



Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment

# Lessons Learned

FROM COFFEE PILOT PROJECTS IN  
BRAZIL | COLOMBIA | MEXICO

for the U.S. Department of Labor | 2024

**Verité**  
Fair Labor. Worldwide.

# Contents

---

Introduction .....	3
Brazil Pilot Project .....	4
Problem Analysis.....	5
Activities Implemented.....	5
Successes and Challenges .....	6
Lessons Learned .....	7
Potential Next Steps.....	8
Colombia Pilot Project.....	9
Problem Analysis.....	10
Activities Implemented.....	10
Successes and Challenges .....	11
Lessons Learned .....	16
Potential Next Steps.....	17
Mexico Pilot Project.....	18
Problem Analysis.....	19
Activities Implemented.....	19
Successes and Challenges .....	21
Lessons Learned .....	22
Potential Next Steps.....	23
Conclusions .....	24

# Introduction

---

The Cooperation On Fair, Free, Equitable Employment (COFFEE) Project aimed to improve implementation of social compliance systems that promote acceptable conditions of work and the elimination of child labor and forced labor in coffee supply chains. The project was comprised of the following main components:

- Development of a toolkit, based on research and stakeholder engagement, to improve labor conditions and prevent labor and human rights risks in the coffee sector.
- Building capacities of key coffee sector stakeholders through a scalable and cost-effective training model.
- Implementation of pilot projects in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico to field test the tools and cost-effective, sustainable, replicable approaches to reducing labor risks.

The COFFEE Project sought to reduce the risk of labor issues in coffee supply chains by working with the private sector and other relevant actors. Activities included the development of a toolkit—comprising 28 tools and 14 online training modules—as well as the provision of training to improve private sector stakeholders' capacity to identify, address, and prevent labor abuses in coffee supply chains.

The COFFEE Project also implemented pilot projects in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico. The pilot projects focused on ethical recruitment in Brazil, improving workers' wages and wellbeing in Colombia, and building the capacity of private sector, government, and civil society actors in Mexico to address labor abuses through online training. These pilot projects were developed through research and stakeholder consultation. The pilot projects in Brazil, Colombia, and Mexico allowed the COFFEE Project to field test select tools and make any necessary refinements to these tools based on the field testing and input from local stakeholders. Through the pilot projects, the COFFEE Project was also able to develop and implement innovative, cost-effective interventions designed to improve working conditions and eradicate forced labor and child labor in the Latin American coffee sector.

The pilot projects demonstrated that the COFFEE Toolkit is compatible with the contexts of a variety of countries and can promote structural changes that benefit workers and producers, guaranteeing diminished risks to supply chains during a time when labor requirements and international regulations — especially in the United States and European countries, the world's largest coffee buyers — are increasingly demanding and strict. The specificity and practicality of the tools — developed based on research, a needs assessment, and robust stakeholder engagement — contributed to the efficiency of project implementation and increased the knowledge of key stakeholders on how to effectively identify and address recruitment and labor risks and abuses in the coffee sector. The COFFEE Toolkit and online training modules can be utilized by other agricultural sectors that have similar labor dynamics to the coffee sector. For other sectors with differing dynamics, the tools can be easily adapted.



# BRAZIL

PILOT PROJECT

## Problem Analysis

Verité research has found that the use of labor brokers (including village-level agents, recruiters, labor contractors, and crew leaders) is widespread in Brazil. Coffee producers often turn to labor brokers when there is an urgent need for workers, especially during the labor-intensive harvest season. While labor brokers can play an important role in coffee supply chains by ensuring a constant supply of farmworkers, unscrupulous brokers may engage in unethical practices that put workers at risk and create legal and reputational risks for coffee producers, traders, buyers, and roasters alike.

Labor brokers are often financially incentivized to recruit as many workers as possible, which may lead to unethical recruitment practices, such as deception about working conditions, retention of workers' identity documents, harassment and abuse, charging of recruitment fees, and illegal deductions from workers' pay. Therefore, it is necessary for private sector actors to improve their understanding of recruitment dynamics and related risks and to establish systems for identifying and addressing these risks in their supply chains.

## Activities Implemented

The Brazil pilot project was designed to reduce recruitment-related risks and promote ethical recruitment in the Brazil coffee sector. In order to better understand recruitment risks and dynamics and the perspectives and practices of Brazilian coffee producers and labor brokers, Verité carried out multiple rounds of research funded by a coalition of major international coffee roasters, brands, and retailers. This research allowed Verité to create five recruitment-focused tools and training modules appropriate for the context of the Brazilian coffee sector. Verité worked with key producers identified through partnerships with major coffee companies to identify coffee producers interested in implementing ethical recruitment approaches at the farm level. Verité trained these producers and their labor brokers and workers on recruitment-related risks and steps that they can take to ameliorate these risks and piloted the tools and ethical recruitment approaches on select coffee farms.

### **Research\*:** Increased understanding of recruitment dynamics and related risks.

- Conducted rapid appraisal research on labor conditions in the coffee sector of Minas Gerais.
- Researched recruitment risks and dynamics.
- Evaluated producer and labor broker perspectives and practices.
- Mapped labor broker networks.

