

GENDER CHAMPIONS FETED TO MARK WOMEN'S HISTORY MONTH



Ziway, Ethiopia - 28th March 2022 - six (6) producer organisations from Fairtrade Africa's Eastern and Central Africa region were last week feted for their efforts in advancing gender equality and championing women's issues in their operations. This was part of Fairtrade Africa's month-long commemoration of International Women's Day on 8th March which culminates in the Women's History Month.

The 6 winners were selected through a rigorous vetting process where producer organizations across the region were asked to submit interventions, currently under implementation to drive gender equality in their organisations. A total of 15 applications were received and winners selected based on projects that were most outstanding at the country level as well as the regional level.

Dukunde Kawa Cooperative from Rwanda emerged as the overall winner for their [reusable sanitary towels project](#) and women's coffee project. The previous has enabled women from the cooperative, their daughters as well as females from the surrounding community to have access to affordable menstrual hygiene products. On the other hand, Dukunde Kawa's women's coffee project has seen its female members in



collaboration with other cooperatives develop an all-female coffee brand ([Angéliques Finest](#)) now exported to Germany.

At the country-level, New Gikaru FCS was recognized for its work in mainstreaming a gender policy subsequently leading to an increase in female leadership. For instance, out of the organisation's 5 board member positions, 4 are occupied by women while the organisation continues to thrive under the leadership of its first ever female CEO- Susan Wangui. The coffee producer from Kenya provided an excellent example of how producer organisations majority of whose leadership is largely short of achieving a gender balance can achieve this.

Hailing from Rwenzori, Uganda, coffee producing organization- Kabonero Mountainous Coffee Growers Cooperative Society Limited - emerged as the country winner for spearheading a successful income diversification project for its female members. Rolled out in 2013, the producer organization's basket weaving project has provided supplementary income for 150 of its female members who are also full members of the cooperative.

Cooperative AMKA, from the Democratic Republic of Congo was announced as a country winner for running an effective loans and savings project where women commit to savings installments on a monthly basis and subsequently qualify for low interest loans to meet domestic needs ranging from school fees, purchase of household items or support their (coffee) farming enterprises.

Sher Ethiopia, Africa's largest Fairtrade flower producer based in Ziway, Ethiopia was recognised as the country winner in breaking the gender bias for the development and implementation of gender policies covering issues such as sexual harassment, non-discrimination, equality and diversity as well as maternity leave and breastfeeding. The policies have seen Sher Ethiopia implement a 4-month paid maternity leave policy and provide new mothers with breastfeeding breaks and transport services.

The first of its kind and spearheaded by Fairtrade Africa's Gender Coordinator, Ms. Susan Limisi, the event not only aimed to recognize the efforts of Fairtrade Certified Producer Organizations in the region in breaking gender bias and driving gender equality. It further sought to create a learning experience for producer organizations present for the purpose of challenging each other to intensify efforts in their own organisations.

"Being part of this event has been fantastic. I have learnt that even women can make honey and learnt how flowers are grown. It has also been interesting to meet people from other countries and exchange ideas. I want to take back home the idea of producing re-usable sanitary towels



for our girls and as well as having more women in the leadership of our cooperative,” said Biira Zirian from Kabonero Mountainous Coffee Growers Cooperative Society Limited in Uganda.

As a next step, Fairtrade Africa will support producer organisations in further developing their current initiatives and rolling out others based on action plans developed.

As Ms. Susan Limisi noted, “different categories of needs have emerged. There are producers that need market linkages, funding and others certification for new initiatives. Others who are implementing closely related projects have noted that they can learn more from others that are doing better and would hence benefit from more peer-to-peer exchange. It will be interesting to see how different facets of our work at Fairtrade can provide solutions.”

The event was attended by 42 participants drawn from DRC, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda. Also in attendance was Ziway Town’s Gender Representative, Mrs Aday Zeleke who commended the deliberate initiatives taken by farmers and agricultural enterprises to promote gender equality.