**NGO3 Interview Solidaridad Manizales - 14-7-2022**

**Can you start with a personal introduction. Who are you, what do you do, what institution do you work for, what is your role, etc.**

Ok, my name is [name], I work for the foundation Solidaridad Latin America. Currently within the organization, I am coordinating a project on school for young entrepreneurs, which is an alliance with Nestle and their project, Nestcafe Plan. We do thing in Antioquia and Risaralda. Personally, I am agronomist engineer, I have a master in agricultural systems. And a thing I am most proud of, and that gives me happiness, is that I am from a coffee growing family, coffee growers without land (cafeteros sin tierra) that dedicate themselves to work on the fields of others. I had the privilege, that not many have had, to study and here I am to assist them.

**Thank you, that is always good to see this smile and pride. From your experience, how do you see the actual context in coffee and cocoa?**

I think all sectors in the economy currently face many challenges, not only on the local level, or national, but also on a global level. On a local level, I am going to separate them, the biggest challenges that we have is partly the pressure that we put on the forests, basically because of climate change. Production is rising in the mountain areas, *(on a higher altitude*) and that will give pressure to the forests, water and the higher mountain areas. That affects what, the soils, possibility to have water resources, to process the coffee and sustain families, and it will make the management of the soil more difficult, because the rain is more and more heavy in shorter period of time and that means that we will have erosion, heavy erosion in the coffee areas. In addition, we still need synthetic fertilizers to still keep on producing coffee. Or more precisely, to keep on producing under the current productivity with the varieties that we currently have. And without a doubt, this has an impact on the livelihoods of the families. Because one of the main challenges that we have now is the costs, not only for the workforce, but also for fertilizers.

On a national level, we have now areas that produce coffee that before did not produce. That has to do with the peace process, under that government of Santos. Many projects started with coffee in those areas, and work with people that were not trained to cultivate coffee, with support from the organizations and institutions that are present in these areas. That also implies that we are getting to know new types of soils, new things, and here is a big need to keep on advancing. Also in research and how that research can be brought back to the coffee growers in that areas.

And another challenge is that we don’t have very large plots, about 96% of the coffee growers has an average of less than 5 hectares. Every time, we are more and more small. That could also be an advantage, because larger plots are also more dependent on workforce, which is one of the limitations that we have, but also for 5 hectares we need workforce, and workforce is more and more scarce. That also implies that we have higher costs of workforce, and every time, the costs of production will rise.

I think that we have big challenges. I also see challenges with the illusion, we have an ‘carga’ for 2.5 million. That seems like it is a lot, but of course when you look at the costs of production, we can see that we are still in the same situation. So here is a big, big challenge.

I also see big global challenges, with the new norm of the European Union, to produce our products free from deforestation, without agrochemicals, it can also be an opportunity, but without a doubt, we will also face a lot of resistance in some organizations in some sectors of the economy. I think this change is possible, but you need to do it.

And I also feel that there is a challenge for coffee growers, although they are small, produce other products, to conserve biodiversity, within local zones, and regional and national. This week, there was the third global forum on coffee and we saw that Africa is producing more coffee, it is entering strongly, and that also implies that the other countries will be on the same level, so a challenge is that we will have coffee Arabica that will face more and more difficulties in production.

**Thank you for this great answer to one question, a follow-up question I have is what other challenges do you see in the sector of coffee and cocoa?**

Other challenges, ok, building upon what I was saying. One of the biggest challenges that we now face is that our consumers go ahead of the producers, basically they set the rules for the producers. Here, this project seems super to me, because we will have a lot of residues, in a big part of the chain that we don’t use. One of the challenges that I think is, basically, we did not yet valorized what we have. For example, the cacao they sell like chocolate. Coffee they sell like tinto or, well we are evolving with brands of coffee, more as an economic topic, but we don’t go further. We are in a part of the chain and we keep on producing the basic. And another thing where I feel that there are opportunities, is we lack innovation and initiative within the whole chain. So that we do controlled fermentation. There are some projects, I heard about a project of someone that was making things out of spend coffee grounds. But this kind of information reaches the farmers quite late. Here we have a lot of challenges to produce our products and make something for the consumer. The consumer is saying, we want healthier products, we want products of this and this category. Almost that we are forced to change. And a challenge is that we have producers with an average age of 50 or 60 years old. The majority is over 40 years old and doing what they have always been doing, to make them to change, that is difficult. Looking it from the school of young entrepreneurs, I see that another challenge is that now we have very few young people working in agriculture. And we need to think of this topic, how can we make sure young people can live in the countryside, from agriculture as well. Also for women, because half of the rural population is woman.