\*Funded by private sector

**Tool Development:** Created tools and training modules for coffee producers, workers, labor brokers, traders, and roasters.

- Developed recruitment-focused tools.
  - Primer on Recruitment-Related Risks in the Latin American Coffee Sector
  - Self-Assessment Questionnaire for Labor Brokers
  - Guidance on Screening and Selection of Labor Brokers
  - Guidance on Monitoring of Labor Brokers
  - Guidance on Monitoring of Labor Brokers
- Developed training modules on labor issues and recruitment.

**Trainings & Piloting:** Implemented trainings and piloted tools and ethical recruitment approaches.

- Identified participants.
- Implemented training for producers and workers.
- Designed ethical recruitment approaches.
- Disseminated tools and training material among Brazilian stakeholders.
- Piloted tools and approaches on select coffee farms and cooperatives.
- Documented successes, challenges, cost implications, benefits, and lessons learned.

## Successes and Challenges

### Successes

As a result of increased knowledge among workers regarding their labor rights and recruitment-related risks and red flags, workers reported feeling more empowered to engage in dialogue with their employers to ensure that their rights are respected.

The Project became involved in the recruitment process and worked directly with producers and their labor brokers. The Project developed a system of joint monitoring of recruitment practices between the Project, farms, and workers. Through this monitoring system, communication between workers and their employers was strengthened, resulting in improvements to recruitment processes, bringing them closer into compliance with labor law. The Project also advanced proper use of and training on personal protective equipment (PPE).

## Challenges

The Brazil team noted that there is a need to develop simpler tools and materials designed for smallholder farmers and workers with low levels of literacy, such as illustrations and short videos. The possibility of using farm equipment and venues to project short videos should also be explored.

Likewise, existing online training modules are not appropriate for workers and smallholder farmers. Instead, training materials could be provided to a facilitator, which would likely increase engagement from workers and smallholder farmers, thereby increase their level of learning.

Resistance to change on the part of influential producers represents a significant challenge, since these producers have a strong effect on their colleagues' practices. From their perspective, recruiting and keeping workers is a consistent challenge and could be made more difficult by a change in practices.

## Lessons Learned

### Ethical recruitment and labor brokers

- Hiring procedures were improved by incorporating workers' rights and responsibilities. The knowledge created was shared with all relevant actors, including workers, producers, certification bodies, cooperatives, and coffee buyers, among others.

### Grievance and communication channels

- Project implementation revealed the need to adapt five of the tools for use by smallholder coffee producers, primarily by simplifying the language and content. To address this need, four booklets were created for smallholder producers on the topics of recruitment-related risks; labor-related human rights; and the screening, selection, and monitoring of labor brokers.
- Verité was able to improve communication between producers and workers by working with producers to develop new ideas and strategies to better communicate with workers based on an improved understanding of decent work and labor rights. Producers learned that promoting these concepts could be used to attract new workers. There were also discussions with workers about the definition of forced labor.
- In addition to the grievance mechanisms already in place on each farm, Verité worked with select farms to create internal grievance committees comprised of a diverse group of workers to facilitate open dialogue between producers and workers and prevent recruitment and labor risks.

## Ensuring labor rights

- The Project was innovative in creating shared value for workers and many coffee producers and expanded knowledge of national labor legislation. It provided an opportunity for learning and the promotion of decent treatment of workers.
- Trainings on red flags and potential legal exposure for farms helped to change producer perceptions about how it could be in their interest to prevent recruitment-related abuses.
- Likewise, training provided workers with essential information allowing them to better advocate for their rights and resulted in an increase in PPE usage by workers following trainings conducted by Project staff.

## Potential Next Steps

- Engage state-level coffee associations and Brazilian and international coffee buyers to scale up the implementation of the COFFEE Toolkit.
- Engage law enforcement and labor inspectors, academic institutions, and other key stakeholders to expand the audience for the tools and scale up their impact.
- Disseminate new communications materials among value chain actors.
- Identify and document good practices in Minas Gerais and Espírito Santo and disseminate them to other key coffee producing states.
- Increase worker participation in the pilot project (including working with unions).
- Increase understanding of root causes of labor migration and forced labor to design interventions in workers' communities of origin.





PILOT PROJECT

## Problem Analysis

Piece rate payment systems are widely used in the Latin American coffee sector, contributing to several labor risks when the necessary controls are not in place, especially when combined with production quotas. These labor risks include deception, wage and hour violations, discrimination against women and other vulnerable populations, and child labor, among others. It is therefore essential to develop and test alternative payment schemes to mitigate labor risks and to promote social sustainability and better working conditions in coffee supply chains.

Verité research has found that a lack of prior experience and skills in the coffee sector is a major driver for labor risks during the coffee harvest, particularly when highly mobile migrant laborers are employed. Reduced skills are linked with efficiency levels as low as 50 percent less than experienced harvesters, such as Venezuelan immigrants, generating extremely low wages that negatively impact workers' livelihoods. Women are placed at a further disadvantage both because they are expected to carry out several unremunerated tasks such as cooking, cleaning, child rearing, and childcare, and because male heads of household often receive the payment for their production.

