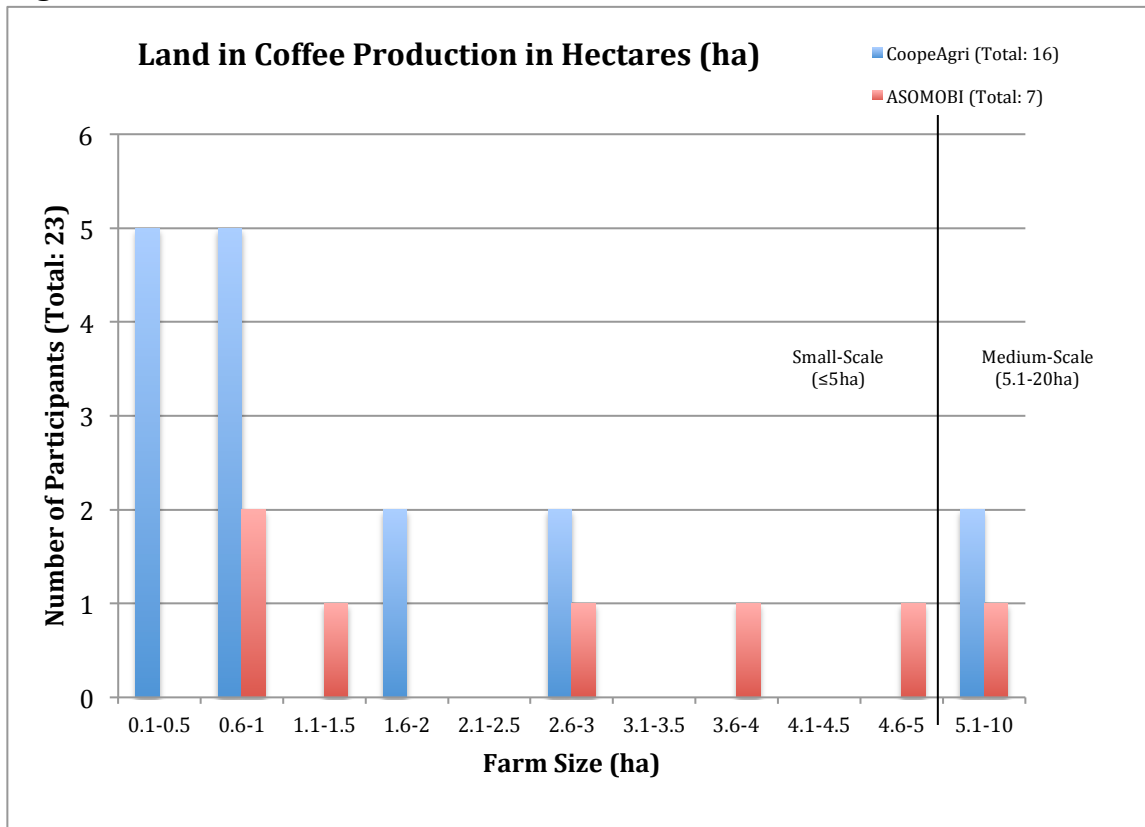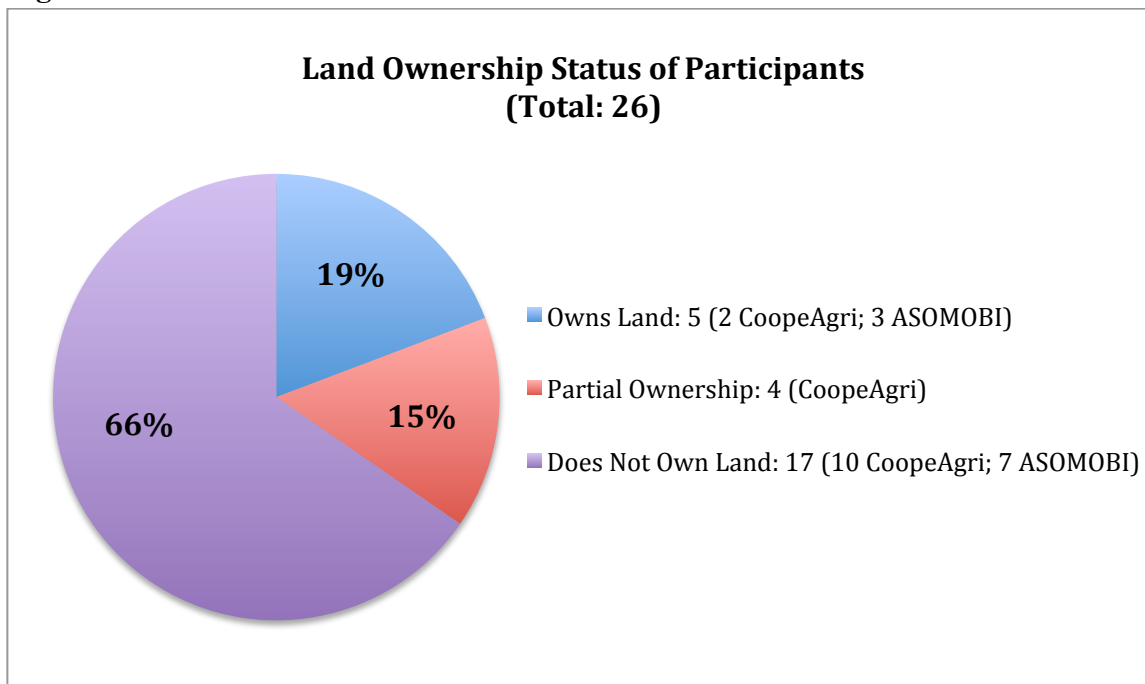[6]Farm scales defined by ICAFE 2016: Small-scale = ≤5ha; medium-scale = 5.1-20ha; large-scale = >20ha

5.1.b. Discussion of Participants' Backgrounds and Empowerment

Participants vary in age, level of education, marital status, and land ownership status. Though the small and non-random sample precludes statistical analysis, these variations are important to bear in mind when examining women's empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry. For example, the range in age and level of education sheds light on how *machismo* culture and other restrictive social norms are slowly but surely changing. Younger women are more educated, and having a career and earning an income outside the home is more accessible and acceptable for them than it was for older generations. Education and paid employment bring myriad benefits and opportunities that increase individuals' generative power by facilitating greater self-reliance and autonomy. Although stigmas surrounding single and divorced women linger in Costa Rican culture where adherence to gender roles within a traditional family structure reflects "status and respectability," it appears to be more common and accepted among younger generations to live independently from a man (Osborne 2013:267).

Participants' desire and decision to seek out these alternative "ways of being" suggests not only increased awareness of and ability to make choices, but perhaps also increased self-confidence and courage to do so, reflecting their personal power (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). As she explained in a speech at the Rural Women's Day celebration, the participant from CoopeAgri who earned her high school diploma did so against her family's wishes because she was self-motivated and determined to elevate herself and have access to more employment opportunities (PZ16). This woman is now the cooperative's first and only female board member. Women from ASOMOBI have enrolled in English, business management, and other education courses, acquiring skills that one participant stated she would never have dreamed of accomplishing 25 years ago (BIO5). Another woman, who claimed she did not finish her studies

partially due to constant negative comments and "psychological manipulation" from her now ex-husband, emphasized that one of her main goals is to return to school (BIO2).

Land ownership remains male-dominated, and, contrary to Costa Rican law, inheritance patterns seem to favor sons (Sick 1998). Women's lack of access to and control over land usually extends to denied control over coffee management and sales as well as "harvest-generated income," representing a manifestation of men's power over women at the household and farm level (IWCA 2013:13). Nonetheless, as evidenced in this study and others, some Costa Rican women do inherit and maintain legal control of land, and/or purchase land with their own money. Sick (1998:209, 203) found that land ownership "strengthen[s] one's position within the household" and that women in Costa Rican coffee communities "who bring land into their conjugal households have considerably more decision-making power regarding both production and consumption than do their landless counterparts." In this way, land ownership can increase women's "power to" make decisions regarding the management of land and related resources (e.g. harvest incomes).

Awareness of alternative "ways of being" and belief in one's ability to make choices, such as choosing to return to school or live independently, as well as access to resources, such as education and land, are key components of empowerment (Khumalo et al. 2015; Moser 1989; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Furthermore, evidence of shifts towards more acceptance, and even encouragement, of increased opportunities, access to resources, and autonomy for women indicates that, compared to earlier generations, they may receive greater support from their communities and families, particularly men, which is arguably another crucial factor of the empowerment process (Ellery 2009). However, despite these promising signs, women in the Costa Rican coffee industry continue to face challenges.

61

5.1.c Challenges for Women in the Costa Rican Coffee Industry

<u>General Challenges to Coffee Production</u>

Participants from both organizations confront similar challenges to coffee production that have been plaguing most Costa Rican coffee producers. One of the major problems identified by participants is disease and pests, particularly *ojo de gallo*, *broca,* and *roya*. An associate from CoopeAgri said, "I see now [production] is more difficult because of the *broca* and all that…lots of plagues, so it seems to me that it's hard," and another stated, "I feel that at the moment we are in difficult times because the *roya* came and production dropped" (PZ7; PZ8). In recent years, *roya* has been especially destructive, and many women pointed out significant production losses on both their own farms and their neighbors'. One participant from CoopeAgri explained, "The problem is that sometimes we take care of our coffee, but the neighbor doesn't, so [*roya*] spreads" (PZ15).

Participants' observations are consistent with the "worst ever recorded" *roya* epidemic in the 2012-2013 harvest year, during which the ICO reported that "incidence rates exceed[ed] 50% of the coffee production area" in eight Central American and Caribbean countries, including Costa Rica (ICO 2014:7). The Coffee Institute of Costa Rica, ICAFE, monitors *roya* and provides information and technical assistance to producers, but the disease continues to pose a challenge (ICAFE 2016). Participants in this study reported being forced to cut diseased coffee bushes, and some have completely cleared their farms because of the plagues. While one woman hopes her family can replant with a variety "that's good in terms of production, that isn't affected much by diseases, and that's also a good quality," others have converted their land to different

crops or pasture, a common "strategic response" among Costa Rican coffee producers facing these challenges (BIO10: Babin 2015:100).

Another identified challenge is the influence of weather, and more broadly, climate change, on the increased severity in diseases and declines in production. For example, one woman from ASOMOBI believes "*roya* and some other sicknesses of coffee are due to climate change" (BIO4). In addition to losses from disease, participants experience losses from extreme weather events. A CoopeAgri associate said, "With the bad weather, the rains came and the flowers fell…so the harvest was very little," and an ASOMOBI member reported, "The weather was really strong and the coffee couldn't resist the rain for so many days, so that caused losses" (PZ5; BIO8). While hard rains are not uncommon in Costa Rica during the typical rainy season, participants are noticing shifts in the timing and severity of weather events, which negatively impacts the annual production cycle of coffee plants and causes nearly ripe cherries to fall and rot before they can be harvested.

Participants are also facing challenges from increased costs of production. In order to combat diseases and maintain adequate levels of production, all participants who produce coffee apply agrochemicals to their fields. The few participants who experimented with organic production claimed that yields dropped and labor inputs increased so much that they had to continue using some amount of conventional pesticides and fertilizers. While one woman said these agrochemicals "are not expensive," most feel the costs of these inputs are burdensome: "The [chemicals] are expensive to fumigate, and good fertilizer – you need a lot of good fertilizer to maintain a good plant and produce a strong, whole bean" (PZ6; PZ7).

Transportation is an additional cost of production, though this varied depending on individuals' location. CoopeAgri helps offset transportation costs of coffee cherries as well as

fertilizer, but some women do not own or know how to drive a car, and they pay neighbors to transport their coffee cherries to the cooperative's receivers. For ASOMOBI's members, their remote location and poorly maintained roads made it difficult in the past to get their coffee to *beneficios* in San Vito over an hour away. ASOMOBI's facilities, located near Biolley's town center, reduce this burden for producers who sell coffee to the organization. Nevertheless, producers still must transport coffee cherries from their farms to the micro-*beneficio*, and ASOMOBI must arrange transportation of their finished products to customers.

A final cost of production is labor. In the past, coffee maintenance and harvesting activities on a small-scale farm could easily be accomplished with family labor (Sick 1998). Now, as more children are leaving for education and employment opportunities, familial labor is scarce. Indeed, though some women said their children still help with harvests when they are home and "have free time," almost half hire seasonal or full-time laborers and pointed out the costs of paying for labor (PZ8). As mentioned, hiring laborers is particularly expensive due to Costa Rica's social taxes, but it is difficult to avoid for most families, especially during harvest.

The most commonly cited challenges among participants are related to problems in the market. Women spoke of chronic low prices creating a "very difficult economic situation" for coffee producers, with one participant referring to it as "a terrible crisis" (PZ10; PZ14). While the global "coffee crisis" periods have passed and prices have increased, the prices paid to producers remain low (Babin 2015). CoopeAgri's board member stated that producers typically receive just 10% of the final retail price, which is true for most coffee producers around the world (PZ16; Fairtrade Foundation 2012). Intensifying the issue of low prices is the problem of price fluctuation. One participant from ASOMOBI explained:

> Coffee has a problem, it's not something stable. One year it's here, another year it's higher, and then another year it drops. It's always been very unstable…you can never say

that it's, for example, $200 [per sack] for three consecutive years. Never. Never. It's always been very unstable, and it hasn't been a good price. (BIO6)

The board member from CoopeAgri went further to say that no one, neither the cooperative nor producers, really knows the price of coffee for a given harvest year until the end of the season, making it difficult for organizations and producers to plan ahead financially (PZ16).

Taken together, disease and weather, rising costs of production, and low and unstable prices leave many small-scale Costa Rican coffee producers with little to no profit. When asked why they produce coffee, especially given the challenges and low profits, participants typically said it is because their families produced coffee ("I grew up in coffee"), emphasizing that it is the traditional "crop of the region" and there are few other options (PZ15). Some participants, like this woman from CoopeAgri, added that part of the reason is simply for the love of coffee: "I like coffee…I like to be planting…I like to work in the fields" (PZ11). Participants' love of coffee and the cultural value they place on the tradition of coffee production were strongly evident in informal conversations with women from both organizations, whereas economic incentive seemed non-existent or unimportant. Indeed, almost half of participants from CoopeAgri stated that coffee is not profitable for them, and others indicated that coffee's profitability depends on the year and on the fact that they do not hire laborers. Two women from ASOMOBI who used to produce coffee said they cut their plants because the prices they were receiving did not cover their costs of production. None of the participants said they produce coffee for economic motivations and not a single participant's family survives on coffee alone.