**I understand the challenges, I am asking you now about challenges related to sustainability? In the context of coffee and cocoa, and the bigger context.**

Sustainability is currently, I think it is threatened. We are working strongly on these topics, and Solidaridad is strong in defining criteria for certification with the platform sustainable trade. Here we did a work, that always puts pressure on sustainability. It is difficult to reach agreements with producers, we have for a long time cut down trees to produce coffee and I feel that for the environmental part, we have challenges with the water. Every time, we have less water springs in the communities, about 80% of the contamination of the Cauca river is caused by the coffee production, so that is serious. The soils are losing the capacity as a sponge of water, we have heavy erosion on the plots and I feel that there are many species disappearing, that used to be part of our environment. It is difficult to see certain types of birds or animals that used to be part of our territory. That is also what we see with the pressure on the forests, the interconnectivity between the forests, we don’t have connectivity between the different forests that permit the movement of the species. There are many challenges. Also a lot of challenges in the social area, not to have workforce implies that, also related to the economic part, that the costs of production rise but also that the workers, the harvesters, collectors in the field, they are confronted with the topic of narcograffic. The consumption of drugs in the coffee regions in high. This is out of our sight, but I don’t know Daniel, for how long are you now involved in the coffee sector or do you know the sector? On Friday they receive the payment for their work, and behind them are the people to collect the money that they spent on drugs. That is a delicate topic.

In the social area, we need to tackle the problem of migration of youth. That is not only happening in Colombia, but also in Honduras, other parts of Latin America. Youth is migrating to search for opportunities. This search for opportunities is also based on this idea that being coffee producer, being a farmer is synonym for poverty. And that it is not a synonym for richness. And that is also a cultural thing.

For me, the topic of sustainability also covers the economic topic. How much land does a coffee producer need to live in a dignified way. I critized a lot certain politics and policies on this forum on coffee, that focus a lot on the productivity, for the past 100 years and in the coming 50 years we have worried so much about how many arrobas per hectare, and how we can produce more, extract from the soil. Like, we have a cow and we need to milk it, and we want to milk it until the very last drop. But the cow cannot give more. And we are not taking into account the conditions of the cow, or in this moment on the coffee culture. Me, coming from these coffee cultures, what draws attention living in the city, is to have a nice house, have good living conditions, and we keep on worrying about the production.

So I think we have big challenges. On the national level, and I don’t think this is solely national but also Latin American, the governments are giving more and more subsidies that result in that people are very comfortable with a family package, a package of different types of support. So if we look at challenges, I think we have a lot of challenges.

**Certainly, these are sensitive issues, but very real, real to the rural zones of Colombia and a reality that we need to work on. Now, what kind of projects does Solidaridad have to impact positively this sustainability?**

We do a lot of projects in the coffee sector, I cannot tell you that much about the cocoa sector. The projects that we realize is the reduce deforestation, increase plantation of trees and coffee trees so that they are resilient. Currently we are in the agreement forest and climate, that we signed last year, based on an alliance with different national institutions and governments, one of them the Netherlands. We are also working on a project of carbon credits, we are in an ambitious project to assist 27.000 families, with help from Microsoft, Rabobank, ACOP platform, the coffee growers receive incentives to plant trees. We have always been saying, don’t plant trees because that will diminish the productivity, we are now saying, plant trees, that will make a good agroforestry system that will not diminish your productivity, that will be in accordance with the climate and the soil, and you will receive, not a payment, because the biggest payment that we receive is that we can adapt to climate change and will not destroy our planet, that is really what we want. This is a way to incentivise planting trees and to be friends of the trees. That is something we are doing in a big project. How can we help reducing deforestation, we also help to have better living conditions. We did big investments to explain to producers to use fertilizers with low carbon footprint. The application of urea, that a big part of this urea will go back into the nature.