## Activities Implemented

In order to address the issues related to the use of piece rate payment systems and to increase workers' wages and wellbeing, the COFFEE Project implemented an innovative pilot project in Antioquia, Colombia. The Project conducted research to better understand current harvesting practices, through a time-motion study, and documented best practices in coffee harvesting. Verité also carried out a living income and living wage study in collaboration with the Global Living Wage Coalition and funded by Keurig Dr Pepper to set benchmarks for living wages for workers, taking into account that smallholder coffee producers cannot afford to make investments that bring their earnings below a living income. In collaboration with RGC Coffee and Ulula, Verité carried out a survey on workers' needs and preferences, which showed that workers were evenly split in their desire for livelihood initiatives and interventions to increase their earnings. Therefore, Verité documented the effects of the *Manos del Café* Project (MCP) on workers' wellbeing and piloted the use of simple assisted coffee harvesting tools to increase workers' production and earnings while working the same number of hours and decreasing ergonomic risks.

## Research

- Time-motion study
- Research on good harvesting practices
- Living Income and Living Wage study (funded by KDP)
- Phone-based worker needs and preferences survey (with Ulula)

## Project Timeline

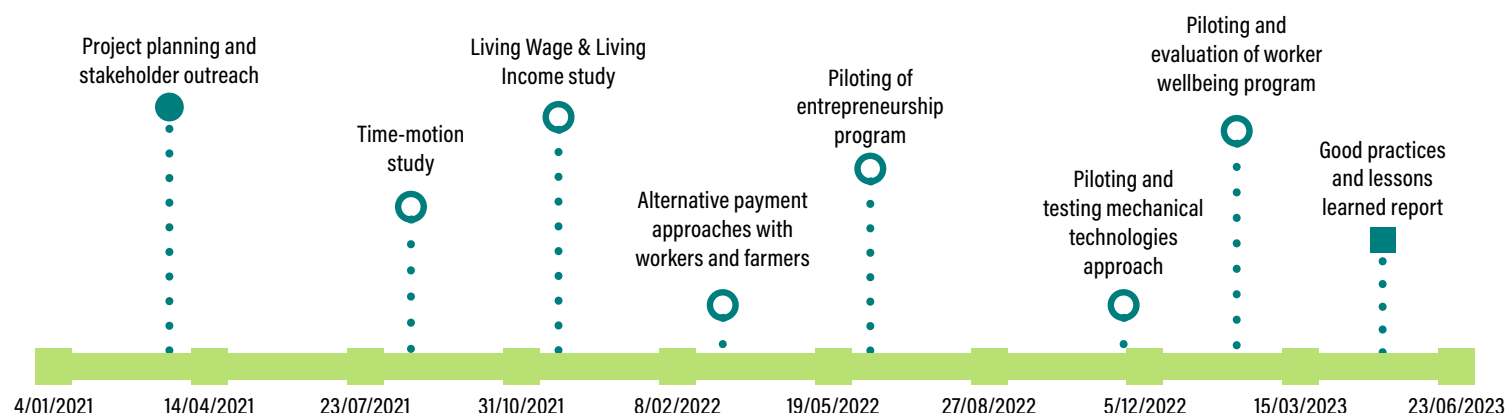


Fig. 1. Timeline of activities implementation.

## Successes and Challenges

### Complementary Compensation Model: Entrepreneurship Approach

The COFFEE Project evaluated the effects of the MCP entrepreneurship program, which promoted the creation of microenterprises. On average, the cost of establishing each microenterprise was approximately USD 3,525.<sup>1</sup> Microenterprises were established by three coffee producers in the region,<sup>2</sup> benefiting fifty-two workers. Coffee seedlings and mechanical businesses were created to provide more stable sources of income for workers throughout the year by creating alternative employment opportunities. Though not all of the microenterprises continued to operate, they provided important lessons for the implementers (see Table 1).

<sup>1</sup> The average exchange rate in 2022 was 4,255 Colombian pesos (COP) per U.S. dollar.

<sup>2</sup> These coffee producers were included because the tests were carried out on their farms. If the pilot entrepreneurship worked, all producers who are members of the cooperative would have access to the services.

Table 1. Entrepreneurship implemented by the *Las Manos del Café* program in Salgar-Antioquia.

Entrepreneurship	Initial Participants (number)	Current Participants (number)	Current State	Learnings and comments
Coffee Seedlings	Eight workers	Zero workers	Discontinued	Plant material was produced and sold.  External factors, particularly price variations due to the excess production of a new and big competitor, discouraged coffee workers from continuing the entrepreneurship program.
Mechanics	Fifteen workers	Ten workers	Maintained	Feedback from the workers allowed the entrepreneurship program to continue with adjustments. Workers and the producer were happy with the new service, which is scarce and expensive in the region. A formal certification will be supported by RGC to enhance the confidence of workers and producers.
Assisted Coffee Harvesting Tools	Twenty-nine workers and three producers	Six workers	Maintained	The women collectors continue this entrepreneurship program and await the next coffee harvest. New methods of working bring risks for both workers, who are fearful of losing wages, and producers, who are fearful of losing quality and productivity. For both groups to be willing to try new techniques, pilot projects must offset short-term economic risks on their behalf. Implementing new techniques also requires personalized technical assistance to give workers and producers confidence in the process.

