

Case Study

Bukonzo Joint Cooperative Union & TWIN: Gender Action Learning in coffee production in Uganda

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A. Overview of TWIN

1. Please give a brief overview of your company. Size, type, reach.



TWIN is a non-profit organisation which owns a trading company Twin Trading. This structure gives Twin the ability to combine trading, marketing, programmes and advocacy in a way that builds market systems that can create better livelihoods for farming groups growing coffee cocoa and nuts. They work to connect buyers, roasters, donors and farmer cooperatives.

Twin has been working with small holder producer organisations since 1985. Alongside coffee cooperatives in Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Tanzania, Twin were pioneers of the Fair Trade coffee movement in the 1990s, working with smallholder farmers to develop better market opportunities through trade.

Globally, Twin works with 59 farmer organisations representing over 400,000 small holder farmers worldwide. Twin works in 17 countries across Africa, Asia and Latin America.

Twin Trading employs 8 staff (5 women, 3 men), with 9 Associates (4 men, 5 women). Twin employs 26 staff (20 women 6 men) with a board of 9 trustees (3 women, 6 men).

2. Please give a brief overview of examples of good practice at different levels internally where company is addressing gender equality such as HR, policies, procurement, CSR, Board and buyers.

Twin has developed a [Producer Partnership Programme](#) of tailor-made investments with farmers that strengthen their individual and collective businesses and meet the strategic priorities of buyers, based around a 6-pillar approach.

1. Business management
2. Gender Justice
3. Governance
4. Market Access
5. Quality and processing
6. Sustainable agriculture

3. Are you signed up to any external initiatives and/or codes ETI, Fairtrade, Rainforest Alliance, UN WEPs or SDGs? If so when and why?

In the 1990s and 2000s Twin launched [Cafedirect](#), [Divine Chocolate Afrofair UK](#) and [Liberation Nuts](#) in the UK; all have farmer ownership structures, with a founding principle to extend farmer influence up the value chain.

Twin also set up the [Joint Marketing Initiative](#) (JMI) in 2012, which is a collective marketing platform for African coffee cooperatives. They work together to access markets and build long-term relationships with buyers to maximise the long-term value of farmers' coffee. By pooling resources and know-how, they realise huge synergies and are able to achieve and sustain market reach far beyond what any small cooperative could achieve working alone.

This business model allows producers to become protagonists in the premium and speciality markets. The JMI currently markets coffee from eight African Cooperatives, adding an annual \$2.5 million to the total prices of their coffee exports. 73% of coffee volume sold at 'speciality' export prices of over \$2/lb, and 20% sold at 'premium' export prices of \$1.60 to \$2/lb in 2017, with the remaining 7% sold at 'standard' prices.

4. Is there a gender dimension in your company supplier agreements/codes? Please attach or give brief overview.

Gender is incorporated into all of Twin's work.

Twin has 3 development goals:

Economic development – Access to fair prices for smallholder farmers and for producer organisations to understand market dynamics and move up the value chain to attain more value.

Social Justice – Equal access for men and women to assets and income, active and meaningful involvement in decision-making processes

Environmental sustainability – The ability for producer partners to manage and adapt to climate change and to sustainably increase productivity, promoting agroforestry and sustainable natural resource management.

Twin uses a [Producer Organisation \(PO\) development framework](#) where they monitor and assess the development stage any PO partner is at. The framework is based on a range of different KPIs across the three development goals and measure the 'level' a PO might be at in terms of business robustness, sustainability and commitment to social and environmental justice.

The cooperative model offers many opportunities for gender equity to be implemented.

Values

Cooperatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity.

Principles

The cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice.

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

5. Do you think there are external drivers encouraging the company to be more gender focused? If yes briefly describe what you think these are.

There are many external drivers encouraging companies to be more gender focussed. Some of these include: the UN SDGs, certification bodies, consumer pressure, high-profile campaigns regarding the rights of women, laws in certain countries regarding representation. There is also a growing body of evidence showing that companies that are engaging in gender work are increasing public approval and worker satisfaction, as well as profits and turnover.

Twin believes that trade can contribute significantly to sustainable development and its vision is for a world where trade benefits everyone engaged in it; where business respects and

supports the people and ecosystems it touches: where smallholder farmers have the power to shape their own business and have a positive impact on the development of their communities

B. Specific Gender Initiative Case Study

1. Name, workplace, industry and area/country that case study is based?

[Bukonzo Joint Cooperative Union](#), Coffee, Uganda, East Africa



2. When was the initiative introduced, does it have a time frame, what were the costs and scale?

Set up in 1999. Ongoing – a business not a project.

Exports (2016) 187.8 metric tonnes to Canada, Germany, Japan, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, UK, USA.

3. Please give a brief description of the initiative and its key goals

The key goal is to improve the quality of life for farmers.

Prior to setting up BJC, the farmers in the Rwenzori mountains in Uganda sold their coffee as low-quality drugar (low quality natural Arabica). The farmers lacked the necessary infrastructure and training to produce high-quality coffee. The women had no rights to the land or crops and were not adequately rewarded for their labours. They also had little formal education and lacked access to financial support.