Participants' responses regarding general challenges in the coffee industry, specifically economic issues, are consistent with other studies demonstrating that producers have very little market power (Bacon 2005; Barham and Weber 2012; Jaffee 2012). The structure of the coffee

commodity chain renders producers and producer organizations as "price takers" who must

accept prevailing market prices without the ability to influence them, effectively giving traders,

retailers, and consumers economic "power over" those on the producing end (Bacon 2005).

Organizations in producing countries, like CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI, attempt to mitigate

negative economic impacts on producers in various ways including: offering easy access to

credit; paying above-market prices for coffee cherries; eliminating middlemen by taking on

processing, roasting, packaging, and sales management; and providing access to alternative

markets via certifications and other product differentiations such as quality. Nevertheless, these

organizations are subject to unpredictable market forces beyond their control. Even in certified

markets, most economic benefits for producers depend heavily upon consumers' willingness to

pay higher prices for certified products and whether or not conventional market prices are lower

or higher than the certification's minimum price. Producers and producer organizations are left

with very few opportunities to increase their market power.

<u>Challenges as Women in the Costa Rican Coffee Industry</u>

In addition to confronting the same widespread problems as their male counterparts in the

coffee industry, participants experience challenges due to socially ascribed gender roles and

cultural norms and attitudes. All 26 women fulfill Moser's (1989:1801) multiple gender roles

("reproductive, productive, and community managing"). With the exception of one, all

participants are mothers, and whether they are married, divorced, or single, women stated that

care of the children and household is mainly their responsibility. Three CoopeAgri participants

hold positions within the cooperative for which they receive a stipend, and four more women

have paid part-time work outside of the cooperative. All participants from ASOMOBI have

either part-time/occasional work or full-time employment both within and outside of the organization. Additionally, 12 CoopeAgri associates and all ASOMOBI members stated that they volunteer within their respective organization and/or in their local community (e.g. church groups, school board, community kitchen).

With regards to coffee production and other agricultural activities, participants' roles reflect global trends in which women are mostly focused on food crops for household consumption and/or local sale, and men are mostly responsible for cash crops (i.e. coffee). Most participants contribute to the coffee harvest, as is common in Costa Rica, yet only a few reported doing any coffee-related fieldwork beyond that. The majority said that husbands, male relatives, or hired male laborers handle maintenance activities like fertilizing, fumigating, and weeding. Nonetheless, over half of participants from CoopeAgri and all from ASOMOBI work with other crops (e.g. fruits, vegetables, beans) and/or livestock (e.g. dairy cows, chickens) for both household use and products to sell locally. Additionally, some women said they help with managing household level administrative tasks associated with coffee, such as tracking sales or paying laborers.

As in many other Latin American countries, *machismo* attitudes persist in Costa Rican culture. A few women feel this was a problem of the past that has disappeared over the years; one associate in CoopeAgri stated, "Now *machismo* has ended, and it's not all just men and boys," and a CDF leader expressed, "In terms of *machismo*, I believe that now in these times it's 50/50, we are not worried" (PZ8; PZ15). However, others indicated this cultural norm as an ongoing challenge for women, especially in agricultural communities, saying, "The culture, because we are a rural culture where *machismo* prevails, it's not eliminated, the culture hasn't changed," and "The culture, at least here [in Biolley], the culture is still a little *machista*" (PZ16;

BIO4). For example, while the number of female delegates in CoopeAgri has increased from less than 1% in 2004 to about 20% in 2016, the female board member considers *machismo* culture to be one of the factors limiting women's representation in leadership positions and decision-making processes (PZ16). According to her, the cooperative is offering more trainings and workshops for female associates, but they are typically in domestically related activities like handcrafts and sewing, "not specifically [to train] women for the directive body" (PZ16). *Machismo* attitudes reinforce notions of traditional gender roles, which often place men in positions of economic and political power and women in domestic and childcare roles.

5.1.d. "Power Over": The Persistence of Gender Roles and Cultural Norms

The challenges confronting women in the Costa Rican coffee industry, which largely result from adherence to traditional gender roles and cultural norms, represent manifestations of "power over" women in a male-dominated culture and industry. Though perhaps not explicit demonstrations of coercive power, many of Costa Rica's social and cultural norms inhibit women's abilities to develop forms of positive power. According to Osborne (2013:268), *machismo* culture is "associated with disempowering or restricting the behaviors of women." For example, the expectation that women should remain in the home and care for children restricts their ability to do other things like attend school, earn an income, or participate politically and socially in their organizations and communities. These restrictions limit the amount of choices available to women and their ability to make choices (personal power); their access to and control over resources, like income, and opportunities to participate in decision-making processes (generative power); and opportunities to engage with others in organization programs and community activities (collective power).

When women *are* involved in activities outside the home, as are all 26 participants, it only adds to their workload because they are still responsible for domestic duties (Lyon et al. 2010). A participant from CoopeAgri pointed out that childcare facilities are virtually nonexistent in rural communities, and usually the only source of support for working mothers comes from female friends and relatives. Household responsibilities often take priority and some women quit their jobs to raise children, as this participant's daughter did (PZ15). On the other hand, some women work full-time, and still bear most of the household responsibilities, like this participant from ASOMOBI who works in the roasting facility:

> My responsibilities? *Lots* of responsibilities, like whatever a housewife [does], all the jobs of the house...to cook, do laundry, get the kids ready for school. And when I return in the afternoon there are more, make sure the kids do their homework, I have to make dinner, yes. (BIO4)

Very few participants said that their husbands took on more household responsibilities in response to women getting jobs or volunteer positions, though this participant said her husband "had to learn how to make lunch, and things that he didn't do before, [because] now he must" (BIO4). Other women said they relied on older children, family and neighbors, or brought children with them to work when possible.

Participants mentioned time constraints as a challenge and a main reason for not participating more within their organization (e.g. attending workshops and assemblies to vote for community representatives) or being able to take advantage of income-generating opportunities. One woman said that CoopeAgri has a lot of talks and meetings, but sometimes she "can't be there because [she] is working [on her farm] or attending to other things" (PZ11). Through informal conversations with female cooperative associates, it was evident that typically the husband attends such events and the wife stays home. A participant from ASOMOBI described a joint project with another member to grow produce for household consumption. When asked if

they wanted to sell their produce to earn more income, she replied, "The idea is to sell, but I don't have enough time to dedicate to the greenhouse…when it's not one thing, it's another because the children require time, the little time that remains, you have to give to them" (BIO9). Thus, women's gender roles, which prioritize their domestic duties, can exclude them from opportunities to develop forms of positive power outside the home.

Despite women's important role in coffee harvesting as well as in the management of their households, farms, and organizations, the cultural view of coffee as "the domain of men" has been difficult to overcome (Sick 1998:193). Some participants referred to physical limitations as a specific challenge for women working in coffee production, believing that women are weaker and less capable of certain fieldwork-related tasks than men. Statements such as "Men are stronger to carry the sacks [of coffee cherries], which is very hard for a woman," and "A woman doesn't have the same capacity as a man with a machete to weed and cut" were common (PZ6; PZ11). However, these statements seem to contradict participants' own contributions to strenuous production activities as well as later comments that they know many "valiant" and "bold" women who work in coffee fields. For example, the CoopeAgri associate with whom I picked coffee is in charge of managing her farm, and she and her daughters are responsible for the harvest because her husband and sons are uninterested in coffee production, preferring to work with cattle. Furthermore, a woman from ASOMOBI directly opposed the view of women as weaker, saying, "There are people who think women can't do it, that women can't work, perhaps they see we are women and they see us as weak, when in reality, I think we are really strong" (BIO6).

The exact reasons for some women's limited involvement in coffee production activities are unclear from this research. Perhaps they feel they are not strong enough or perhaps, as Sick

(1998) observed, Costa Rican women avoid coffee fieldwork as a reflection of higher status. Indeed, the few participants who have no involvement in fieldwork seem financially capable of hiring laborers who assist their husbands in production activities. When asked what her responsibilities are on the coffee farm, a CoopeAgri associate said, "Just in the house, not on the farm, my husband and the laborers work the farm," adding that she is the "administrator of money and make[s] the transactions when the harvest is turned in" (PZ14). A woman from ASOMOBI also said she hardly does any work in the coffee field, but helps keep track of paperwork (BIO6). Both of these women have medium-sized farms and hire multiple laborers, which is uncommon among other participants, suggesting that they have the means to afford labor. Unlike these two participants, most women do participate in the coffee harvest.

Additionally, there are some women who have taken over all management responsibilities because their husbands are uninterested in coffee production as in the case mentioned above, they are divorced, or their husbands have sought other job opportunities, sometimes abroad, to compensate for low profits from coffee. Outmigration of men, initially in response to the coffee crises of the 1990s, remains a common strategy for increasing household income, leaving many women to care for both the home and the coffee farm (Babin 2015; Lieberman et al. 2015). Nonetheless, in many instances, husbands or male relatives still own the land and have at least partial control over harvest incomes. Moreover, women who participate in production activities said that they defer to their husbands, male relatives, or even hired male laborers for management decisions. For example, the woman who is in charge of her coffee farm because her husband is uninterested said, "I am the one who makes decisions about the coffee…I am the one who decides what days we harvest, what days we don't" and "[The income from coffee] is mine because I am the one who is caring for it, I am in charge of it all" (PZ15).

However, she also stated, "I don't know how to manage coffee very well" and "I would forget in what month you fertilize, in what month you do things, so in that part, my husband helps me" (PZ15). This sentiment is consistent with Sick's (1998:197) finding that "women farmers were often less confident than men about their farming abilities," which may be related to women's exclusion from both formal and informal information networks.

Aside from fieldwork, participants mentioned that before ASOMOBI was formed, all other aspects of the coffee industry, like processing and trading, were strictly "a man's world" and were "activities of men where women were not well received" (BIO5; BIO10). ASOMOBI's founders confronted doubt and negativity from both men and women because "a coffee mill is men's work," and people did not believe a group of women could be successful in this type of business (BIO5). One participant said, "Some thought it was just for us to get together and talk and that we weren't capable of doing things," and another stated, "Many people didn't believe in us…they told us, 'you aren't going to achieve anything, you're women'" (BIO1; BIO5). Furthermore, because a woman's traditional place is considered to be in the home, some men in the community were angry that their wives were working with ASOMOBI, even if they were earning an income, because it took them out of the house:

> We have a member who used to make lunch for her husband, and she would leave it ready so he didn't have to do anything but show up, and when she arrived home, the lunch was there, and he had the worst face in the world, like [demonstrating a look of disgust] because he was really mad that she wasn't there. (BIO5)

Members now feel they have demonstrated to their families and the community that, as a successful all-women's business, ASOMOBI is beneficial for everyone and their work is worthwhile. However, as shown, the persistence of *machismo* cultural attitudes and adherence to traditional gender roles within households, communities, and organizations present ongoing challenges for women in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

5.2 Certification Schemes as Potential Pathways to Women's Empowerment:

In light of the challenges discussed above, some scholars and certification agencies argue that certification schemes offer the possibility of changing power imbalances between producers and consumers and of elevating women's status by promoting gender equality and women's empowerment (Auld 2010; Fairtrade International 2016; Jaffee 2012; Lyon et al. 2010; Kilpatrick 2015). The following section addresses the second part of Research Question #1 (What are women's perspectives on certification schemes?) and Research Question #2 (In what ways do certification schemes create pathways to women's empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry and what are the limitations?). Unless otherwise stated, participants from CoopeAgri are referring to the Fairtrade International certification. Participants from ASOMOBI discuss the national-level BAE and CST certifications that the organization currently holds as well as their perceptions of fair trade, which they are considering pursuing. I first describe participants' views on the benefits and challenges of certification schemes within the context of their respective organizations, as well as their suggestions on how certifications could be improved. Next, based on participants' views and experiences, I examine how certification schemes contribute to components of the empowerment process and address limitations.

5.2.a. Participants' Perspectives on Certification Schemes

While women from both CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI experience some benefits of certifications, including higher payments and greater access to resources through price premiums and a sense of pride in good management practices, much of the impact is minimal and indirect. Women further identified potential benefits of gaining additional certifications such as increased

prices; yet, these were usually accompanied by cautious skepticism that the certifications would actually bring desired benefits. Members of each organization voiced concerns about the challenges of certification schemes for producers, namely lack of consumer demand for certified coffee and economic barriers to entering the certified coffee market, and offered suggestions for improvement. Participants' perspectives on the benefits and challenges of certification schemes, and their suggestions, are summarized in Tables 1 and 2.

CoopeAgri

The Cooperative: CoopeAgri has been certified by Fairtrade International (FLO) for coffee since 2004. As members of a democratically organized cooperative, CoopeAgri's associates are automatically certified, as per Fairtrade standards (Bacon 2005; Jaffee 2007). Two key informants, certification manager Carlos Calderón and the female board member, explained some of the benefits and challenges of Fairtrade for the cooperative in general. Importantly, associates do not bear any costs of certification in terms of time, energy, or money because cooperative employees oversee all fee payments, documentation, sales, and other logistics. The manager pointed out that it was fairly easy for the cooperative to become certified as many of the social and environmental standards were already a "part of CoopeAgri's culture." Still, the Fairtrade label provides proof that they meet these standards to buyers who demand Fairtrade-certified coffee; thus, the certification helps "position [CoopeAgri's] coffee in the global market" (Calderón 2016). Moreover, Fairtrade contributes to CoopeAgri's ability to maintain stable, long-term trade relationships with buyers all over the world (Fairtrade Foundation 2016; Calderón 2016).