At the end of 2022, a workshop was held with the workers who participated in the entrepreneurship program to discover what they did and did not like and get their perspective on what could be improved. The workers mentioned that the best thing about the entrepreneurship program was that it allowed them to access training, workshops, machines, and other job opportunities. Challenges included issues with payments, delays, and costs. The main identified areas of opportunity include additional training, workshops, and provision of equipment.

## Complementary Compensation Model: Assisted Coffee Picking

The Colombia pilot project evaluated the effects of using assisted coffee harvesting tools (mentioned in Table 1 above) on worker productivity and earnings. Twenty-nine workers and three producers participated in this intervention, testing three methods for harvesting coffee: the traditional method (manual), *canguaros* (special gloves), and *lonas* (plastic sheeting).



Fig. 2. Coffee harvesting methods. A) Traditional, B) *Canguaros*, C) *Lonas*.

These tests were conducted across five coffee farms in the project study area (Salgar, Antioquia). The results show that in terms of productivity, the *lonas* allow a more significant collection of coffee per hour compared to the *canguaros*. While the traditional method continues to generate better results for men, the *lonas* allow higher productivity for women compared to conventional harvesting. The *lonas* also reduce the productivity gap between men and women (see Figure 3 below).

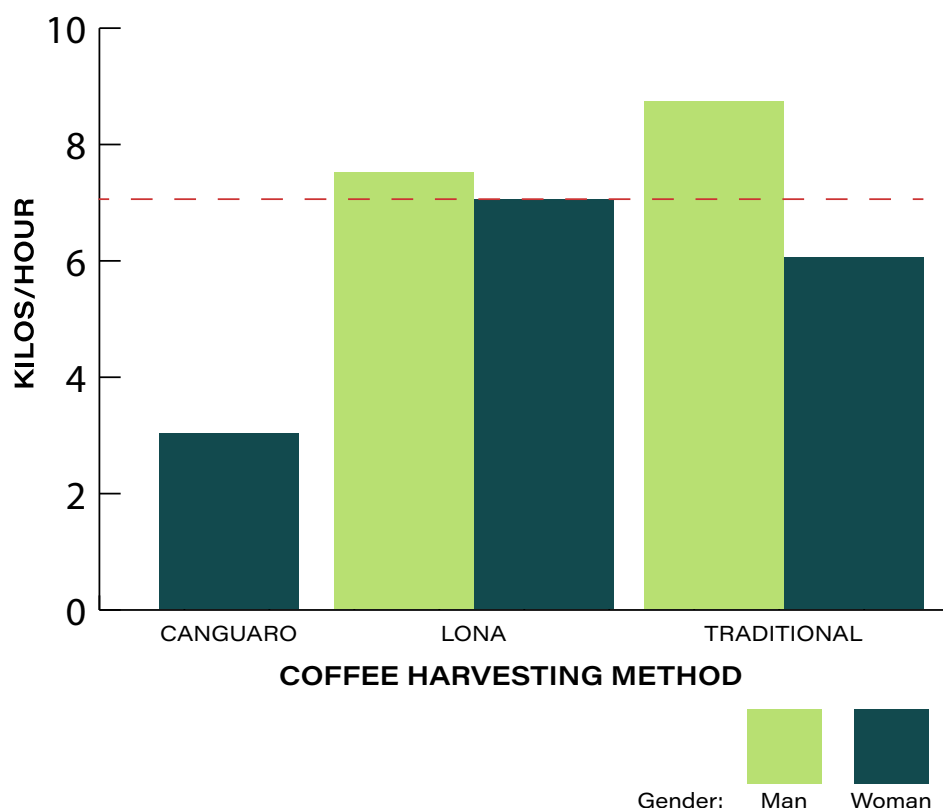


Fig.3. Average productivity per coffee worker by type of harvesting tool. The red line indicates the average productivity (kilos/hour).

Workers felt that the main benefit of *lonas* is that they allow them to be more efficient during the peak harvest season. The main challenge with the method is the need for more practice so that workers can work more effectively as a team. Workers also highlighted that workers' attitudes and the layout of coffee farms (preferably larger paths between coffee plants) play a significant role in how much the use of *lonas* can increase their productivity.

The testing of coffee harvesting tools with coffee workers and producers resulted in several lessons learned. First, in comparison to the *canguaros*, the *lonas* have both better results in productivity and greater acceptance among workers. Second, in order to promote greater efficiency in the use of *lonas*, farms must have several weeks of accumulated ripe cherries, as this allows for increased productivity and prevents damage to green cherries. Third, harvesting with *lonas* has the potential to increase worker productivity and reduce the gender pay gap. However, the main challenge is that the use of *lonas* requires a collective team approach, compared to the individual approach with traditional harvesting.