Another thing is local climate change, that there is no water, that there are strong rains, storms. That affects us a lot. We think that if we treat trees like friends, they will be this protective sealing for the coffee producer.

And also in this project to improve living conditions, we are with projects and alliances, to stimulate ecological stoves, so they don’t need to transport all the materials, but they have it there and only need to put it together. We are friends of the women, research says that a woman that is cooking on a stove based on wood, is the same as smoking 60 or 70 cigarettes. How are the longs of our women, we need to take care of them. We are united to promote ecological stoves, that consume less wood. We use, and I think this is interesting for the project. We stimulate the use of biodigestors in some areas, to use biogas that is not only produced by the manure of the animals, but also the mucilage of coffee. That biogas is used to make food. Here we are also working on, especially in Santuario, Risaralda. And also we do a pilot project about machines to wash the coffee, that is similar to those that they use in big plots, but this is for small plots, they only put the fermented coffee in it, and it is washed with only 0.7 liter of water per kilo of pergamino (green) coffee. So instead of 40 liters, we reduce the water use, resulting in less water use and less contamination.

**I didn’t know this information about the stoves, that is impressive. From your experience, do you have knowledge or are you connected to projects related to bioenergy?**

No, apart from the biogas projects, no. The big challenge for that is that only a few plots have pigs, for biogas from mucilage, the families also need to have pigs and that is a limitation to make this project bigger.

**Ok, but I understand that you know the biogas, and biodigestors, do you know opportunities and challenges for these kind of bioenergy projects in the sector?**

Yes, sometimes it is difficult form farmers to have access to certain things. For example, now we are working on a project in Santuario and one of the things we want to do is with one of the sub-products of coffee, is after trillage (trilago) of coffee (removing skin after drying), remaining pergamino. And there are many studies with this, and this pergamino has a lot of calorific value, also to dry coffee in silos. We are looking with other companies to make recommendations to use this skin. Here, there are many studies, for example when we started this project, in Santuario, who produces this skin, so people can buy this. And there is no. It is not easy for producers to have access to some primary materials. There are opportunities, for example a publication of Cenicafe in 2010, and from there on, there are many studies on the use of subproducts as energy source. In the research, big opportunities have been identified, but I don’t know what happened with that research but I think there is a big opportunity.

**I am going to show you an image of the biohub, one of the concepts they are working with. (*Daniel explains the concept*). We want to ask you what benefits, challenges and harms do you see for this project?**

Well, let’s start with challenges, I think one of the big challenges is how can we bring research that says this is possible, how can we make that realize. How, from this value chain, can we create a sub-chain that really benefit the small coffee producers. Technically, for a big coffee producer, this is easy, I have my big plot, I generate a lot of residues. How can we really make this beneficial to those that we really want to benefit? That is a big challenges. Another is how can we homogenize, or have one quality of coffee to produce a certain type of coffee. We all have different concepts, different challenges, mentality and culture. One of the opportunities is that people already produce coffee, we don’t need to teach them to cultivate something else. We can develop what we already have. The harms that can be generated, I don’t know. I can’t say because in principle, in this idea of win-win collaboration, there can be a limitation from other sectors that already produce certain types of renewable energy, and what we need is openness in all aspects. That not only the research thinks it is possible, what is happening now with Siva, Susan, Daniel, Diana and me, but also that the producer thinks it is possible, and that this win-win collaboration is more than only money. That there is a good impact on regenerative agriculture, an impact for the society and the families. I don’t know if I responded to your 3 questions Daniel.

**Yes, what we are looking for is this perspective, that is very valuable.**

Yes, but you asked me about the challenges, hurdles, and what was the other, benefits?

**Yes, benefits**

The benefits is another time, win-win. But another thing, looking at the picture, I see a big opportunity for the youth. They don’t want to keep on producing like they have been doing before. It is a window that we can open to show, you can do something different. This can be a big opportunity for the youth, this can be interesting for them.

**Within this concept, from your experience, do you see any role for Solidaridad in the development of a project like this?**

Yes, now we are working strongly on the carbon credits, and environmental topic. But we don’t close our eyes to see other opportunities. We as Solidaridad, we want to work more on circular economy. This picture helps us to see what could be a way to work with the producer on this topic of circular economy. Of course it needs to be a good project, well developed, we need to see how to do pilot etc. There is work to be done, but I do see opportunities, on a personal level. What I see as opportunity is that we are now starting to look at coffee culture in a way different from what we are used to all those years, we work with climate change, and also circular economy, we are working on that together with Peru.