The price benefits, including the guaranteed price minimum, the social premium, and bonuses based on quality, have helped the cooperative and its associates, as detailed below; yet, drawbacks remain due to international market forces and lack of consumer demand. Both the certification manager and the female board member emphasized that even though 100% of CoopeAgri's coffee is FLO-certified, they only sell a small percentage at fair trade prices each year (e.g. 16% sold as Fairtrade in 2015). This pattern is consistent with global trends where the supply of fair trade-certified coffee consistently exceeds consumer demand (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Kilpatrick 2015; Potts et al. 2014). Moreover, due to the relatively high costs of production in Costa Rica, buyers can find cheaper fair trade-certified coffee in other countries, leading CoopeAgri to emphasize production of higher quality coffee to stay competitive. Though producer organizations can negotiate higher prices based on quality, the Fairtrade certification neither requires nor communicates to consumers any quality standards, a fact regarded by key informants and fair trade critics as another downside (Dragusanu et al. 2014; PZ16).

The price minimum also presents a conundrum for CoopeAgri: while it guarantees a fair trade price if the market price is low, fewer buyers want fair trade-certified coffee when the market price is high because they would have to pay the premium on top of an already high price (Calderón 2016). The premium nevertheless allows CoopeAgri to provide associates with bonus payments and/or social and environmental services, which are decided upon by elected delegates (one delegate per 50 associates, serving four-year terms). However, as discussed below, not all associates are aware of these benefits, and if they are, they do not necessarily recognize the connection to the Fairtrade certification.

Female Associates: With the exception of the female board member and one leader within the CDF who are more informed because of their leadership positions, the majority of participants, including most CDF coordinators, know very little about the Fairtrade certification. When asked what they knew, nearly all participants said they had heard of Fairtrade, but are "not very well informed" and "do not have much knowledge" or understanding of it (PZ15; PZ13). When asked what they thought about the certification, most spoke vaguely, saying that they thought it was good for the cooperative in general, but all except the two leaders reiterated that they knew "very little" about it. Some women mentioned that they had either attended or heard through their spouses about talks given by CoopeAgri employees about Fairtrade. Yet, even these women had only a basic understanding of the certification and mainly spoke of the higher price paid to the cooperative for Fairtrade coffee. CoopeAgri's annual reports briefly discuss Fairtrade, but mostly as a summary of sales and to which programs the premiums are applied (outlined below) (CoopeAgri 2015). In short, CoopeAgri makes general Fairtrade information available; it is then each associate's decision whether or not to utilize it.

Lack of knowledge among associates indicates that they do not feel the burdens of the Fairtrade certification, such as the fees or documentation processes, but they also do not experience or are not aware of many direct benefits. A CDF leader explained that because price premiums must be distributed among thousands of associates, "sometimes this money is just a little" for each individual (PZ14). Indeed, half of the participants from CoopeAgri mentioned sometimes receiving a higher price, but noted that it is not very much. Furthermore, women did not directly equate higher payments with Fairtrade, and instead stated the extra money was based on the quality of their high-elevation coffee, reflecting the cooperative's efforts to promote high quality alongside Fairtrade. None indicated that this greatly affected their overall income from

coffee, only that it was "a little something added." The woman who serves on the board was the only one to say that the guaranteed price minimum "is a great benefit" for the cooperative in the face of low market prices (PZ16). However, CoopeAgri has a history of paying producers more than other *beneficios* in the *cantón*, even before it was FLO-certified; so, it is unclear how much of this is due to the certification versus other long-standing business and marketing strategies (Sick 1993).

Despite low awareness of the certification and minimal direct economic benefits among associates, members benefit indirectly from programs and services paid for with the Fairtrade social premium. Of the roughly 15 general programs and services CoopeAgri provides for associates, six are funded, at least partially, with the Fairtrade premium (CoopeAgri 2015; Fairtrade Foundation 2016; PZ16). Though only a quarter of participants connected certain services directly to the certification, all 16 mentioned some of these benefits as reasons why they choose to belong to CoopeAgri and/or as ways the cooperative has positively impacted them. With the help of the Fairtrade premium, CoopeAgri accomplishes the following:

- Offering medical services at reduced costs for associates and their children
- Providing technical assistance to individual producers as well as general talks and trainings on improved production strategies at no cost to producers
- Subsidizing costs of fertilizers, coffee plants, and transportation of coffee cherries to *beneficios* and fertilizer to farms
- Providing easy access to credit, especially pre-harvest
- Conducting experiments, analyses, and dissemination of knowledge in a variety of agricultural areas including more resilient coffee varieties, organic production, and diversification into other crops such as cacao

- Providing payments to producers to preserve forested lands and protect water sources on their property

Another indirect benefit of the Fairtrade certification noted by female associates is the sense of pride they feel knowing the cooperative is certified and that they are implementing best management practices. One of the CDF leaders expressed her feelings about Fairtrade: "One feels like, wow, we are certified for something because we are a business leader, because we've always had credibility, sustainability, so truly, it's a great honor" (PZ14). She views the certification as recognition for things the cooperative does well for both associates and the environment, and for individual associates' good management practices. The board member included indirect ecological benefits, such as improved soil health and biodiversity, due to elimination of toxic chemicals and implementation of conservation practices (PZ16). Fair trade environmental standards are often criticized for being vague and lenient; but, the cooperative helps producers meet baseline requirements (e.g. offers discounted FLO-compliant fertilizer), and complying with these standards opens doors to other, stricter certifications. For example, two participants voiced interest in organic production, which is typically expensive, demanding, and risky for Costa Rican coffee producers. CoopeAgri uses the Fairtrade premium to assist producers in this area and already has trade relationships to market organic coffee.

Though the Fairtrade certification may not directly result in significant income increases for individual associates, it does benefit the cooperative as a whole and enhances its ability to serve producers. CoopeAgri offered some of these services before the certification and, as implied by the certification manager, would probably continue to offer them regardless of Fairtrade because they represent core values of the cooperative. Nonetheless, the Fairtrade premium contributes to numerous social and environmental benefits for CoopeAgri's associates.

Researchers note the costs of certification along with cooperative membership fees as a major barrier for many producers (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007). However, CoopeAgri's associates do not bear certification costs; moreover, many view membership fees as another benefit since it is actually a savings investment to be returned to them after a certain number of years. The main disadvantages for CoopeAgri stem from many of the commonly cited market challenges that limit fair trade's effectiveness; but, thus far, the benefits of being FLO-certified outweigh the costs for CoopeAgri and its associates (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007).

<div align="center">ASOMOBI</div>

The Association: ASOMOBI does not yet have international certifications, like fair trade; however, it is certified by two government-sponsored programs: *La Bandera Azul Ecológica* (BAE) for coffee production, and *La Certificación para la Sostenibilidad Turistica* (CST) for sustainable tourism. ASOMOBI also labels its coffee packages "*Con Sello de Mujer*" ("With the Seal of Women") to distinguish their brand in the market as an all-women's processing and roasting organization, a singular characteristic in the Costa Rican coffee industry. ASOMOBI is interested in pursuing international certifications, and organization leaders have been contemplating the possible benefits and challenges of doing so. The following section describes ASOMOBI members' perspectives on the actual impacts of BAE and CST as well as anticipated impacts of a certification such as fair trade.

ASOMOBI Members: One of the main advantages of BAE and CST for ASOMOBI members is that the certifications' labels communicate the organization's values and standards of production to consumers. Participants pointed out that certification labels demonstrate to coffee buyers and tourists that ASOMOBI is "working in environmental projects" and "practicing sustainable

production" (BIO10). Others stated that certifications go beyond simply communicating

standards, and in fact give ASOMOBI more credibility. One woman said:

> If I just say I'm [taking care of the environment], how will you evaluate me? CST comes
> to evaluate me, BAE comes to evaluate me. So I'm consistent with what I say. That's
> what comes with those certifications. It's true that you can promise that ASOMOBI cares
> about the environment, but those certifications say, yes, we do. They…demonstrate that I
> am consistent with what I say, that what I say is also what I do. (BIO8)

In this way, certifications validate ASOMOBI's sustainability claims to consumers and hold

ASOMOBI accountable for meeting certain standards, which is indeed a goal of certification

schemes (Dragusanu et al. 2014). Some ASOMOBI members believe that certification labels

thus attract consumers and tourists who specifically look for sustainability certifications and

bring in more business than they would otherwise have, but others are doubtful of this effect.

While a certification label is a simple and useful method of communication, particularly

when marketing to far-off consumers, participants recognize that it is only effective if consumers

understand and value what the label means. For example, though the "*Con Sello de Mujer*" label

is not an official certification, it communicates a unique feature of ASOMOBI's coffee that

differentiates it from other coffee on the market. However, one participant stated that they have

not been successful in marketing their coffee this way because there is a lack of "recognition for

women's products" (BIO8). Similarly, another woman said, "to have the [CST] certification is

not an assurance we are going to have more people coming to the lodge" (BIO10). BAE and CST

are national certifications unlikely to be recognized outside of Costa Rica, reducing their

potential to attract international consumers. A possible advantage for ASOMOBI of being fair

trade-certified is the international recognition; yet, as previously stated, consumer awareness and

demand for fair trade remains limited (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Potts et al. 2014; Weber 2007).

A related issue is the disconnect between anticipated increases in prices for certified coffee on the producing end and low demand and lack of willingness to pay on the consuming end. ASOMOBI participants explicitly said that certifications are "added value" for their products and listed greater income as a possible advantage of additional certifications. At the same time, many of the women acknowledged that they "still have not seen that [BAE and CST] really generate more money" because, as one said, "no one wants to pay the added value that those have" (BIO5). Nonetheless, all 10 ASOMOBI members are cautiously optimistic that they could see indirect economic gains from current certifications (e.g. attracting more business, prompting some buyers to pay more for the "added value"), and they hope that fair trade would guarantee higher prices. Unlike BAE, CST, and even some international certifications, fair trade requires buyers to pay for the "added value" of the certification via price minimums and premiums; but lack of demand and willingness to pay limits real economic gains for producers.

The main dilemma for ASOMOBI is weighing the known costs of international certifications against only the possibility of economic benefits. Although they may not experience direct economic benefits from BAE and CST, there was little risk in obtaining these because the Costa Rican government covers the costs. On the other hand, fair trade certification costs are the producers' or producer organization's responsibility. Other studies have found this to be both a barrier to entry and a limitation on certification schemes' economic effectiveness if costs equal or surpass gains from price premiums (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Lyon et al. 2010; Valkila 2009; Weber 2007). Accordingly, ASOMOBI members worry about the risk of expensive application and management costs with no guarantee that the investment will pay off.

In addition to monetary costs, participants spoke of the demands on producers' time and energy to comply with certifications. Even to comply with BAE and CST, which are not as strict

as other certifications, women described the amount of paperwork and required documentation

as difficult because they "are not accustomed to having to do those things" (BIO2). One

participant whose family has a BAE-certified farm said:

> [It's] a lot of writing every day, everything you do…if you weed, if you fumigate, if you
> fertilize, if you trim the branches of the trees, everything. For [my husband] it's a lot of
> work, he's not used to it. [It's] hard when the person isn't used to it. Today this point, and
> another day you have to do this, and he forgets some things sometimes. (BIO4)

With the exception of one participant with a BAE-certified farm who feels it is fairly easy to

comply with requirements (BIO6), ASOMOBI members said the documentation processes for

both individual farms and the organization are burdensome. They are also well aware that

seeking additional certifications could compound these burdens, especially if they cannot afford

to hire staff to oversee them. ASOMOBI's administrator believes that these demands can in fact

exclude small producers and organizations that lack the time, personnel, and resources to

properly manage certifications (BIO10). Ironically, it is these same small producers and

organizations that fair trade purports to target.

A final concern voiced by ASOMOBI members is the belief that big companies have

diluted the standards of certifications, which ties into the aforementioned issues of cost barriers

and lack of consumer understanding. In the case of both national and international certifications,

one participant stated:

> There are businesses that do it just…to look good in the world, and economically, they
> can do it. Then there are people who really want to do it for their convictions, but can't
> economically. So I think they are poorly distributed. (BIO8)

Participants feel there are some certified companies that do not truly meet requirements, and if

that is the standard consumers equate with a certain label, it devalues the certification label for

organizations like ASOMOBI that "are using it for its real purpose" (BIO8). This concern echoes

that of researchers and others in the fair trade movement who worry that licensing the use of

labels to big corporations leads to a "dilution of standards," posing a threat to the original mission of fair trade and other certifications (Jaffee 2012:110).

In addition to creating confusion about what labels mean, ASOMOBI members are frustrated by this dilution because they, like CoopeAgri associates, are genuinely proud of their sustainability efforts and best management practices. Participants discussed the importance of caring for the environment and their pride that certifications like BAE and CST support and recognize their efforts. For one participant, the positive environmental impacts are her main motivation in being BAE-certified: "Economically, [the gain] is practically zero. It's not that we go along with it to make money…what interests us is the environment, to conserve and protect it" (BIO6). It is clear that despite the lack of economic benefits, ASOMOBI members find intrinsic value in certifications that highlight environmentally friendly practices.

Finally, participants see a benefit in certifications' ability to help both producers and the organization improve their management strategies. BAE and CST, like fair trade, are structured as a process of continual improvement, and six participants cited an ordered learning process as an important component of certifications. One woman with a certified farm said that BAE has helped her family "think more about the future, taking care of the soil [and] the land" (BIO4). Another member said certifications give producers "the awareness to improve their practices," and she is happy that they are willing to make these changes (BIO10). In reference to ASOMOBI itself, a final woman stated, "we…realize there are other ways of working that are more environmentally friendly…[and] the fact that we can change and work differently, I think that those are gains" (BIO5). This willingness to learn and ability to adjust their practices will no doubt help them face economic and environmental uncertainties.

Table 1. Participants' Perspectives on the Benefits and Challenges of Certification Schemes

Benefits	Challenges
Certification labels communicate values and standards of production to consumers and add credibility to claims of good social and environmental practices	Lack of consumer awareness, understanding, and recognition of certification labels
Certifications help position products and increase access to specific markets; possibly attract more business	Lack of demand for certified products and oversupply; cannot sell 100% to certified markets
Fair trade guarantees a price minimum when market price is low, providing some market stability	Buyers are less willing to purchase at fair trade prices when market prices are high
Higher payments via premiums and bonuses	Lack of consumer willingness to pay for "added value"
Social and environmental benefits and services (paid for with fair trade premiums)	Low awareness and knowledge among producers of general Fairtrade standards
Sense of pride in sustainability efforts and good management practices	Certifying big companies can result in a dilution of standards and diminish certifications' value
Ecological benefits such as improved soil health and increased biodiversity from implementing certification standards	Fair trade neither requires nor communicates quality standards
Can provide a structured and guided process for improving management practices	Costs money, time, and energy to obtain and maintain certifications with no guarantee of financial compensation

In summary, participants from both CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI share views on some of the benefits and challenges of certification schemes. Members from each organization named the higher and more stable prices offered by certifications like fair trade as a benefit; yet, women also know that these economic gains can be minimal and are often dictated by market forces out of their control. Another common thread among participants is the pride they feel in belonging to a certified organization and the belief that certifications not only acknowledge their sustainability efforts but also help guide them towards improved management practices. Many consider these efforts as "added value" to their products and share frustrations regarding the lack of consumer awareness and demand that limits benefits of certifications for producers. Below are suggestions offered by participants from both organizations, as well as insights from my volunteer work with ASOMOBI, of how certification schemes could improve.