This technology adoption process requires changing how producers pay for the coffee harvested on their farms and how harvesters work as a team. It is therefore necessary to train groups of workers that are willing to work

together and offer coffee harvesting as a specialized service. Additionally, the adoption process requires a significant amount of worker training and practice with the technology. Workers must unlearn the process of picking coffee cherries from a tree and putting them in a bucket, and instead learn to use *lonas* throughout the farm. This learning process involves the cost of short-term reductions in production and earnings that workers cannot afford, as they depend on their daily wages to survive. However, the use of *lonas* has the potential to bring long-term benefits to both producers and workers, especially women, who were shown to be better at working in teams than men, and thus demonstrated larger increases in production using this method.

## Complementary Compensation Model: Provision of Services

Lastly, the Colombia pilot project evaluated a model focused on the provision of services to improve workers' wellbeing. The *Manos del Café* program provided workers and their families with medical and dental services, assistance in participation in savings, retirement, and recreational services. This program benefited 388 coffee pickers in Antioquia. With the help of Ulula and the Salgar Coffee Growers' Cooperative, Verité developed and implemented a survey with 118 workers via WhatsApp. In addition, Ulula's platform allows workers to report on their perceptions of the program anonymously.<sup>3</sup>

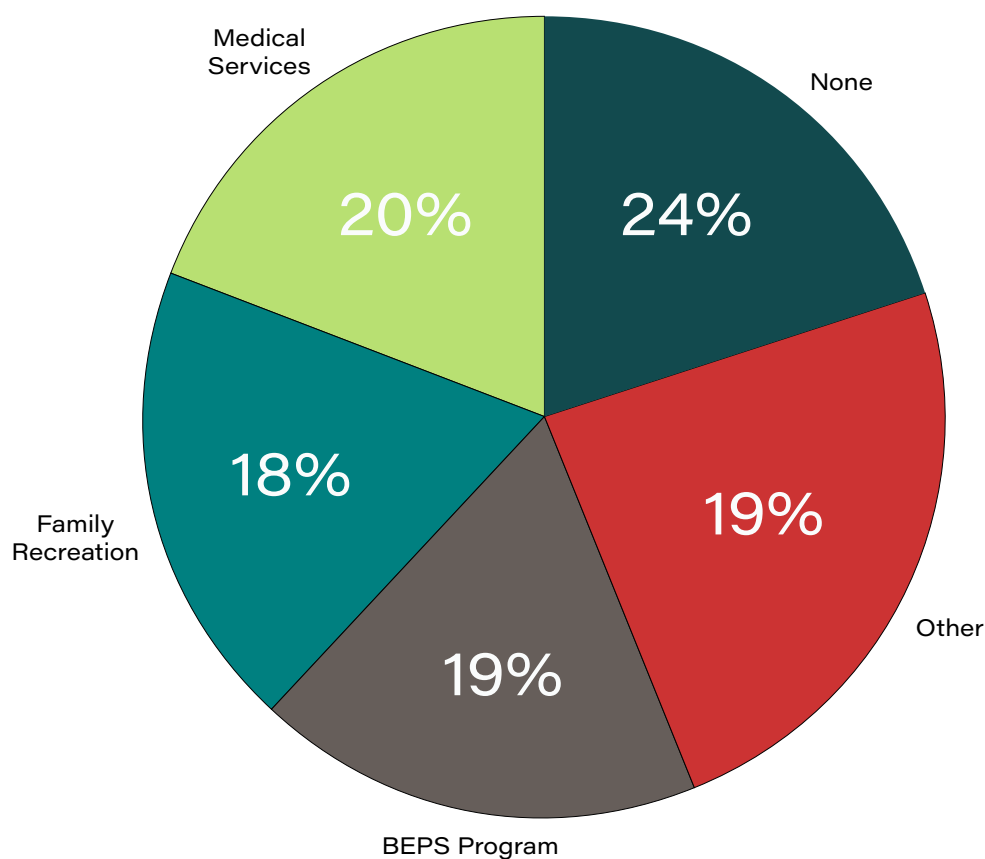


Fig.4. MCP services that workers were most satisfied with.

<sup>3</sup> [www.ulula.com](http://www.ulula.com)

The survey found that 76 percent of workers had used at least one of the services provided by the program and that medical services was the one service that workers were most satisfied with (see Figure 4). These survey results align with the results from a workshop carried out with worker beneficiaries of the program. In this workshop, the facilitators did an exercise in which workers prioritized services using fake bills. The workers gave a value to and ranked each service provided, with medical services, familiar recreational activities, and the retirement and savings programs (BEPS)<sup>4</sup> ranked at the top. Based on the evaluation of workers' perception, the project created a job satisfaction index that it shared with MCP. While in general, there was no relationship between the benefits offered by the program and the level of job satisfaction of workers, workers who said they were most satisfied with medical services and the BEPS program had the highest levels of job satisfaction. Additionally, workers who received health services and assistance in the social security program reported a greater sense of wellbeing.