**This is an interesting project, from your experience, like Solidaridad and as a personal, what do you think this project needs to it can be developed further?**

I think, I am going to mix everything, but looking at this, this project is very ambitious, for all it implies. How can I say this well. There are individual interests that do not coincide with collective interests. People will say, what a fantastic project, spectacular, but it occurred to you, not to me. We lack a kind of mentality, and we need to think about the project, regardless of who thought of it. This is a project that can bring benefits. And we should not think, what will be my benefit, but what will be the common benefit. On a personal level, in our culture, we see in our politics, politics that is present in all spheres of society, I also feel like we lack to identify who can be really interested and how we can make it more easy. Sometimes there is a project that is really good, but if we then look at how can you realize it, it becomes really complicated, and the people will think oei no, this is too much. If we propose a project that implies more workforce needed, but I don’t have that workforce, there we can bring a solution. Now, more than ever, we need efficiency. We often focus so much in our projects on, [we all have humans as central, but we all focus on ‘obligation’ and we forget the humans.] There I think are a lot of difficulties in the projects. And another one, is that I feel that those project, I talked a bit about the politics, like how will this benefit me, I feel like this is also from the other side, projects are connected to political themes that are pushing/giving impulses to develop these in the communities.

**Ok, now, I am going to show you a power-interest grid with the different actors that play a role in the sector of coffee, and placed their position based on their power and interest. Which actors do you think should be in this grid and why?**

Apart from those that are here?

**Yes**

Apart from those, I think the associations of coffee. Not the individual coffee farmers but the associations. The cooperatives unite farmers, but what we have seen is from there, associations have emerged that identified their common necessities ad they want to find solutions for those. And they formed associations and I think, for example, to develop this project according to the picture you showed me before, with a coffee producer, or some coffee producers, or maybe with a big coffee producer, but when we have coffee associations, we have a big opportunity.

**And another one?**

For example, I don’t see the Federacion de cafeteros

**Yes, it is, Fedecafe**

Ok, yes I think they are very important, I don’t know if the buyers of coffee are here? Are they the biomass collectors?

**No, those are the ones that organize the logistic part, bring the biomass from the fields to a location**

Ok, no I think another important actor is, well now we have association and cooperatives that buy coffee, here we have a big volume of biomass, with a good calorific value, the skin of coffee. This is located at the associations, cooperatives, and also the local buyers of coffee. I think they can have a role as well.

**Another question, what do you think of the position in terms of power and interest?**

I was surprised by the position of Cenicafe, it is in the middle of power. Because I think that the federation is the one that takes the decisions for Cenicafe, I think it is good. Maybe it differs per municipality, there are certain municipalities that are more interested in certain projects than other ones. It depends a lot on the policies per government, but how we are now, the current national government, the government has an important role in power, but how it is now, in renewable energy projects, they have also a high interest. But that will change a lot depending on who is in charge. But this is not only for Colombia, but for what is happening on a global level, we are looking for more renewable energy instead of petroleum.

**Yes, the last question is, with these actors, with which actors is Solidaridad connected and how is that relationship?**

Well, let’s see. First the national government, we have a good relationship, last year we received a fund from the ministry of agriculture that has to do with innovation. We always have good relations. The regional governments, we are less connected with the regional governments, it depends a lot on the will. We do work strongly with the municipality, not always with the institutions like the mayor, but we do work closely with the municipalities. The maritime industry, we don’t work with. Communication platforms, yes we do that as well. With technology providers, specifically with companies that are reducing carbon footprint. With the cooperatives we work strongly, also with the federation, that could be more, but we work specifically in the municipalities with them. With biorefineries, I don’t think so, but we do strongly work with palmoil, so it could be we work with biorefineries. Liquid transport, no I don’t think so, biomass collectors neither. With academia yes with certain academia. With coffee producers 100%. With Cenicafe, very little. Ah, you know which actor is lacking, from the industry of coffee, the coffee roasters. I think there, they are important, they are also a motor of development for the communities. In general terms, they do the transformation on a large scale, so they also produce a lot of residues. The quality is not the best, but they also have subproducts and can be of help.