Participants' Suggestions

Participants in this study think that, overall, certifications are "good," "important," and "have their value;" nonetheless, there is room for improvement. Firstly, although some view certification requirements as too demanding, CoopeAgri's board member feels that Fairtrade standards should be stricter in the area of gender:

> The certifications, like Fairtrade, are not very demanding. They should be more demanding. They should demand by law that women take part in decision-making, that there is a specific program for women. [T]he [certification] program is open, but because of the culture, more men participate than women. Men have the availability to go to meetings; the woman has to run the house, so she doesn't go. [B]y law, there should be a program specifically for women, but there isn't. It's a weakness. (PZ16)

Although CoopeAgri has the women's committee (the CDF), it is not directly related to nor affected by the Fairtrade certification, and so, does not necessarily increase women's decision-

making authority within the cooperative in the way this participant suggests a Fairtrade requirement might. As mentioned, Fairtrade International recognizes the certification's shortcomings in adequately addressing gender equality and women's empowerment (Kilpatrick and Freund 2014). It appears that the concerns voiced by this participant, among other things, are addressed in the revised Gender Strategy (Fairtrade International 2016). It is too early to determine how these strategies will be enacted on the ground in different contexts and what the true impacts on women in FLO-certified organizations will be.

Secondly, other participants feel strongly that certifications must adequately compensate producers for their sustainability efforts, as evidenced by this woman from ASOMOBI:

> I've always thought…that the certifications should repay someone [for] all the work that they are doing. If one group is making an effort to work for carbon neutral or work against climate change, the certifications should give in some way, should [pay them for] what's been done. What we've done to preserve the PILA, something should exist that repays us…[for] those improvements. (BIO5)

This sentiment ties into a commonly identified weakness that certification price premiums are not enough to sufficiently reward producers for the added time, energy, and money they put into meeting requirements (Auld 2010; Weber 2007). Indeed, many participants said that producing organic coffee in Costa Rica is nearly impossible due to decreased yields and increased costs of production; eliminating chemical inputs necessitates greater and, in Costa Rica's case, more expensive labor inputs. Even with the higher prices paid for organic coffee, Costa Rican producers do not believe that profits overcome the costs of meeting strict organic requirements. Moreover, ASOMOBI leaders contemplating a fair trade certification question whether price premiums would outweigh the costs of audits for their organization.

Lastly, the biggest weakness of certification schemes made evident by both participants' responses and my own experience volunteering for ASOMOBI is the potential to exclude the

very producers and organizations they claim to support. As a large, well-established cooperative with reliable trade partnerships and trained personnel to manage the certification, becoming FLO-certified was fairly easy for CoopeAgri and does not create burdens for producers (Calderón 2016). Still, the board member emphasized that, as small-scale producers, it is only because of CoopeAgri that associates can be certified. Indeed, Fairtrade International only works with small-scale producers who are organized into a cooperative that pays for and manages the certification. While this ensures that small-scale producers are represented in democratically structured organizations, this prerequisite excludes independent small-scale producers who may not have the option of belonging to a cooperative. Other certifications without this prerequisite still carry the costs of audits and complying with standards (e.g. altering management practices, updating farm facilities); a large independent farm may be able to handle these costs, but small-scale producers may again be excluded (PZ16; Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007).

Though the cooperative-based requirement was imposed to reduce competition from large plantations and maximize support for intended beneficiaries, it has proven problematic for ASOMOBI, which is not technically a producer organization, but rather a women's association that buys coffee from independent small-scale producers (Dragusanu et al. 2014; Weber 2007). As evidenced through my research on certification requirements for an organization like ASOMOBI, Fair Trade USA, which has a pathway for independent small-scale producers to become certified, may be more accessible than Fairtrade International. Yet, even this process presents challenges. ASOMOBI can only sell coffee certified by Fair Trade USA if they buy the cherries from producers who agree to become certified and eventually form an organized group. ASOMOBI would then have to meet additional Fair Trade USA standards as a "Market Access Partner" working with this now-certified producer group "to commercialize their product" (Fair

Trade USA 2014:2). Although Fair Trade USA has been criticized for being too lenient by opening the certification to large-scale plantations and corporations, it also seems to be the only viable fair trade option for independent small-scale producers and small associations like ASOMOBI that are not classified as cooperatives.

On top of these barriers, participants from ASOMOBI feel that the challenges associated with certifications (e.g. money, time, energy) exclude independent small-scale producers and small organizations in favor of large plantations, corporations, and organizations with the resources to manage them. Indeed, it was clear from my experience researching certification possibilities for ASOMOBI that realistically, they would need a trained administrator to take on the responsibilities of a certification. Simply determining requirements, eligibility, and possible costs and benefits is a daunting and time-consuming task. With regards to international certification schemes, language is also a barrier. While most website information is available in a few widely-spoken languages like Spanish, Portuguese, and French, the dominant language is English, and some documents and reports are not available in multiple languages. This implies that even for speakers of these other languages, proficiency in English is desirable when navigating complicated international certification schemes. Moreover, Lyon et al. (2010) noted language as a major barrier among indigenous, non-Spanish speaking populations in Latin America, not to mention producers in other regions of the world who do not speak these four languages.

Table 2. Summary of Participants' Suggestions for Improving Certification Schemes

▪ Standards should be stricter in the area of gender Ex: Require more participation and representation of women in certified organizations
▪ Premiums must adequately compensate producers for the "added value" of certified products Ex: Fully cover costs of production and certification fees Ex: Reward environmentally-friendly practices and conservation efforts
▪ Certifications need to be more accessible to independent small-scale producers and small organizations Ex: Less expensive Ex: Simplified documentation processes

5.2.b Discussion of Certification Schemes as Pathways to Empowerment

This section assesses the extent to which certification schemes create to pathways to women's empowerment within CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI. The basis of the fair trade model is "to promote fair trading conditions and empower producers to combat poverty, strengthen their position, and take more control over their lives" (Fairtrade International 2017). Other certifications, many of which are based on the principles of fair trade, also seek to increase producer empowerment by ensuring equitable prices, stable trade relationships, and increased decision-making power. As mentioned, Fairtrade International further recognizes gender equality and women's empowerment as crucial factors in sustainable development and aims to strengthen "women's human, social, financial, and physical capital" (Fairtrade International 2016). Indeed,

increased "decision-making capacity [and] access to income, productive assets and property" along with "self-confidence and solidarity with other women" are key for developing "pathways to empowerment" (Khumalo et al. 2015:49; Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:114).

Results of this study indicate that while certification schemes may contribute to some components of the empowerment process, most notably through increased "power to" or generative power, the relationship between certifications and other components (awareness, "power within," and "power with") is minimal and indirect. Furthermore, the economic and social challenges women face, as discussed above, limit certification schemes' capacity to influence women's empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry. Certification schemes' contributions to and limitations within the empowerment process are manifested differently in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI; therefore, it is necessary to begin by addressing the differences that shape the role of certifications in each organization.

A Matter of Scale

The major difference between CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI is scale. CoopeAgri serves thousands of associates spread across the district's 736 square miles. ASOMOBI consists of 37 members, the vast majority of whom live within a 5-mile radius. Consequently, while CoopeAgri's associates rely on a relative few to manage cooperative affairs, including certifications, most of ASOMOBI's members are involved in day-to-day operations through committees, volunteer work, and employment. These differences in scale have strengths and weaknesses that affect the organizations' access to resources (i.e. ability to be certified), distribution of resources to members (i.e. distribution of certification benefits), and members'

level of participation (i.e. awareness and involvement in the certification process and sense of empowerment in relation to certification schemes).

CoopeAgri operates on a larger scale in terms of products and services offered, selling on both national and international markets, whereas ASOMOBI is mostly restricted to domestic sales. In this respect, CoopeAgri has the advantage of being a large cooperative with both the financial and human resources to obtain and maintain certifications, and established trade relationships to market certified products. ASOMOBI, on the other hand, lacks the resources to become fair trade-certified without significant financial risk, and does not yet have a guaranteed market for fair trade-certified products. Moreover, ASOMOBI does not currently have the personnel to manage a complex international certification. Though ASOMOBI's small scale might mean they could more efficiently distribute the benefits of certifications to their members, they face greater barriers to entry than CoopeAgri.

Furthermore, though both organizations are democratically structured, CoopeAgri's associates are represented by elected delegates in assemblies and are thus a degree removed from management activities and major decision-making processes. Conversely, all of ASOMOBI's members are invited to participate directly in decision-making. The disparate level of knowledge on certifications appears to be a result of this difference in scale and individual involvement. Due to ASOMOBI's small-scale, everyone seems to have a part in, or at least awareness of, everything happening in the organization, including discussions of certifications; therefore, members appear to have a better overall understanding of certifications. In the case of CoopeAgri, participants have limited knowledge of certifications perhaps because it is not the responsibility of individual associates to make decisions in this area. This general lack of

knowledge was evident in another study of large Costa Rican coffee cooperatives, implying that the nature of large-scale cooperatives affects producers' awareness of fair trade (Ronchi 2002).

Nevertheless, all participants from CoopeAgri seem to have a sense of trust and satisfaction in what the cooperative is doing in the area of certifications. CoopeAgri has always promoted "an ideology of mutual self-help," and the relationship based on trust and loyalty between associates and cooperative mangers appears to have endured over the years (Sick 1993:175). Still, other studies have identified coffee cooperatives in which mismanagement, lack of transparency, and poor communication erode trust and lead to eventual demise, suggesting that CoopeAgri leaders must remain vigilant of associates' attitudes regarding the management of certifications (Babin 2015; Dragusanu et al. 2014; Sick 1993).

All of these factors influence the role of certifications and their potential contributions to empowerment. With these in mind, I next discuss the relationship between certifications schemes and women's empowerment in the two different organizations.

CoopeAgri

Female associates in CoopeAgri experience some minor contributions to generative power as a result of the Fairtrade certification in the form of increased access to resources and opportunities to participate in cooperative-sponsored programs. However, these benefits are tempered by external economic and cultural forces. Furthermore, the Fairtrade certification does not seem to have had a major impact on women's participation in decision-making processes nor representation in leadership positions. Overall, participants feel that any benefits are general among all associates, and nothing appears to have changed specifically for women as a result of the Fairtrade certification.

As discussed above, some participants mentioned slightly higher and more stable prices from the Fairtrade price minimums and premiums as a benefit. Though most do not experience a significant economic impact from the certification, any increase of income can contribute to women's overall financial security and independence (i.e. generative power). However, it is a woman's position within her household that ultimately dictates her control over incomes from coffee. As mentioned above, in CoopeAgri, a woman can be an "associate" as long as a portion of her family's coffee is turned in under her name, meaning she does not necessarily have to be directly involved in coffee production to receive cooperative benefits, such as medical services. Access to cooperative benefits regardless of labor contributions is certainly a positive, and indeed, most participants stated that they are not involved in fieldwork beyond the harvest.

In a situation like this, Sick (1998:202) points out that often "men's year-round direct contributions to coffee production are used to legitimize their…greater control of…income from coffee sales." Twelve participants said they and their husbands make decisions about the household and incomes jointly. Yet, the vast majority also stated that their husbands or male relatives makes decisions regarding farm management, and that they, the women, "own" coffee only "on paper" in order to belong to the cooperative. This position could limit women's access to and control over "harvest-generated income" and thus diminish Fairtrade's economic impact and contributions to generative power for female associates (IWCA 2013:13).

Another potential contribution to women's generative power is increased opportunities to participate in trainings and workshops funded by the Fairtrade premium, yet this is also limited by cultural norms. The certification manager explained that Fairtrade requires the cooperative to report how many men and how many women attend trainings and workshops. Women typically comprise only ~20% of participants in activities despite making up ~43% of associates. Some

participants spoke of taking advantage of opportunities to learn about new production strategies or attend workshops in their communities; but again, women's ability to do so is influenced by household circumstances. Women fulfill multiple gender roles in their homes and communities, and indeed, participants cited time constraints as a main reason they did not take part in certain programs. Furthermore, the board member attributed lack of women's participation to the commonly held view in *machismo* cultures that it is the husband's role to attend trainings and workshops while the wife stays home with the children (Lyon et al. 2010; Ronchi 2002; Sick 1998). Then again, as indicated by two participants, some women are simply uninterested in participating in programs, demonstrating that even if the cooperative does all it can to make opportunities equally accessible, it is each associate's choice to participate.

Finally, the Fairtrade certification has the potential to "significantly increase women's active and equal participation" and representation in FLO-certified organizations, contributing to generative power by enhancing women's involvement in decision-making processes (Fairtrade International 2016). Yet, according to leaders in CoopeAgri, the actual impacts from Fairtrade in this area are negligible. As the certification manager stated, this is partially because CoopeAgri had already implemented certain policies and programs, like the CDF, and thus, Fairtrade was not an impetus of change for female associates in this regard. However, women are still underrepresented, filling only 20% of overall leadership roles and holding only one of the seven board positions. The female board member expressed her frustration in being the first and, so far, only woman in a position of authority, and emphasized how, even with the addition of Fairtrade standards, the culture "represses women's participation in decision-making." It is possible that because Fairtrade requirements draw attention to gender inequalities (e.g. monitoring women's involvement), the cooperative will work towards more effective policies to promote women's

participation and representation. The objectives and strategies proposed in Fairtrade's new Gender Strategy could also prompt changes in the next few years. Nonetheless, there is only so much a certification scheme can do to affect change unless the culture also changes.