The evaluation of the effects of the MCP services showed that workers recognize the value of a program that gives them a voice and benefits. Even if workers did not use any services, they recognized their value. However, providing more services does not translate directly into greater worker satisfaction. In general, workers valued interventions that provide free health services and social security (pension savings) to a greater extent than other services.

## Lessons Learned

The primary lesson learned from the Colombia pilot project was the necessity of providing producers and workers with financial support as they adapt to new practices. Many smallholder coffee producers and workers face a difficult economic reality in which they live from day to day. Workers do not have the necessary resources, savings, or access to credit to make investments in training or technologies. As a result of these conditions, they cannot absorb short-term losses to reap the long-term benefits of the implementation of new practices. Consequently, it is crucial to provide economic incentives to workers, giving them the required time to participate in trainings and implement new practices, such as providing workers with assisted harvesting tools and paying their wages while they attend trainings and learn how to use these tools effectively.

There is no silver bullet to improve workers' wages or wellbeing, but complementary compensation schemes and improved access to health services, recreational activities, savings programs, and assisted harvesting tools can do so together.

The use of *lonas* allows women to increase their productivity while decreasing ergonomic risks for workers and reducing the risk of pests and diseases for farmers. However, it faces several challenges, mainly its collective approach compared to the individual one used under the traditional harvesting model. Additionally, it requires

---

<sup>4</sup> BEPS is a government policy that allows workers to save for old age, where a series of benefits is provided for saving. This includes life insurance and economic assistance in the event of the beneficiary's death.



small investments and worker training that should be supported by a third party to avoid workers having to take on financial risks and short-term decreases in earnings while they learn new techniques.

Entrepreneurship exercises were successful with workers who were enthusiastic about participating at the outset, suggesting that it is not worth trying to convince reluctant workers to participate in these types of activities. Additionally, it is crucial to provide economic incentives to workers that give them the required investments and time to build profitable microenterprises.

Workers highly valued programs and interventions that recognize their needs and preferences, particularly those that provide both immediate and long-term tangible benefits, such as access to medical specialists and retirement savings.

## Potential Next Steps

- Implement pilot projects in other regions to clarify whether the lessons learned from the project can be extrapolated to other regional contexts.
- Measure and evaluate these complementary compensation models for a longer period of time to allow for the measurement of longer-term impacts on workers' earnings as they perfect new harvesting techniques.
- Provide assisted harvesting tools and training to immigrant workers (especially Venezuelans), who generally have much lower levels of experience and productivity than Colombian coffee workers, to help close the wage gap.



**MEXICO**

PILOT PROJECT

## Problem Analysis

Verité research has found a number of risks related to child labor, forced labor, recruitment abuses, and poor working and living conditions in the Mexican coffee sector. Risks were found to be highest among Guatemalan workers employed in the state of Chiapas, where coffee farms rely heavily on Guatemalan and other Central American migrants, many of whom are undocumented and are therefore at greater risk of exploitation. Verité found that there is a low level of government capacity to enforce labor law in the Mexican coffee sector, as coffee falls under state, rather than federal, jurisdiction. Additionally, Verité found that many coffee farms and the agronomists, field technicians, and certification and monitoring bodies — who serve as the primary eyes and ears on the ground in the absence of government labor inspections — have low levels of awareness of international standards, Mexican law, and risks and root causes of labor violations, as well as effective steps that they can take to address these issues.

## Activities Implemented

In order to address the lack of knowledge and capacity among key Mexican coffee sector stakeholders to identify, address, and prevent labor issues, the COFFEE Project developed a robust online training program. While the COFFEE Project originally intended to develop an in-person training program, the COVID-19 pandemic forced a switch to an online training model. Fortunately, Verité was able to build off online training modules on labor issues in the Mexican coffee sector developed for Nestlé, which gave Verité permission to adapt and use these materials for the COFFEE Project. The Project ultimately developed 14 online training modules on core labor rights and steps that companies can take to effectively identify, address, and prevent labor risks. The Project subsequently shared the online training modules with certification bodies that conduct inspections for Rainforest Alliance, as well as staff, field technicians, and agronomists of major coffee companies. The Project conducted online instructor-led trainings (ILTs) for these individuals. Verité also provided in-person trainings for dozens of government officials who are members of Mexico's Intersecretarial Commission Against Trafficking in Persons. A subset of the online training modules were adapted to the international context, translated into English and Portuguese, and made publicly available on the COFFEE Project website, which was not originally planned.

A summary of the main elements of the Mexico pilot project can be found below:

- **Curriculum Development:** Curriculum developed based on research, needs assessments, and existing curricula developed for Nestlé in Mexico. A total of 12 online modules were developed specifically for Mexico, including five core and seven elective modules (see Figure 5 below).
- **Piloting training materials:** Provision of access to online training modules and ILTs for key private sector actors.
- **Refinement of training materials:** In keeping with the project's participatory approach, modifications were made to the training modules after a period of testing to ensure that they were applicable to a global audience.