**Siva: In the projects that Solidaridad develops, what is the biggest challenge in knowledge transfer to producers?**

I think the biggest challenge, also for each extentialist, is that the producer faces a lot of changes in a short period of time. When the producer sees changes in a short period of time, he gets excited and continues to develop. I think the biggest challenge is to get to know their challenges and needs in their own territory. There are different methods to do that, but that they identify themselves the changes that they need. Sometimes, I want to change what do you want to change, they say I don’t know. So that the changes come from their own proposals. I think there is a big challenge.

**Siva: Wat can you do, to improve communication between producers themselves?**

I think, now we are impulsing a lot the communal work, so that producers are not islands within their own communities. That they know what others are doing, what is working, what will help. This is something that we are doing now, with this scarcity of workforce. You have the same need as I do, one day I help you and one day you help me. That is a way to help to improve the communication, that also improves the integration within the communities, that we are not islands. I think that is one of the main challenges. But also, the topic of associations, also helps a lot in the search of the common factors, challenges and opportunities, for everyone.

**Siva: What are the big difference between added value between small and big producers. Not economic value, but capacities, difficulties.**

There can be exceptions, but within the values of small scale farmers, coffee is part of their culture, a small scale coffee grower often has been that for whole their lives, because they did not have other opportunities. Here, I think there is all the history, this is where I was born, there is a family history, it is related to our story, experience. *Al cafecultor pequeno le duele el grano* (the coffee bean hurts for a small scale farmer). What do I want to say with that, they want to produce it in the best way, if there is anything to improve it, they will. The sustainability of their coffee culture is to improve the quality of their coffee. Also, I see that one of the big characteristic of the smallscale coffee farmer is labour done by themselves. They work themselves in the field, in that way they can harvest the best coffee beans, take care of the trees, see where there are opportunities for their children. And their children, we know this because of research done by Solidaridad, they don’t leave their plots because they don’t love coffee, they go because they look for more opportunities. But if there are opportunities, they want to stay, also for family reasons, they want to continue with what their parents do. The big value that I see is that this is what us unites in our culture and in our family.

**Siva: Are there differences between farmers, more developed than others, and how would you compare the farmers in this region, Caldas, Risaralda and Quindio. How would you compare them with other regions?**

Now we have a second coffee region, the region or Narina, Huila, that has received a lot of impulse. That made us think, we think that we produce very good coffee here. People from those areas used to go from field to field to work and harvest, but now they have their own plots. And they work really well with quality coffee, they produce high quality coffee. In Solidaridad we use a scheme of technical assistance, some are farmers that you only need to tell once and they start doing it, not because you tell them to, but they are really motivated. These are coffee producers that there are, these are only a few, but they are a reference point for other coffee producers. There are others that first want to see how other are doing, before they will adapt. These producers are behind the leaders and wait for the experiences of the reference producers. And then there is the big mass, that wait for those few farmers to see how it is going. From Solidaridad we are focusing on those farmers in the second group, they will adapt the new technology, they are the once that will use it and give an impulse to the other ones, they will tell to the others how it works. With them, we have more meetings, more visits to their fields, because they are the key actors. Those that come behind them, is an important mass. With them we also do meetings, trainings etc. but not on the same level in the first categories, that are more open. When we say let’s make these biofuels, the last category will say, no that is not possible, but the first category will say, how do you do that? With them we start to work.

**To finalize, 2 things. 28 of July we organize a workshop where we unite the different stakeholders we interviewed to discuss opportunities and needs. And they will also present the project in a more concrete way. It will be important for the project that you will participate. We will send the invitation as well. And a second one, thank you very much for this interview and your time.**

Thank you very much to invite us and think of us in this project, we work with the UTP in a articulated way in many projects. Thank you for this opportunity, I hope I was of help. About the values you asked me, important values as well in coffee growing families is, they are very hard working people, working in the sun, to make sure they produce very good quality coffee, and so you can enjoy a good cup of coffee, and I am sure they are doing that in the building where you are sitting now.

**Yes, that is an important characteristic of the coffee producers in Colombia**

Yes indeed, thank you very much and greetings.