ASOMOBI

In the case of ASOMOBI, certifications have not yet brought members any direct benefits, but it is possible that they, too, could experience increases in generative power if they pursue international certifications. ASOMOBI would be subject to the same uncontrollable market limitations as CoopeAgri, but individual members might receive more significant increases in income since benefits would be distributed among far fewer people. ASOMOBI's costs of operation (e.g. paying employees) are less than CoopeAgri's, which may leave more of the premium available for group projects or individual distribution. Additionally, ASOMOBI leaders hope that greater profits for the organization would allow them to expand employment and involvement opportunities for a growing number of members. Once again, these hoped-for benefits would be restricted by the costs of maintaining a certification.

Increased incomes are more likely to have direct impacts for ASOMOBI's members than for those in CoopeAgri. As an all-women's organization, there is no question among participants that what they earn at ASOMOBI is their income. Though most field labor contributions still come from men, women's contributions through personal income can enhance their position in decision-making within the household (Sick 1998). As mentioned by participants who already have paid positions, access to and control over their own income reduces women's financial dependency on their husbands or other family members, providing them with greater autonomy (i.e. generative power). For example, one participant, who is now divorced and works full-time

at ASOMOBI, said, "Before I only depended on what my husband gave me and things were more limited. Now, if I want something and it's something I can reach, I can get it" (BIO2). Coupled with more employment opportunities, increased profits from certification premiums would mean greater economic power for a greater number of women in the organization. Social premiums from fair trade could also be applied to group investments like more efficient machinery to process higher quality coffee and improvements to the lodge to increase visitor capacity. These assets in turn would generate more income and provide more job opportunities, and potentially enhance more members' financial independence and authority in their households.

Beyond these possible contributions to generative power, obtaining certifications like fair trade is unlikely to influence decision-making capacity and representation in leadership positions for women in ASOMOBI as they already hold this power. For example, founders decided that ASOMOBI would be an all-women's association, not to exclude men from involvement, but rather to ensure that women will always be leaders in decision-making processes. Thus, it is clear that certification schemes are not an important factor in this respect. Moreover, as with CoopeAgri, certifications alone will not affect the cultural challenges ASOMOBI members face such as persistent *machismo* attitudes; these changes must include the individual and household level.

There is some evidence that participants experience other components of the empowerment process through indirect benefits of certification schemes. For example, as mentioned by women from both organizations, following certification requirements can raise awareness of alternative "ways of being" in terms of more efficient and sustainable production

practices (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Certifications' guidelines for continual

improvement can provide women with information on other management strategies (awareness)

and help them realize their ability to successfully implement new strategies on the individual

farm level (personal power) and to achieve common goals on an organizational level (collective

power). In addition, many participants cited a sense of pride in meeting certification standards as

a benefit, which may bring them greater self-confidence (personal power) and motivation to

continue improving production practices in an ongoing process.

In the context of this study, certification schemes can facilitate components of the

empowerment process; however, direct contributions are minimal and often dependent on the

economic and social conditions at the household and organizational level, as well as in the

international coffee market. Nevertheless, as discussed below, participants experience

empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry, and CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI contribute to

the development of components of the empowerment process. The ways in which this is

accomplished are worth exploring in order to gain a deeper understanding of how women create

"pathways to empowerment" and how local organizations facilitate this process (Said-Allsopp

and Tallontire 2015:114).

5.3 Creating Pathways to Empowerment in the Costa Rican Coffee Industry:

In the following section, I address Research Question #3 (How do local coffee

organizations facilitate women's empowerment?). I draw on Rowlands' (1995, 1997) framework

to illustrate examples of how participants' involvement in their organizations contributes to

components of the empowerment process: awareness, "power within" (personal power), "power

with" (collective power"), and "power to" (generative power). Though these are presented sequentially, empowerment should be understood as a process in which each component both supports and is supported by the others (Mosedale 2005). Next, I discuss how the context of each organization influences women's experiences of empowerment, highlighting their strengths and limitations in facilitating components of the process, particularly the dynamics of mixed-gender versus all-women settings. Finally, I consider "the role of men" in women's empowerment and conclude that this is indeed an important additional component of the empowerment process for women (Ellery 2009:143).

5.3.a Raising Awareness

The first step in the process of empowerment is gaining awareness of surrounding power dynamics, one's position within those contexts, and viable alternatives (Rowlands 1995). As discussed above, participants referenced gender roles and persistent *machismo* attitudes in Costa Rican culture, particularly within the coffee industry, which often confine women to domestic duties and restrict their choices and opportunities. Once gendered power dynamics are identified, women also realize that they can act to change them and that they have options beyond the traditional roles of housewife and mother. Participants' involvement in their organizations plays a key role in raising individuals' awareness of power dynamics and possible alternatives.

<u>CoopeAgri</u>

In CoopeAgri, for example, the CDF organizes presentations and meetings for the committee's coordinators to discuss topics such as domestic violence. At one such meeting that I attended, CDF leaders arranged for a speaker to guide a discussion about aspects of *machismo*

culture that perpetuate violence against women and cause women to feel powerless to change their situation. Many participants shared stories of experiences of domestic violence, both their own and those of family and friends. The meeting ended with a presentation about how to recognize patterns of physical and psychological abuse and how to break cycles of violence in relationships and in the home. Coordinators then returned to their communities to share what they learned with female associates in their local groups.

Participants believe that the culture is changing because women are increasingly aware of their ability to enact such change and step outside of traditional roles. One CDF leader said:

> Many times in the community there are people who have great potential but they just don't know it…women today dare more to take charge, be political, take charge in associations, organized groups…they know they can…do a lot for the community, for a group, for an institution. So the culture for women today has improved a lot. (PZ14)

Women's involvement in the CDF contributes to their awareness of potential manifestations of "coercive power" in their daily lives and of alternative "ways of being" in which they can confront and overcome them (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:118, 116). Moreover, the CDF coordinators provide a network of communication for women outside of the committee, expanding their reach to as many female associates as possible.

ASOMOBI

Participants from ASOMOBI also spoke of increased awareness among women in their community. Women discussed learning to recognize *machismo* attitudes in their lives and how to "put aside those negative comments" and "defend oneself" through the examples of other members and/or in workshops held at ASOMOBI (BIO2; BIO4). Others emphasized that joining ASOMOBI made them aware of more choices for women, with one participant referring to the organization as "a door to go out…to leave the house where [we were] accustomed to

being…and work and get involved" (BIO6). Another woman, who is also a founder, explained

how involvement in ASOMOBI opened her eyes to new possibilities in her life:

> At the time I was raising my daughters, they were my world, I didn't have a different world. I hadn't been academically prepared, and for me nothing else existed. But when I joined ASOMOBI, it opened up a range of different things that I could achieve…before ASOMOBI, yes, I had a life, a family life, nothing more than caring for the children, washing clothes, things like that. There wasn't…projection, there wasn't any thought of a different future, no. I didn't think about that because, first, I was a very young woman, and second, that was my life, caring for the kids, being in the farm, nothing else. And after I joined ASOMOBI, it opened up so many things to me. (BIO5)

As in CoopeAgri, women feel that collective awareness is changing the culture for

women in Biolley. One woman said, "It's almost forgotten, this idea that the wife is only in the

house" (BIO8). Other participants indicated that both women and men are realizing alternative

"ways of being" for their families in which women have more choices outside of traditional

gender roles, largely due to opportunities provided by ASOMOBI (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire

2015:116). Awareness raised through involvement in organizations can help foster a sense of

"power within" as women gain self-confidence to undo "internalized oppression" and choose to

make perceived alternative "ways of being" a reality (Rowlands 1995:102; Said-Allsopp and

Tallontire 2015: 116).

5.3.b Fostering "Power Within" (Personal Power)

Women from both CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI expressed feeling increased self-

confidence to pursue new "ways of being" through involvement in their organizations, as

described below (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). According to Said-Allsopp and

Tallontire (2015), "seeing alternative possibilities with respect to gender relations" can lead to

personal power because it "allows women to 'contemplate alternative ways of existing and

generat[e] a belief in their own abilities to have some role in enacting change'" (McEwan and Bek 2006:1025 as quoted in Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:117). Additionally, this section highlights aspects of "empowerment" as defined by participants, including the courage to overcome fears and feeling fulfilled and secure in their own lives.

CoopeAgri

When asked what it means to "be empowered," participants from CoopeAgri described it as feeling confident and capable of achieving goals. As one woman said, to be "empowered" is "to know that you have the capacity to continue on, to leave behind the myths, the fears and know that, yes, you can" (PZ14). She believes that women in *Cantón* PZ now "feel more capable that, yes, we can do things ourselves" (PZ14). She stated this is not only because many women have had to take on more responsibilities as men have migrated, but also because organizations, including CoopeAgri, are "dedicated to giving women what they need in terms of talks [and] workshops …[and] have made women feel more informed and more supported to move forward" (PZ14). Indeed, another CDF coordinator said that as a part of the committee, she "feel[s] better, like [she] can move ahead in whatever [she] wants to do," and a third believes she has "elevated [her]self" through her participation in the CDF (PZ9; PZ3). In explaining her perspectives on empowerment, a final woman in the CDF emphasized the self-driven nature of personal power: "I believe it's like…saying 'I can do these things, I feel that I can do it…not because someone else told me, it's that I can do these things [because] *I* intend to'" (PZ10). These explicit expressions of self-confidence came from women who are directly involved in the CDF, suggesting that participation in this particular committee facilitates women's "belief in their own abilities" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:117).

Furthermore, participants spoke of overcoming fears and feeling fulfilled in their lives as part of feeling empowered. One of the committee leaders described her experience:

> Before I was very shy to speak in public, now I give talks…in the community. So that makes one feel useful, feel that through this work one can reach others…that I can convey my knowledge to others. It used to embarrass me, when I was elected for the CDF, I was in front [of a group] and I said, what am I doing here? It was a moment of crisis. And now, I am in front of people and I like what I do, because I know I am helping them realize their capabilities that are hidden. (PZ14)

Another CDF coordinator said that participating in committee events, such as the meeting we were attending that day, makes her "feel free of the house" and "liberated," and commented that to her, "empowerment" is "to be occupied" and not worrying about life's troubles (PZ13). A final participant, who is not affiliated with the CDF, described empowerment as feeling "more secure…in what you are doing, that there is a future…that if something happened, you have a solution" (PZ6). Though she said her sense of security is not necessarily related to her involvement with the cooperative, she indicated a sense of personal satisfaction being part of CoopeAgri because she feels supported by the community of associates and employees.

ASOMOBI

Women in ASOMOBI expressed feelings of increased confidence and self-esteem related to their involvement with the organization. One of the founders said, "To be empowered is to feel good about what I am doing, to know that what I am doing is beneficial not just for me but for others, too, and to feel that my self-esteem is like this (raises arms high)" (BIO5). She stated that ASOMOBI has helped increase her self-esteem because she "realized [she] could learn many things" (BIO5). Another member described empowerment as "an internal strength" and

"internal force…that can help take you very far as a person" (BIO3). A third woman reiterated this notion of empowerment as a self-driven "internal force":

> I think empowerment has to begin within oneself…I have to believe in myself, in what I'm doing, because if I don't believe in myself, how am I going to…make other people believe in what I'm doing or in what I want, or in what ASOMOBI wants? We have to learn, to know, to want, and to fight for what we are visualizing, for what we are, or for what we want to accomplish. So empowerment comes first, it has to begin with us. For me to be an empowered woman, I have to believe in myself first. (BIO9)

A final member emphasized the importance of feeling fulfilled in addition to confident, saying, "Empowerment is to see that you can do things well, that you have the ability, and to be excited and believe in yourself" (BIO4) This member went on to say, "If you feel capable…you can see everything you've accomplished and it brings satisfaction" (BIO4). Members related their involvement in ASOMOBI to these feelings of greater self-esteem and greater belief in their own capabilities.

Accompanying these expressions of self-confidence were stories of overcoming fears and feeling secure and "at peace" in their personal lives (BIO1). Similarly to CDF leaders, a founder of ASOMOBI admitted to fears of public speaking: "As a woman who's very afraid to talk, who wanted the earth to swallow me up (laughs), now those things don't scare me, to talk in public" (BIO5). Another member described how overcoming challenges reinforces her self-esteem and drives her "to continue fighting" and "makes [her] feel very useful and full and secure in [her]self to believe and fight and look for more goals" in an ongoing process (BIO9). A final participant, who is also a founder, described how her work with ASOMOBI "brings peace," saying, "when something brings you peace, that's being empowered" because "when you have peace, you can do things" (BIO1). As demonstrated in these examples, the development of personal power creates a self-perpetuating cycle in which belief in other possibilities and the

ability to "conceive oneself as able to exercise agency" lead to action, such as learning new things, overcoming fears, and striving towards new goals (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:117). These outward demonstrations of one's "internal force" and "strength" then reinforce self-confidence and can also ignite the empowerment process in others through example.

5.3.c Building "Power With" (Collective Power)

When women individually have the confidence and ability to pursue "different ways of being" through the development of personal power, they can unite together and exercise collective power to create "different ways of doing" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:117). This section explores the ways in which being part of an organized group contributes to building "power with" others, leading women to "achieve a more extensive impact than each could have had alone" (Rowlands 1995:103). Not only do women inspire and encourage one another through their relationships, thereby fostering awareness and personal power in other individuals, but they are also able to accomplish tangible collective goals.

CoopeAgri

Leaders and coordinators in the CDF discussed the importance of the committee for themselves as well as for other women in their communities. Participants spoke about their role in bringing information and trainings back to their local groups, thus expanding the network of support and opportunities for women throughout the *cantón*. One woman said, "It's important, the feeling of sharing together, we help one another, if one is in pain, if one has a problem, we give encouragement," and a leader explained how the CDF works to "generate more unity through meetings, trainings, and workshops" in all communities (PZ13; PZ14). Women in the

CDF also emphasized the significance of the committee for them personally. One coordinator mentioned that being a part of the CDF "means a lot" because she feels "supported by all of the other women" and "taken into account" (PZ9). Another described her main motivation for being in the committee: "We are all like sisters…I love it. When we meet…it's a happiness for me, being with the others, it's beautiful" (PZ3). Indeed, attending meetings and social gatherings highlighted women's sense of camaraderie and solidarity; it was clear that these relationships, which they might not otherwise have with women from different communities, were important to them.