- **Open-source online platform developed:** The modules were translated and uploaded onto Verité's learning management platform for inclusion on the COFFEE Project website to make them publicly available.
- **Training for government and CSOs:** To reach a wider audience, the project provided customized trainings for government and CSOs (certifiers).

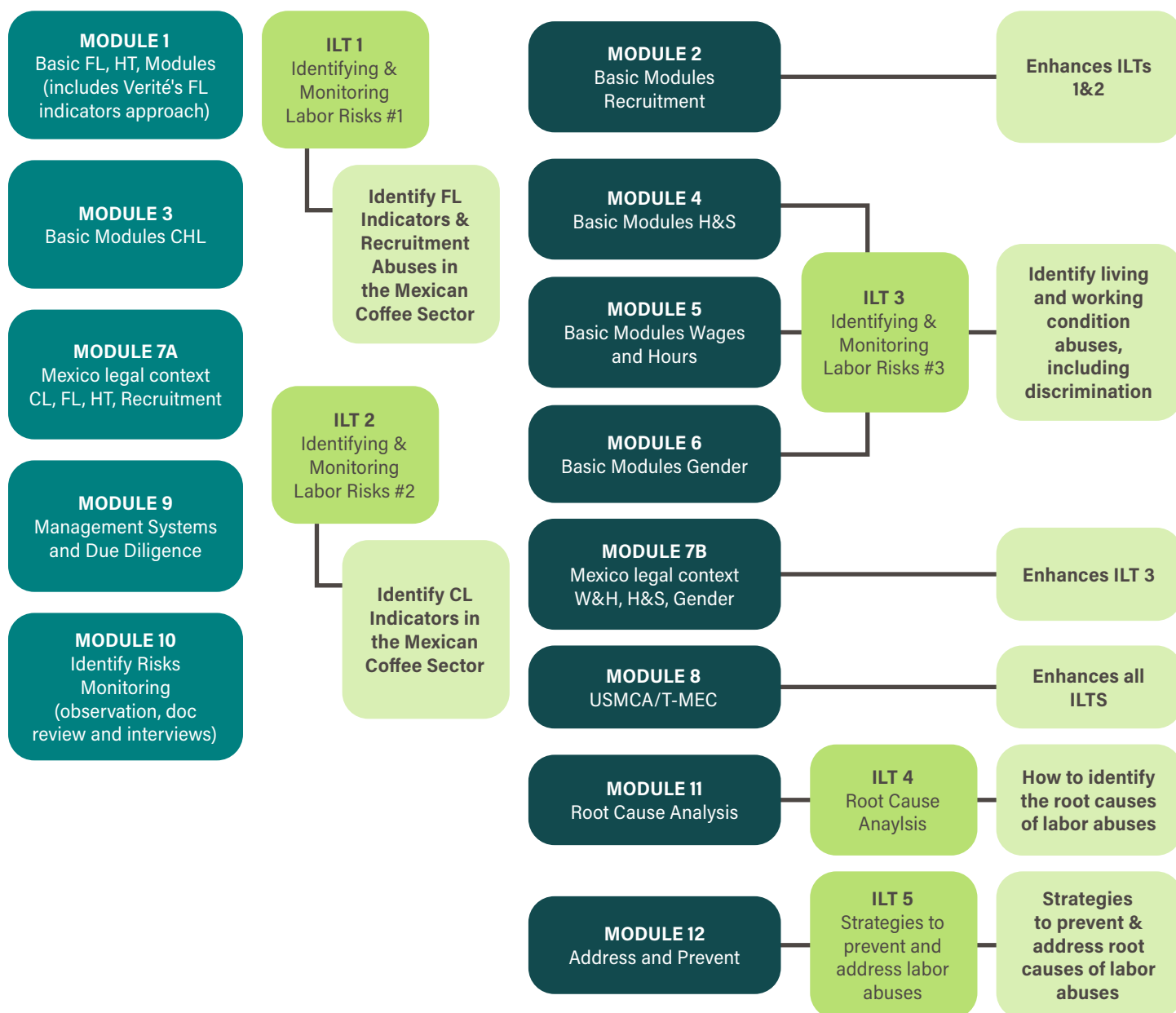


Fig. 5. COFFEE modules and trainings

## Successes and Challenges

### Successes

After piloting the online training modules with private sector partners in Mexico, Verité identified elements to be modified and corrected. An evaluation of participants' experiences verified that the modules, after minor corrections and modifications, were ready for translation into English and Portuguese and dissemination to the public, free of charge, through the COFFEE Project's website. Since then, usage of the online training modules for the COFFEE Project has reached well beyond the coffee sector, with some users reporting that their fields of work are non-profits focused on other sectors and auditors, among others.

The main successes of the training program are listed by category below:

#### Requirements:

- Facilitated dialogue between producers and certifiers on certification requirements.
- Buyers/brands became more conscious of legal and United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) requirements.

#### Risk prevention:

- Facilitated the analysis of risks and triangulation of data and complaints.
- Effectively diagnosed issues related to debt bondage and child labor.
- Participants became more conscious of the need for prevention programs.