The cooperative improved the quality of the coffee through a micro-station model. A decentralised way of processing high-quality washed Arabica, which the farmers refer to as 'Owemba'. Cooperative group members contribute financially to the cost of construction of the washing stations and supply the stations with coffee cherry and with their labour.

The group used, and still uses, the [Gender Action Learning System](#) (GALS) to ensure farmer ownership, gender equity and participation. GALS is used throughout the development and decision-making processes.

4. What drivers, internal and external, encouraged you to introduce this initiative? Did the political and cultural landscapes influence your initiative?

In the 1990's, the majority of men from rural communities would migrate to seek work in urban centres, returning only to harvest and sell coffee as an immediate cash crop. Women had rarely any control over assets or income, and so although they were doing the majority of the farm labour whilst the men were away, they had no financial incentive to work on improving the quality of their crop. As a result, the women often harvested their coffee prematurely to sell before their husbands returned to sell the coffee and take all the money. This meant that the coffee was not good quality and fetched a lower price.

5. What key issues in the workplace was the initiative designed to tackle? (Please indicate which human rights are at risk, please include reference to those in the [ETI Base Code](#))

This initiative was designed more to address gender imbalances and the distribution of resources within smallholder farming households, rather than workplace issues.

6. Were other organisations involved in this intervention (companies, buyers, NGOs and/or Unions) and what were their roles (eg. funder, implementing partner, advisory role)?

[BJCU](#), [Twin](#), [Comic Relief](#), US Importer [Atlas](#), [Fairtrade](#). Other coffee buyers, donors and ethical financiers (for example [Rabobank](#) and [Rabobank Foundation](#)) have also supported BJCU at various times throughout their history.

7. Were women involved in designing and developing the initiative? Brief description of how involved and were these women; workers, managers, supervisors, HR and/or CSR staff, etc?

Gender was central to BJCU's approach as it was initially formed as a women-led microfinance society with 98% female membership (now 80% see above).

The cooperative has embraced the [Gender Action Learning System](#) (GALS) approach and cooperative has dedicated itself to enabling the equal participation of women.

BJCU was one of the first organisation to work with GALS and has used this to promote voluntary joint land agreements between husband and wife and increase awareness of inheritance rights.



8. What were the number and description of women workers engaged (eg. fixed term contract, permanent, migrant)? Please identify the source of these figures.

2016 - 5,464 - 4,043 women, 1,421 men. 55% of board are women.

2018 - 5,061 – no gender breakdown. Organised into 6 cooperatives.

9. Were you monitoring the wider impact of your initiative? Do you know the number of dependents (if possible)?

Not known.

10. How was implementation monitored? Please detail any activity undertaken to inform the development and delivery of this case study (such as focus groups, workshops or research). Please attach any details of these activities, including frequency and numbers of participants.

Implementation of the delivery and impact of the GALS work was primarily funded through a project funded by Comic Relief, and as such was measured through Twin's development framework as well as project reports collected on an ongoing basis.

BJCU and Twin monitor other metrics annually, such as production and the quantity and quality of the coffee and the price paid.

Also, through the number of male/female members (the number of men joining increased when they saw how successful the cooperative was – women were 98% at the start and now are 80%).

11. Have you evaluated the initiative? How was this done? If you have an impact assessment or report, please attach.

Please see <https://www.twin.org.uk/resources/>

The BJCU is featured in a number of the reports – see references below.

12. Please describe what you feel has and has not worked?

An example of the maturity of the cooperative is shown by its attitude towards plans for expansion. The cooperative wanted to increase the number of washing stations and this was regarded as a sign of progress. However, when the group came to review this expansion, they realised that the increase in the number of washing stations was actually affecting the quality and quantity of coffee. It was agreed that they would reduce from 60 to 24 stations. This has resulted in increased quantity and improved quality for 2017.

13. Briefly explain how the initiative has improved:

Agency – trade union representation, individual/collective voice and role in decision making

The cooperative has more influence through collective voice and can negotiate from a position of strength.

Aspiration – opportunities for advancement, promotion and training

Education and improvement of key skills required to run a successful business are central to the running of the cooperative.

Dignity – treatment, behaviour, attitudes.

By using GALS men and women are jointly coming together to discuss the role of women in society and how men and women can work together cooperatively in order to improve the situation for women in a number of different arenas such as access to land, control of finances and engagement in decision making all of which lead to an increase the quality of life for all the family and community.

Reward – benefits e.g. wages, maternity, childcare, etc.

Women are able to be properly rewarded for their labour and have access to the support of the cooperative to help with childcare, maternity provision etc.

Safety – sexual harassment/violence, safety to and from work, at work.

The issue of sexual harassment and the position of women and girls in the local society are topics that are tackled and covered by the GALS programme. This was not highlighted as an issue in the reports researched but may not have been reported on rather than not present.

Security – job and income security.

Through improving the quality and quantity of the coffee, and developing specialist niche markets, this gives the cooperative and its members much greater financial security.