Furthermore, women in CoopeAgri are able to achieve goals working together that they would be unable to do on their own. One of the leaders explained that in addition to the CDF and local women's groups, CoopeAgri enables them to build partnerships with other institutions in order to provide more trainings and workshops, such as health seminars and the domestic violence presentation discussed above (PZ14). Another important responsibility of the CDF is managing the credit program for women. This is separate from the cooperative's general credit program and is designated to provide micro-financing options for women to make farm and household investments or start their own business. For example, I accompanied CDF leaders on a home visit to approve a loan for a woman who wanted to buy a cow and produce dairy products for household consumption and local sale. We also stopped at a bakery that another woman had started with a loan from the CDF. These loans are available to all female associates, even if they have never participated in the CDF before, and committee leaders ensure that the women themselves utilize the loans for their own projects. Lastly, many of the local women's groups organize joint projects such as selling produce, crafts, or clothing to generate extra income. These projects would not be possible without the support and organization of a collective group.

Women in ASOMOBI experience the benefits of collective power from the support and friendship of their fellow members as well as through accomplishing common goals. Since ASOMOBI's beginning, women have been inspiring, encouraging, and teaching one another. Younger members, some of whom are founders' daughters, described how the older women have inspired them to participate and work hard for the continued success of the organization. One daughter, who is now on the tourism committee, said, "I owe everything to my mom because she made the path. She has experienced a lot of very difficult things, and she continues on, has…a vision of something more" (BIO3). Another participant mentioned how her friendships with fellow members have encouraged her to pursue personal goals, including going back to school (BIO2). Moreover, women have a strong sense of pride and happiness being part of "a group of brave women" who "see [them]selves as a family" (BIO4; BIO9). A participant shared her impression of the group before she joined and why she decided to become a member:

> I liked the way the first associates were working, the solidarity among the women…the fact of belonging to a group. When we all meet up, although in some ways we have our differences in our projects or in meetings, I feel it's very good, the relationships we have had…I feel very happy to belong to the organization. (BIO7)

This participant's acknowledgement of members having their "differences" highlights a common sentiment among ASOMOBI women. Much of the group's success can be attributed to their efforts to respect one another, especially when they disagree, in order to work together to benefit the organization and accomplish collective goals, like expanding their market for coffee and improving their tourism projects.

This ability to learn and work together to overcome challenges has always been a defining characteristic of ASOMOBI. One member explains what it was like when they began:

> We began to train ourselves and, like we say here, '*a tirarnos al agua*' (throw ourselves in the water). It's a saying, '*tirarse al agua*' is 'I don't care, I'm going [to do it], no matter what happens.' So we began '*a tirarnos al agua,*' to go to San José, talk with people, administer the projects although we didn't really know how…and in this way we learned a lot of things. For example, first we burned the coffee, then we lost coffee that had fungus, and things like that because we didn't know, but we continued, we went on, it didn't matter, here we go, we are going to continue on. (BIO5)

Their belief in a common purpose, "to provide sources of work for women…and families" and support the community, has driven them forward and allowed them to achieve things they could not on their own (BIO7). Not only is ASOMOBI a business that provides employment opportunities for community members, but also, as one participant said, as "an organized group…already legally established," ASOMOBI has "more ability to capture resources than one person alone…it has a reputation and recognition…and it can capture resources to help the community" (BIO3). Indeed, beyond accomplishing goals for the organization itself, ASOMOBI has been instrumental in community development projects including the community kitchen, the school, and the health clinic, because it attracts support from government agencies and volunteer groups that can supply more resources (Lieberman et al. 2015). Women's collective power can thus be harnessed to increase generative power for individuals and the organization.

5.3.d Establishing "Power To" (Generative Power)

The cultivation of both personal and collective power allows for increased generative power, or "power to." This third type of positive power encompasses both the amount of choices available and the "ability to make choices," and is manifested "most clearly through greater self-reliance and financial independence" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Furthermore, Rowlands (1995:102) emphasizes the importance of "bringing people who are outside the decision-making process into it" through political and economic channels in order to "maximize

the opportunities available to them." As discussed above, certification schemes contribute modestly to women's generative power; this section examines how each organization further facilitates women's "power to" make decisions, access resources and opportunities, and increase self-reliance and financial independence.

CoopeAgri

Women in CoopeAgri, particularly in the CDF, discussed their participation in decision-making processes and additionally emphasized the importance of feeling a sense of "ownership" in their personal decisions. Two women in the CDF also serve as delegates for their communities in cooperative assemblies. The board member explained the role of delegates: "[They] have to direct [the cooperative]…make decisions about the [annual] reports…the results, the operations, everything, they have to make the decisions of [how to] move forward" (PZ16). For example, the delegates decide how to use the premiums from Fairtrade. Moreover, the coordinators in the CDF are chosen by the women in their communities and are responsible for bringing the needs and interests of women to the committee and disseminating information from the committee back to their communities. On a personal level, CDF coordinators spoke of feeling empowered by knowing they are the "owner[s]" of their lives and "make [their] own decisions," which one woman said she learned through participating in the committee (PZ2; PZ4).

Another important aspect of generative power is having access to resources and opportunities, which increase the amount of choices available to women and their "ability to make choices" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Aside from programs funded by the Fairtrade premium, the cooperative and the CDF provide women with access to resources, like credit, trainings, and workshops. Opportunities to enhance financial independence and greater

access to information networks can result in increased self-reliance, another factor that participants noted as important in feeling empowered. Leaders in the CDF described how women are "more autonomous now" and "can do things for themselves, alone" without relying on others, particularly men, to support them (PZ14; PZ15). A coordinator added that "one knows now that women can advance themselves…there are women who are very brave and valiant, who move ahead," and she commented that seeing this in the women around her has impacted her views: "Now I am different…one knows more, you don't depend as much on others' support, no, one makes their own decisions…I am learning all of this" (PZ4).

ASOMOBI

As part of an all-women's organization, ASOMOBI members are at the forefront of decision-making processes. They, too, follow a democratic process in which all members vote to elect committee and board members, and representatives collectively make decisions for the organization. Participants again noted the importance of mutual respect and consideration of everyone's input. One woman said, "I have a voice! And also a vote …I know I will be listened to. It will be a discussion, but I know that they will listen" (BIO3). Another participant commented, "We don't always all agree with each other, but that's what it's about in the committees, defend your ideas and discuss them with respect towards everyone" (BIO7). Members' active involvement in decision-making processes contributes to their feeling of ownership over the organization and pride in the decisions they make. One founder explained how even though she does not have an education beyond primary school, she feels empowered through ASOMOBI because she "created it…and [she] feel[s] that ASOMOBI is [hers]" (BIO1).

Another woman expressed that empowerment is "to feel like the owner…that each one of us feels like the owner of [ASOMOBI]" (BIO8). A final member added:

> It's a way of feeling that we as a group of women make our own decisions…that we know that the decisions that we make are by our own hand…it's to feel that our opinion matters, that our decisions matter a lot, and that we feel it's something we have done well and that we continue improving. (BIO7)

These comments demonstrate that women's sense of ownership over ASOMOBI and over the decisions they make is an important factor that adds to their experience of empowerment.

Through their collective decision-making, ASOMOBI women have worked hard to increase access to resources and opportunities and create more choices for their members, families, and those in the community. As mentioned, ASOMOBI's main goal is to provide a source of employment in an area where jobs are scarce, mainly for women, but also for their families. Additionally, the presence of the organization draws resources and information to the area through visitors, volunteers, and government-sponsored training programs. These aspects contribute to women's feelings of increased self-reliance. One of the founders explained what the situation was like when they decided to begin ASOMOBI:

> The fact was that [women] felt that they couldn't do things. One of the things that one learns is to…nurture good self-esteem as a woman and to know that one can do things. Yes, because sometimes when…they don't have anything to take hold of, they are going to think that they depend solely on a partner, and no. You have to know that you can do things. And ASOMOBI taught us that. (BIO1)

A younger member also described how her involvement in ASOMOBI resulted in greater self-reliance:

> The income I had was from…their father. But since I am working here in ASOMOBI, I feel fulfilled because I earn my own income…I have what I generate from ASOMOBI. Although it's occasional, it's really nice that I can earn something…The hope is, I dream to have an opportunity to buy some land and be able to sell my own coffee to the association…I think that if one has accomplished leaving, for example, my husband told me that I wasn't good for anything. When we separated, he told me, you will leave and in

three months you'll come back crying because how are you going to do everything with the kids, how are you going to sustain yourself, you've always been supported. So…from that day onward, I've never sought him out and I don't think I ever will. So I think that, yes, I feel empowered at least in that respect because it's not true, one can live without depending on other people. (BIO9)

This woman's story exemplifies how awareness of her ex-husband's negative "power over" her and of viable alternatives, development of greater self-esteem and belief in herself, and employment opportunities provided by ASOMOBI combined to create a "pathway to empowerment" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116).

Through raising awareness and facilitating the development of positive "power within," "power with," and "power to," women's involvement in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI enables them to overcome negative "power over" and to create "pathways to empowerment" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). These pathways, however, are not linear; a truly "empowering situation" necessitates that all three forms of positive power build upon and reinforce one another in a self-sustaining process (Rowlands 1995:103). Said-Allsopp and Tallontire (2015:118) thus describe the "situation of empowerment" as a "positive power spiral" in which the "possession of one form of power facilitates women's access to and exercise of other forms of power." As shown above, when women are *aware* of alternative "ways of being" and feel confident in their abilities (*personal power*), they unite and work together (*collective power*) to make decisions and increase their choices and ability to choose (*generative power*). This then enhances self-reliance, possibly resulting in a greater sense of self-esteem (*personal power*) and inspiring others to believe in their own personal power. In this sense, "empowerment" is not a "zero-sum" game in which "the more power one person has, the less the other has." Rather, "empowerment" is the capacity to believe in oneself and achieve personal goals while also "stimulating activity in

others and raising morale," thus facilitating the empowerment process within someone else and working collectively for the benefit of all (Rowlands 1997:9-10, 12).

5.3.e Facilitating Women's Empowerment in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI

A final characteristic is that the empowerment of one individual, group, or organization must not "infring[e] upon the rights of others" and instead should serve to "support the empowerment of others in the community" (McWhirter 1991 as quoted in Rowlands 1995:103). It is evident that when women are empowered, they contribute to the empowerment of other women, families, and community members, and that communities and organizations such as CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI likewise play a role in women's experiences of empowerment (FAO 2011). The following section considers the role of each organization in facilitating empowerment within mixed-gender and all-women's contexts, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of each, and examines the role of men in women's empowerment.

<u>Scale and Structure</u>

Just as scale influences the impact of certification schemes in each organization, so does it influence how CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI contribute to women's empowerment. For example, CoopeAgri has the ability to offer female associates more resources to enhance generative power. The credit program has been successful in providing women with the opportunity to finance their own small-scale enterprises, which may eventually become self-sustaining sources of income and opportunities to work outside the home. Furthermore, women have access to trainings and workshops available to all cooperative associates as well as programs specifically for women. The CDF serves as an additional network of information, support, and opportunities

connecting women from communities throughout the *cantón*. As shown, this committee fosters a sense of personal power, facilitates participants' collective power, and allows them to achieve common goals that increase generative power.

Conversely, ASOMOBI's capacity to access resources and generate opportunities for its members is more limited. Women have been successful in expanding the organization despite numerous hardships, all the while offering employment and training opportunities and attracting outside support that the community might not otherwise have. Nonetheless, all 10 participants said that a main challenge and continuing goal is to be able to employ more women and create more economic development in Biolley. Currently, ASOMOBI lacks established international trade partnerships to sell greater quantities of coffee, and visitation from tourists and volunteers is sporadic. This limits the organization's ability to provide stable full-time employment for more than a handful of members, diminishing contributions to generative power.

While CoopeAgri's large scale may enhance its contributions to generative power, the structure and scope of the cooperative may limit the development of other forms of power. For example, despite modest increases over the years in women's participation in decision-making processes and leadership roles, female associates remain underrepresented in these areas. In this instance, a mixed-gender setting continues to favor men over women in terms of the organization's management and opportunities to participate in cooperative programs. Key informants commented that women do not seek out such opportunities as much as men, but it is unclear why. As discussed, women's lack of involvement may be related to cultural norms and gender roles positioning them in the home while men are more active in political and economic roles within cooperative (Gopal et al. n.d.; Moser 1989). Moving forward, the cooperative will

need to identify why women are less involved and determine ways to address this situation in order to enhance gender equality and women's empowerment in CoopeAgri.

It appears that, aside from the female board member's experiences, the main area in which women expressed feeling personally and collectively empowered in CoopeAgri is within the women's committee. The eight women directly involved in the CDF expressed more explicit experiences of empowerment, such as increased self-confidence and collective support, related to their involvement in the cooperative than non-CDF members. As with knowledge of certification schemes, CoopeAgri's scale also seems to limit associates' awareness of programs like the CDF. Five of the eight participants who are not involved in the committee said they had not heard of it or did not know much about it, indicating limitations in the committee's ability to facilitate empowerment for all female associates. Reasons for lack of knowledge are unclear from this research. One participant simply stated that she was uninterested in being involved in committees (PZ11); but there could be external factors limiting women's awareness and/or ability to participate that warrant the attention of leaders in the CDF and the cooperative as a whole.

ASOMOBI members seem to benefit from the organization's small scale and all-women designation when it comes to decision-making and participation. To reiterate, participants emphasized that ASOMOBI is not an all-women's organization for the purpose of excluding men, but rather to ensure that women are at the forefront of decision-making processes and management activities. ASOMOBI members take great pride in the fact that the organization offers employment opportunities for men, organizes programs for children and families, and contributes to the overall wellbeing of the community. Furthermore, ASOMOBI members conveyed a greater sense of ownership and personal pride in the organization than women in

CoopeAgri because the small scale lends itself to more direct involvement and necessitates greater contributions from each member.