#### Management systems:

- Improvement in human rights and sustainability management systems.
- The need for more support to implement workplans to remediate problems was detected.

### Challenges

There were challenges in engaging local campuses that train agronomists and field technicians. While many field technicians are trained in large universities located in the cities, there is also a significant volume of producers and field technicians who attend municipal branches of larger schools. In these cases, the most significant challenge to disseminating the COFFEE tools and training modules lies in the lack of infrastructure for online training at those satellite campuses.

Verité's biggest challenge was providing training to smallholder producers. Due to the restrictions and challenges that arose from the COVID-19 pandemic, the training program was delivered online, which required that participants have decent levels of literacy and access to computer equipment and internet, which often

is not the case for smallholders, who constitute the vast majority of farms in Mexico. Similarly, not being able to physically travel to the regions where coffee is produced made it more difficult to establish connections and relationships with smallholder farmers and their cooperatives, which hinders not only their access to the materials, but also the collection of feedback to develop viable and responsive options for this segment of the coffee sector.

Another challenge Verité found with the hybrid training approach was related to logistical coordination with partners in Mexico. Coordination with local private sector actors was needed to ensure a minimum viable number of participants in ILTs. This challenge triggered the need to work directly with different local managers to identify ideal dates and times and strategies to maintain a higher level of participation, thereby reducing the need to reschedule ILTs when not enough participants showed up.

## Lessons Learned

The piloting of the tools clarified the ideal timeline for ILTs, specifically that participants needed more time to complete the modules before the ILTs. Initially, the ILTs were scheduled soon after the modules were disseminated, forcing the participants to finish the asynchronous modules in a very short time between sessions. For this reason, some groups reported that they could not complete the necessary material between sessions, which led to participants arriving unprepared or not attending the ILTs. In response, for subsequent rounds of trainings, participants were allowed at least a full month between the date they were given access to the asynchronous modules and the first scheduled ILT.

Likewise, it became evident that the time scheduled for the ILTs had to be reduced to increase participant retention. ILTs were reduced from 120 minutes to 90 minutes at the suggestion of participants and facilitators. This adjustment reduced the number of participants who left before the end of ILTs, when the most important topics related to their work were covered.

The prevalence of intermediaries obstructs the dissemination of COFFEE Project resources and efforts to address labor risks in the Mexican coffee sector, especially in the state of Chiapas, which produces over 40 percent of Mexico's coffee, the largest amount of any state by far. Coffee buyers and large coffee growers in the state often function as intermediaries or middlemen that buy coffee from micro producers and sell it to major international brands and coffee traders. They often establish their own requirements for the purchase of coffee from smallholders, mainly related to quality. It is important to highlight that the majority of these large coffee producers or middlemen do not monitor respect for human or labor rights since they do not have the infrastructure to do so. Furthermore, there are few organizations in the area that work directly with workers in the coffee sector. This is a significant challenge for the dissemination and usage of the COFFEE tools and online training modules in the region.

## Potential Next Steps

Verité identified the possibility of increasing the impact and reach of its tools through academic institutions whose students are often farmers or field technicians on medium and large coffee farms. The students at these schools and universities do not usually receive training on labor issues, so there is a unique opportunity to disseminate the tools in a high impact group by collaborating with these institutions.

Based on the difficulty reaching smallholder farmers on the ground during the implementation of the pilot project, due to COVID-19, and smallholders' lack of access to computers and highspeed internet, Verité determined that it was necessary to develop alternative training materials for smallholders. Based on a process of multistakeholder consultation, the Project determined that it would be best to develop short training videos on key topics that could be disseminated to and among smallholder farmers by WhatsApp. The Project ultimately developed seven training videos on topics such as child labor, forced labor, recruitment, and discrimination in English, Spanish, and Portuguese, which are available on the Project website.

## Conclusions

---

In Brazil, the pilot project resulted in improvements in the recruitment practices of participating coffee producers and labor brokers. Labor brokers demonstrated important changes to their knowledge and perspectives regarding ethical recruitment and the steps that they should take to avoid recruitment-related abuses. The pilot project was able to achieve significant involvement of labor brokers, the most crucial actor in the coffee supply chain with respect to ethical recruitment, through training and monitoring of their recruitment practices.

In Colombia, the implementation and success of all pilot project activities was highly dependent on key local partners in the region. RGC and its *Manos del Café* project had already established important alliances with coffee cooperatives in the area, which allowed them, and subsequently Verité, to gain the trust of coffee producers and workers. Verité and RGC noted that complementary compensation models could be evaluated for a more extended period to capture migration dynamics (local and foreign) over multiple coffee harvests, along with longer-term impacts on closing the living wage gap.

In Mexico, prompted by feedback from training participants, Verité was able to make minor modifications to the online training modules to adapt them to the broader context of the Latin American coffee sector, translate them into English and Portuguese, and make them available to the general public free of charge on the COFFEE Project open-source website. This was not originally envisioned as being part of the COFFEE Project and the online training modules developed for Mexico have become a major contribution to the Project.