14. Has the learning been shared? Where and how has this been shared? With whom?

The success of BJCUC and its gender equity has been shared through many different mediums and formats. BJCUC has 24 micro-washing stations with raised mesh drying tables, with the capacity to process between 5 and 40 metric tonnes micro-washing station per day. BJCUC hosts other cooperatives from across East Africa to learn about their participatory, gender-inclusive approach to running a successful cooperative coffee business, with farmer-run, owned and managed micro-washing stations and sustainable farming practices.



BJCUC has a speciality coffee hour on local radio (although this is more to promote the cooperative than share learning about gender equality and was actually set up to promote coffee drinking and the understanding of how coffee is produced, and in part to debunk the widely-held belief that coffee cherries were used to make ammunition!).

Each micro-washing station enters into an annual cupping competition to find the 'best' coffee. Atlas and their roaster buyers have a commitment to help train the cooperative members so when they visit, they offer training in cupping sample roasting, equipment maintenance and calibration of the grinder.

In general marketing they also spread the message of the power, productivity and success of their cooperative through community events such as football matches, repairing of bridges, paving roads, supplying electricity, etc.

Twin also share the learning on the international stage – they regularly present at conferences and workshops on their work. Twin partnered with [FAO](#) to bring together over 30 organisations and individuals, who work on gender in agriculture, to a three day sharing workshop in London in 2018.

They have produced [numerous reports on women in Agriculture](#) and in particular coffee and cocoa.

15. Has the intervention continued? If so, what has the continued impact been? Has the information and learning informed further work to ensure respect for women's rights in the workplace?

BJCU continue to host other groups and their model of participatory, gender-inclusive approach to setting up and running a successful cooperative is a source of inspiration to cooperatives across East Africa and to buyers internationally.

Twin have also replicated the intervention and learning across other cooperatives they work with in East Africa and Latin America. Staff from BJCU are a key part of this, and regularly travel to other cooperatives to share their experiences.

C. Future work

1. What additional support, if any, would you have liked to have had to help you promote gender equality?

NA

2. What additional strategies have been implemented, and by whom, to both promote respect for women's rights and to mitigate rights violations?

Initially starting as an alliance of savings and credits groups, in 1992 BJCU grew to be set up as a micro finance organisation in 1999. At the time 98% of its membership were women. In 2007 BJCU began work with Gender Action Learning System (GALS) and worked with the women and the men to analyse their current situation and to consider and discuss their vision and aspirations for the future. They looked at the power imbalances in their relationships and developed joint visions for their future. The practice of joint visioning and planning was extended through to group visions and eventually to the cooperative union level – essentially building a shared. Farmer-led strategic plan. This process is continued in a learning feedback loop and it means that the cooperative has an engaged membership who have ownership of their organisation's vision and strategy.

3. As a result of the learning from this initiative what actions would you recommend that companies, unions, NGOs or other actors in the tea, banana and flower sectors take to ensure respect for women's rights in other workplaces?

Companies

- Develop corporate policies that explicitly recognise the role and contribution of women at each stage in the production and marketing of the commodities they buy, process or sell.

- Encourage and support producer partners to become stronger, more democratic organisations with a commitment to gender equity in membership and leadership. Understanding that participation in producer organisations in itself can create opportunities for women to gain skills, confidence and challenge gender norms.
- Invest in programmes that improve women's access to farming resources and agricultural knowledge - for example inclusive agricultural extension services, agricultural inputs and technologies, and microcredit schemes.
- Use business expertise and financial resources to support practical income-generation initiatives that target women, encouraging the creation of alternative micro-enterprises that can provide women and their families with a supplementary source of income and food security.
- Develop differentiated products – for example, 'Women's Coffee' – that promote women's empowerment and builds relationships between women producers and women consumers and provides the opportunity to understand value chains.

Producer and development organisations

- Producer organisations, encouraged and supported by development organisations, should continue to strive to improve their work on gender justice.
- Develop and implement gender policies that formalise producer organisations' commitment to gender justice and have the potential to generate transformational change in gender relations.
- Enable more women to become members of the producer organisation in their own right by reviewing membership policy and/or encouraging men to share or gift ownership of land to their wives and other female family members.
- Establish spaces to act as 'incubators' for women's leadership and allow both men and women to learn about gender and consider ideas about identity. Inclusion of women's committees in the producer organisation governance structure also enables women leaders to have more influence over decision making and access to financial resources.
- Create opportunities for women to get involved in selling products.
- Prioritise access to affordable credit for women and/or campaign for subsidised credit to be offered by the government or other local actors.
- Invest in adult literacy programme to enable women to engage more effectively in democratic processes such as leadership elections and increase their awareness of and ability to access rights over land ownership.

- Promote 'Made by Women' initiatives which add value to women's produce.

References



[Empowering women farmers in agricultural value chains](#) (2013)



[Women's coffee bringing greater gender justice](#) (2016)



[Smallholders and speciality](#) (2018)

Further resources available at - <https://www.twin.org.uk/resources/>

Photos: © TWIN

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