Moreover, ASOMOBI's history as an all-women's organization is important to note when considering members' experiences of empowerment. As women discussed in the documentary, *A Small Section of the World*, Biolley and surrounding communities experienced high rates of male outmigration in response to the coffee crises in the 1990s, leaving women alone to care for their children, homes, and farms in a rural area with very few employment opportunities (Lieberman et al. 2015). After realizing that more traditional sources of income for women (e.g. sewing) would not be viable to sustain their livelihoods, women decided to pursue coffee because they believed they could offer producers better prices and create a more valuable finished product. A combination of necessity and determination to improve the lives of their families and others in the community led women in Biolley to form ASOMOBI and to fight for the continued success of their women-owned and operated business in a traditionally male industry (Lieberman et al. 2015). In summary, the examples in this study suggest that compared to the mixed-gender cooperative, a distinct women's organization, like ASOMOBI, or a distinct women's group, such as the CDF, have greater capacity to facilitate components of the empowerment process for women, particularly within a male-dominated culture and industry.

The Role of Men

The observation above emphasizes the need to consider "the role of men" in women's empowerment (Ellery 2009:143). Participants' experiences in both organizations imply that men exert considerable influence in women's experiences of empowerment, which can be negative or positive. A few women from ASOMOBI described situations in which their (now ex) husbands

exercised "coercive power" over them, discouraging them from seeking education or employment opportunities and putting them down for wanting to pursue alternative "ways of being" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). On a subtler level, as CoopeAgri's board member indicated, it is likely that household-level situations collectively result in women being held back within the cooperative and the coffee industry in general. For example, while husbands may not explicitly prevent their wives from participating, it is implicitly expected that women care for the home and children while men take on income-generating and decision-making roles (Gopal et al. n.d.; Moser 1989).

In contrast, there are examples in which men have positively contributed to women's empowerment, signifying that their role is a necessary component when examining women's empowerment and identifying ways to enhance it. As made evident in numerous informal conversations, ASOMOBI members highly praise the husbands and fathers who were instrumental in helping the organization get started and who continue to support it however they can. Indeed, I noticed that a couple men were consistently present at meetings and trainings to offer their perspectives and learn alongside the women; nonetheless, final management decisions are left up to the women. ASOMOBI's example is consistent with an assertion made by Ellery (2009:147) in her research of women's empowerment in an all-women's coffee cooperative:

> Women-only initiatives allow women the opportunity to participate in programs that lead to their control over resources, yet require the support of men for this participation to occur and for women to experience the processes of their own empowerment.

ASOMOBI demonstrates a true "situation of empowerment" in which men's participation, including enjoying the organization's benefits, does not inhibit the empowerment process for others, namely, women (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:118). The reverse is also true: the formation of this all-women's organization has not diminished men's ability to experience

positive forms of power, but instead, has enhanced it through greater access to resources and opportunities for economic and social development for all.

Finally, women in both CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI indicated that the support of their husbands, fathers, and other family members was important in both their decision to join and in their ability to participate more in their respective organizations. For example, one of the CDF leaders shared that it was her husband who encouraged her to join the cooperative and the women's committee. Moreover, when an opportunity arose for her to travel to Panama as a representative, it was her husband who urged her to do it, even though it meant leaving her small children for a week: "If it weren't for [my husband], I never would have done it because women in [rural communities] are very tied to the children, to the house" (PZ15). It is clear that women's capacity to break from traditional gender roles and pursue alternative "ways of being" is influenced by their household-level situations in which their relationships with men are a key factor (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). For this reason, it is crucial that local-level organizations like CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI and international initiatives like certification schemes take male perspectives into account when addressing gender equality and women's empowerment.

VI. Conclusions and Reflections

6.1 Conclusions:

This research sought to illuminate women's experiences and perspectives in the Costa Rican coffee industry, identify their perceptions on the benefits and challenges of certification

schemes, determine if and how certification schemes create pathways to women's empowerment, and explore if and how women experience empowerment in their local organizations. Results revealed that in addition to the economic and environmental challenges plaguing many Costa Rican coffee producers, women confront barriers within the industry due to culturally ascribed gender roles and social norms. This research also suggests that while certification schemes may bring minimal benefits to women in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI, there exist challenges, particularly for independent small-scale producers and organizations, which limit certifications' economic impact. Moreover, though certification schemes contribute modestly to increased generative power and indirectly to other components of the empowerment process, the capacity to influence the social and cultural roles, norms, and conditions inhibiting women's empowerment remains limited. Finally, participants' involvement in CoopeAgri and ASOMOBI facilitates pathways to empowerment, but the scale, structure, and the role of men in organizations (as well as households and communities) should be taken into account when evaluating if and how women experience empowerment in their local organizations.

Costa Rica ranks high on global scales of gender equality in education and politics; yet, coffee remains a male-dominated industry (Osborne 2013; Sick 1998). Women have become more involved in roles beyond family field labor, as evidenced by the increase of women in leadership roles in CoopeAgri (e.g. 19% increase in the number of female delegates between 2004-2016; first female board member elected in 2004) and by ASOMOBI's success as Costa Rica's only all-women's coffee processing and roasting facility. Nonetheless, men continue to have greater control over land and resources in coffee production and in the management of coffee organizations (Lieberman 2015; Sick 1998). In the context of this study, land ownership and farm-level decision-making is male-dominated, as is representation in leadership roles in the

mixed-gender cooperative (e.g. women comprise 43% of CoopeAgri's associates, but represent only 20% of delegates and one of the seven board members). These findings are consistent with other studies, suggesting that barriers to women's equal participation and representation persist throughout the coffee industry (IWCA 2014; Lyon et al. 2010; Sick 1998; Ronchi 2002).

Participants in this study expressed mixed perspectives regarding on international (fair trade) and national (BAE, CST) certification schemes, indicating that they experience some direct and indirect benefits, but that these are tempered by certification costs, uncontrollable market forces, and local social and economic conditions. Other studies examining the benefits and challenges of certification schemes have emphasized the context-specific nature of their findings, highlighting the need for continued research to determine the short and long-term impacts on producers in different settings (Arnould et al. 2009; Bacon 2005; Barham and Weber 2012; Lyon et al. 2010; Valkila 2009). Furthermore, by considering the views of women who do not yet have an international certification but are contemplating pursuing one, this research offers producers' perceptions of anticipated benefits and more importantly, reveals significant barriers to entering into certification schemes. In addition to monitoring impacts on certified producers and organizations, more research on non-certified producers and producer groups could uncover certification schemes' limitations in reaching intended beneficiaries and provide insight into how to overcome these barriers.

Indeed, a main area of concern identified in this research is the potential for certification schemes to exclude independent small-scale producers and organizations with inhibitory costs and requirements. This fact, coupled with variations in certified producers' experiences, signifies potential problems with international certification schemes' approach to addressing market challenges in the coffee industry. A global standardized set of requirements and procedures may

reduce confusion for both producers and consumers, which is arguably necessary to encourage

producer participation and increase consumer awareness and demand (Jaffee 2012). However,

this component inhibits certification schemes' ability to adapt to context-specific conditions. For

example, as noted by participants, neither fair trade nor organic certifications account for the

high costs of production in Costa Rica compared to neighboring countries like Nicaragua.

Producers in both countries are expected to meet the same requirements and any potential

benefits are uniformly applied, regardless of economic differences. While the price premiums

may meaningfully contribute to economic stability for Nicaraguan producers, higher prices for

certified coffee often do not outweigh the higher costs of production in Costa Rica (Bacon 2005).

Furthermore, certification schemes' requirements do not account for differing conditions

within a country. CoopeAgri and other large cooperatives in Costa Rica have the financial and

human capital to pay for and manage certifications at little to no cost for individual producers

(Ronchi 2002). Yet, for a small organization like ASOMOBI, the money, time, and energy

required to obtain and maintain an international certification are inhibitory even if the

organization meets all other requirements. More research is needed to identify ways in which

international certification schemes can increase their adaptability in order to include more

producers and organizations without increasing confusion or burdensome documentation and

audit processes. Additional research could also aid in identifying and examining other market

alternatives for coffee producers and producer organizations, such as direct marketing or product

differentiation factors (e.g. quality, regional characteristics). Research exploring the potential

benefits and limitations of such alternatives could provide producers with more options for

increasing their market power in a consumer-driven industry.

As indicated by participants, another major factor limiting certification schemes' effectiveness is lack of consumer awareness, demand, and willingness to pay for certified coffee. Even for an organization like CoopeAgri that does not consider certification costs and processes burdensome, benefits from the Fairtrade certification are restricted by uncontrollable market conditions. This demonstrates the need for further investigation on the consuming end to identify why demand for certified coffee consistently lags behind supply and how this imbalance could be shifted to increase benefits for producers (Potts et al. 2014).

In addition to examining the general impacts of certification schemes, research is needed to assess if and how they contribute to women's empowerment. Research to date, including this study, indicates that certification schemes' capacity to increase gender equality and women's empowerment is limited by contextual social and cultural conditions (Ellery 2009; Lyon et al. 2010). Researchers and certification agencies alike recognize contradictions, such as the focus on male-dominated cash crops or requirements that add burden to women's workload and responsibilities, which not only limit their ability to improve conditions for women, but may also play a part in perpetuating inequalities (Fairtrade International 2016; Lyon et al 2010; Rice 2010). As shown in this study, though certification schemes can set standards at the organization level and bring modest benefits to women, there is no evidence that they influence cultural norms and household-level conditions that may prevent women's full and equal representation, participation, and utilization of benefits. For these reasons, certification schemes' contributions to women's empowerment remain limited.

Results from this study reflect the "gender gap" evidenced in agricultural communities around the world in which women's access to and control over resources and participation in decision-making processes are restricted by gender roles and cultural norms (FAO 2011:23).

121

While similar patterns exist across the globe, site-specific research is necessary to identify challenges and barriers within particular social, economic, and political settings. Women's varied experiences based on context-specific conditions must be considered in order to effectively enhance gender equality and empowerment, implying that reliance on "cross-cultural indicators, for instance the United Nations Development Programme," or international certification scheme standards, "may fail to adequately capture empowerment processes that occur in different contexts" (Khumalo et al. 2015:54). Moreover, Mosedale (2005:244) emphasizes that "empowerment cannot be bestowed by a third party; [r]ather those who would become empowered must claim it." Therefore, it is important to assess certification schemes, and other entities that seek to "empower" women, in their role as facilitators of empowerment, not as its creators. This perspective necessarily constrains the ability of external entities to directly "empower" others, as empowerment must ultimately be derived from within each individual within the scope of their personal circumstances.

The notion that empowerment needs to be self-driven and self-directed raises an important question: What should the role of external entities like international certification schemes and local organizations be in promoting women's empowerment? Results of this study suggest that the broad-scale, top-down approach of international certification schemes is of limited effectiveness in contributing to the empowerment process because it cannot account for local factors. It is therefore imperative to seek input from local organizations and communities where certification standards are being implemented to determine compatibility with social and economic practices (Lyon et al. 2010; Rice 2010). Research to date suggests that global standardized requirements and processes are not compatible with all situations, again emphasizing that certification schemes should focus on increasing adaptability while still

maintaining some recognizable uniformity. Indeed, it appears that Fairtrade International's new Gender Strategy incorporates consideration of local contexts and aims to engage actors along the entire chain of production from local producer organizations to international certifying entities in facilitating gender equality and women's empowerment. Detailed monitoring and systematic analysis of implementation processes and resulting impacts on women in various settings will be critical in determining the viability of certification schemes in achieving these goals.

If international certification schemes are limited in enhancing women's empowerment, perhaps local organizations are in a better position to facilitate this process. This research and other studies have highlighted key considerations with regards to the role of local organizations in women's empowerment, including the notion of "women-only" versus mixed-gender settings and the "role of men" (Ellery 2009:143). Participants in this study appear to experience more components of the empowerment process in "women-only" environments, i.e. ASOMOBI and the CDF. Women in these groups more explicitly expressed awareness of surrounding power dynamics, feelings of self-confidence and personal ability, collective support and capacity to achieve goals, and decision-making authority and self-reliance than CoopeAgri participants outside of the CDF. This is not to say that these women do not feel empowered in their lives, but based on Rowlands' framework, their involvement in CoopeAgri does not seem to contribute to their sense of empowerment to the same extent as participants in ASOMOBI and the CDF.

Nonetheless, as asserted by Ellery (2009), participants in all-women's initiatives experience unique challenges. Women in ASOMOBI faced significant negative pushback from their families and the community when they began, including some men's resistance to women's involvement in an organization that "[took] them outside of the home" (Ellery 2009:59). To this day, they struggle with prevailing *machismo* attitudes that limit women to domestic duties and

maintain coffee as the "domain of men" (Sick 1998:193). Women in CoopeAgri seem to benefit from their involvement in a large mixed-gender cooperative with relatively easy access to resources compared to ASOMOBI. Women in the CDF appear to further benefit from their participation in an all-women's committee, the only one of its kind among Costa Rican coffee cooperatives. However, though not explicitly discussed by participants, it is possible that the presence of the CDF in fact limits women in other areas of the cooperative. The CDF could be perceived as the "solution" to gender disparities in CoopeAgri, diminishing the need for further efforts to more fully integrate women into all aspects of the cooperative's management. More research is needed to assess the dynamics of all-women's initiatives versus mixed-gender settings in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

The circumstances within each organization, all-women's or mixed-gender, highlight the need to consider the role of men. This research found that men contribute positively and negatively to women's experiences of empowerment in both settings, which is consistent with other studies (Ellery 2009; Lyon et al. 2010; Rice 2010). More attention must be given to how men can be actively involved in facilitating women's empowerment. Not only must women be aware of power dynamics and viable alternatives, but men, too, must recognize other "ways of being" in which their wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters are not confined by specific gender roles and cultural norms (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116). Moreover, shifts in the cultural view of men's roles in the home could liberate women to participate in other activities, thereby further cultivating forms of positive power and creating "pathways to empowerment" (Said-Allsopp and Tallontire 2015:116).

6.2 Reflections:

This research comprised an in-depth case study of two coffee organizations in southern Costa Rica. The use of qualitative methods may have facilitated a deeper understanding of women's experiences and perspectives, which have been largely overlooked within the coffee industry and in discussions of certification schemes. Furthermore, these methods allowed for greater flexibility than quantitative methods to delve into topics of most interest to participants and better understand "patterns in *how* women *experience*" life in the Costa Rican coffee industry and the meanings they attribute to certification schemes and empowerment (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:45). A qualitative approach was appropriate for achieving stated research objectives and, though results cannot be generalized, findings of this study contribute to our understanding of women's experiences and perspectives in the coffee industry, and conclusions could be extrapolated to other cases "based on fittingness," or the "'similarity between…contexts'" (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2011:262). Nevertheless, the limitations to this study must be considered.

There were numerous components of international fieldwork that proved challenging. Language and interpretation are key factors in cross-cultural social science research, and the researcher must evaluate the potential effects of different approaches to multi-lingual challenges (Gibb and Iglesias 2017). The first challenge was to consider the trade-offs of whether or not to use an interpreter. I chose not to use one for a few reasons, the first being purely pragmatic as I did not have the resources to hire an interpreter. More importantly, I chose to refrain from using an interpreter in order to reduce the levels of data interpretation. In some ways, this proved challenging because, although I am proficient in Spanish and have experience with the language

nuances of Costa Rica in particular, it is my second language, and this inevitably affected data collection, interpretation, and analysis. On the other hand, I was the only level of interpretation, thus eliminating the potential influence of another person's "filter." Furthermore, an interpreter's presence in interviews could have affected my relationship with participants and impacted what they chose to share with me.

Although there was no interpreter and I attempted to keep interviews private, there were a few instances in which other people were present during interviews due to both logistical reasons and following socially acceptable behavior. For example, I was interviewing a woman on her porch and her neighbor who had introduced us was also there; later, the participants' parents came to join us, and the woman deferred to her father to answer a question more than once. I would reiterate that I was interested in *her* response while trying not to be rude to her family, but felt I could not insist on a private interview. Some of the interviews with CDF coordinators took place in the group's conference room before a meeting because that was the only opportunity I would have to speak with them. There were other women in the room conversing amongst themselves whose presence and the fact that they were fellow committee members may or may not have influenced participants' responses. There is no way of knowing for sure if or how the presence of others affected data collection. However, I never had the impression that participants were reluctant to answer questions fully and truthfully because other people were present.

Another factor for consideration is my decision to use an audio-recorder during interviews. As part of the verbal consent process, I asked participants if they would mind the use of a recorder and explained that it was only for my use to aid in translation. While a few hesitated slightly before agreeing, the vast majority said it was fine, and as the interview progressed, it seemed as though the recorder was mostly forgotten. I felt an audio-recorder was

necessary for me, especially working in a second language, to accurately and completely capture participants' responses and for easy reference throughout analysis, thus reducing the potential for misinterpretation. I also felt that an audio-recorder, once turned on and set aside, was less distracting than note-taking and would help me focus fully on the conversation. Though I never had the impression that the recorder influenced interviews, its presence nonetheless may have affected some participants' comfort and willingness to respond openly.

One participant asked me to review the questions with her before turning on the recorder. She also mentioned that CoopeAgri members are not supposed to speak ill of the cooperative, calling into question how open and honest all CoopeAgri participants felt they could be. However, none of the other CoopeAgri associates mentioned this and none, including this one, seemed hesitant or reluctant to share their experiences and opinions. A similar point of consideration in ASOMOBI's case is that fact that all participants, and indeed all members, are part of a very small and tight-knit organization and community. Most spoke of this as a positive, emphasizing mutual respect and open and honest communication within the group, and again, I never had the impression that participants were holding back. Nevertheless, despite my assurances of confidentiality and privacy, it is possible that some participants may have felt wary sharing any potential concerns or complaints because of the group's dynamics.

I also faced challenges due to time and resource constraints that impacted how participants were selected and how interviews were conducted. As discussed above, I relied on chain referral and accessibility for participant selection, so results reflect the experiences and perspectives of more active and involved members of each organization. Furthermore, because I relied on other people to introduce me to participants and help arrange interviews, I rarely had much control over when and where interviews were held. Lastly, as is common in Costa Rican

culture, many interviews were arranged very last minute, leaving me with little time to build rapport with some participants, particularly those in CoopeAgri. The fact that women had little time to get to know me or prepare to be interviewed may have influenced our conversations by potentially reducing participants' comfort and trust and resulting in less open and thorough responses. Again, it is impossible to know the impacts of such circumstances.

Besides limitations in the logistics of data collection, the approach of this study was limited because, with the exception of one key informant, I chose to only interview women. This decision was appropriate for achieving stated research objectives, but it does not allow for a gender analysis. I did not interview men, and therefore, I cannot speak to how they view coffee certification schemes, empowerment, or the role of the organizations in their communities, and I cannot draw conclusions from comparisons between men's views and experiences and those of women. Rather, this research serves as an exploratory case study to gain a preliminary understanding of women's experiences and perspectives, which is sparse in the literature. Future research could build upon the findings of this study and conduct thorough gender analyses to broaden our understanding of women's experiences and perspectives on certification schemes and empowerment in the Costa Rican coffee industry.

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Appendix A.

Interview Guide for CoopeAgri, Pérez Zeledón, San José, Costa Rica

Sample: female associates of CoopeAgri
- Participants identified with the help of a CoopeAgri board member, members of el Comité de Desarrollo de la Familia (CDF), and a participant who was approached by me in the main office in San Isidro.

Explanation of Research/Verbal Consent: My name is Laura and I am a student from the University of Montana in the US. For my thesis, I am interested in the opinions and perspectives of women coffee producers about coffee production, certification programs, like Fair Trade, and cooperatives, like CoopeAgri. I am also interested in your thoughts on empowerment as a woman and associate of a cooperative.

If you would like to stop the interview at any time or don't want to answer a particular question, please let me know. Is it ok if I use a recorder during our conversation? This is only for me to help me with translation later on and recordings will be deleted at the end of my project. I will not be using names or any other identifying details (*if verbal consent is given, turn on recorder*).

10/5-10/10 – PILOT INTERVIEWS
- 3 Key Informants (KIs): 2 CDF leaders; 1 CoopeAgri board member
    - 1 male employee in charge of certifications was asked different questions
- 7 associates: 2 CDF coordinators; 5 non-CDF members

11/17-11/28 – Interviews with CoopeAgri associates
- 16 associates (including follow-up interviews with the 3 KIs): 1 board member; 8 CDF leaders/coordinators; 7 non-CDF members

General Opening Questions:
1. In which community do you live?
2. How many hectares is your farm? Is all of this for coffee?
3. Do you produce anything else?
    a. Is this to sell or for household consumption?
4. How long have you been producing coffee?
5. Why do you produce coffee?
6. Do you think there are challenges of producing coffee?
    a. With diseases or plagues? How do you manage these?
    b. In the market?
7. What are the costs of production? i.e. what do you have to pay for?
    a. Is coffee profitable for you?
    b. Does the cooperative help producers in any way when prices are low?

Background Questions:
8. What is your marital status?
    a. What does your spouse do?
9. Who is the owner of your finca?
    a. Who is the owner of the harvest?
    b. How did you/they acquire the finca? (e.g. inheritance, bought)
10. Who else lives in your house?
    a. Do you have children outside the home?
        i. *If yes*: what do they do?
    b. Are your children also associates of CoopeAgri?
    c. Do you hire workers?
11. How many years did you attend school?
    a. Your husband?
    b. Children?
    c. How did you learn about coffee production and the management of a finca?
    d. Do your children have an interest in coffee production?
12. What is the main income for your household?
    a. Do you have others? Whose?
    b. Do you have your own income?
13. What are your responsibilities with the finca?
    a. Are you in charge of delivering the harvest?
    b. What are your responsibilities in the house?
    c. Do you have other responsibilities in the community?
14. How do you make decisions about the finca? Household?
15. How do you make decisions about the income?
    a. Do you have control over your own income or part of an income?
16. In your opinion, are there challenges for women who work in coffee?
    a. Have you experienced any personally?
    b. In your opinion, what is the culture like for women in Pérez Zeledón?

Involvement with CoopeAgri:
17. How long have you been an associate of CoopeAgri?
18. Why did you decide to join CoopeAgri?
19. What did your spouse/family think?
20. What do you have to do to be an associate of CoopeAgri?
    a. Are there costs?
    b. Do you have other responsibilities within CoopeAgri?
21. What are the advantages of belonging to CoopeAgri?
    a. What does the cooperative do for coffee producers?
    b. What have been the advantages for you?
    c. Are there economic benefits? Social benefits?
22. Have you had opportunities as an associate that you may not have otherwise had? (e.g. learn more about coffee production, participate in meetings)
    a. Is it easy for you to participate in meetings and activities?
23. Do you think CoopeAgri has had an impact for women in particular? How?

Comité de Desarrollo de la Familia (CDF):

24. Do you know about the Committee for Family Development?
    a. *If yes*: What do you know about it?
    b. Have you benefited from this committee in any way? How?
    c. Why do you think it's important for the cooperative to have a women's committee?
25. What has been the impact of CoopeAgri and/or the CDF for you?

Empowerment:

26. In your opinion, what does it mean to be empowered?
    a. In what ways do you feel empowered?
27. Do you think the cooperative has had an impact in these areas for you?

Fair Trade Certification (Comercio Justo):

28. Do you know about the Fair Trade certification that the cooperative has?
    a. *If yes*: What do you know about this?
    b. Do you think there are advantages for producers?
    c. For women in particular?
    d. For you personally?
    e. Do you think there are disadvantages?
29. Do you have any other certification for your coffee?
    a. Why or why not?
    b. Are you interested in other certifications? Why or why not?
30. Anything else you would like to share about your experiences as a coffee producer and associate of CoopeAgri?

Appendix B.

Interview Guide for ASOMOBI, Buenos Aires, Puntarenas, Costa Rica

Sample: women who are members of ASOMOBI (Association of Organized Women of Biolley)
- Participants identified with the help of key informants in ASOMOBI.

Explanation of Research/Verbal Consent: My name is Laura and I am a student from the University of Montana in the US. For my thesis, I am interested in the opinions and perspectives of women who work in coffee about coffee production and processing, certification programs, and associations, like ASOMOBI. I am also interested in your experiences as a woman who works in coffee about some of the challenges you may have faced and what kind of impact ASOMOBI has had in your life.

If you would like to stop the interview at any time or don't want to answer a particular question, please let me know. Is it ok if I use a recorder during our conversation? This is only for me to help me with translation later on and recordings will be deleted at the end of my project. I will not be using names or any other identifying details (*if verbal consent is given, turn on recorder*).

9/29-10/1 – Pilot Interviews
- 3 Key Informants (KIs): 1 founder; 1 administrator; 1 board member
- 2 members

2/13-3/3 – Interviews with ASOMOBI Members
- 10 members (including follow-up interviews with the 3 KIs)

General Opening Questions:
1. Do you produce coffee?
   a. *If yes*: how many hectares do you have in coffee?
      i. How long have you been producing coffee?
      ii. Why do you produce coffee?
   b. *If no*: did you produce coffee in the past?
      i. *If yes*: why don't you anymore?
2. What do you think are some of the challenges for coffee producers here right now?
   a. *If produce*: do you have problems with disease? In the market?
      i. *If yes*: how do you manage for this?
   b. *If produce*: what are your costs of production? i.e. what do you have to pay for?
   c. *If produce*: is coffee profitable for you right now?
3. Do you produce anything else?
   a. Is this to sell or for the house?
   b. Who owns the land on which you produce?
   c. How did you/they acquire it?

Background Questions:
4. What is your marital status?
    a. *If married*: what does your spouse do?
5. What are the sources of income for your house?
    a. Do you have your own income or control over part of an income?
6. Who else lives in your house?
    a. Do you have children outside the home?
        i. *If yes*: what do they do?
7. How many years did you attend school?
    a. Your husband?
    b. Children?
    c. Do your children have an interest in coffee production?
8. Do you work in the finca at all?
    a. *If yes*: what do you do?
    b. *If no*: who does?
    c. Do you hire workers?
9. What are your responsibilities around the house?
10. How do you make decisions about the finca? Household?
11. How do you make decisions about the income?

General about ASOMOBI:
12. How long have you been a member of ASOMOBI?
13. Why did you decide to join?
    a. *If founder*: why did you decide to start ASOMOBI?
    b. What do you have to do to join?
14. What did your spouse/family think when you joined/started ASOMOBI?
15. What are your responsibilities at ASOMOBI now?
    a. What have you done in the past for ASOMOBI?
    b. How did you learn to do all these things?
    c. Do you have other responsibilities in the community? Work or volunteer?

Life before ASOMOBI:
16. What was life like for you before ASOMOBI?
    a. What did you do?
    b. Did you have an income?
    c. *If produce coffee*: to whom did you sell your coffee?
17. In general, what was the culture like in Biolley for women?
18. What did men think when ASOMOBI began? And now?
19. *If founder*: Why was ASOMOBI formed?
20. *If founder*: What were some of the challenges the group had?
21. *If founder*: How did you overcome these?
22. What are some ongoing challenges the group faces? How are you overcoming them?

Since ASOMOBI:
23. Has your life changed since you joined ASOMOBI? How?
24. Has your economic situation changed at all?

25. *If produce coffee*: have your production practices changed at all?
26. Through ASOMOBI, have you learned new skills or knowledge?
    a. How? (i.e. classes, trainings, learning by doing)
27. How has the community changed since ASOMOBI started?
    a. Has the general economic situation changed?
    b. Are there more opportunities for people in community?
    c. Are people in general happy ASOMOBI is here even if they aren't involved?
28. Do you participate in decision-making with ASOMOBI?
    a. Do you feel comfortable contributing your ideas and opinions?
    b. Do you attend meetings or are you/have you been part of a committee?
29. Why do you think it's important to have an all-women's organization?
30. What are ASOMOBI's goals moving forward?
31. Why do you think ASOMOBI has become an example for others around the world?

Empowerment:
32. In your opinion, what does it mean to be empowered?
33. Do you feel empowered in your life? In what ways?
34. What are some of your goals? Have these changed from before ASOMOBI?
35. Do you feel you are able to accomplish your goals?
36. Do you feel your involvement in ASOMOBI has impacted this at all?

Certifications:
37. Are you familiar with the certifications that ASOMOBI has or is working towards? (i.e. BAE, CST, fair trade)
    a. What do you know about these?
38. Do you know about any other certifications? Which ones?
39. In general, what do you think are the advantages of certifications?
    a. Disadvantages?
40. Do you think other coffee certifications could help ASOMOBI?
    a. Why or why not?
41. What do you hope for or expect?
    a. Do you anticipate any drawbacks?
42. Anything else you'd like to share about your experiences or about ASOMOBI?