

## Summary of report

### **'Relationship between Icafé technicians and coffee producers'**

The following document is a summary of the report 'Relationship between Icafé technicians and coffee producers'<sup>1</sup> which was originally written in Spanish for the Costa Rica Institute of Coffee (Icafé). The report details the state of the relationship between Icafé's experts and coffee producers, particularly in the context of the farm visits offered by Icafé to all producers. Subsequently, the document proposes a series of recommendations to improve the technical service provided by Icafé for the optimisation of coffee production. The report is one of the outcomes of a research project<sup>2</sup> conducted by SSRP researchers Dr Layla Zaglul Ruiz and Dr Evan Killick based in the School of Global Studies, University of Sussex.

#### Methods:

Two research tools used for the data collection were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. The participant observation was conducted during the weekly visits that technicians carry out to producers' farms. In total, twelve participant observations took place. On the other hand, twenty-six interviews were completed amongst three different groups: 1. Coffee producers 2. Icafé technicians 3. Miscellaneous (secretaries and heads of the regional offices, and the management of the Icafé regional offices program)

#### Main findings:

##### 1. Producers are satisfied with the visits:

All producers interviewed showed satisfaction and appreciation for Icafé's staff after receiving technical support from the visits. The technicians present themselves as experts without undermining the knowledge and experience producers have. This environment has allowed a semi-horizontal relationship creating clear communication between the parties.

##### 2. More visits:

Producers expressed that they wished technicians could visit them more often in order to receive stronger support during the different stages of production. Likewise, the technicians argue that a shorter gap in between visits would avoid many of the actions that negatively impact producers such as unnecessary purchase of products or neglect of part of the production process.

##### 3. Limited outreach:

Most producers hear about the service of farm visits thanks to other individuals and not by dissemination campaigns. This means that the outreach strategy of communicating the

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<sup>1</sup> In Spanish: 'Estado de la relación entre extensionistas del Icafé y personas productoras de Café'.

<sup>2</sup> The project titled 'Supporting social, environmental and economic sustainability in the Costa Rican coffee industry'.

different services Icafé offers and how to access them, has not proven efficient. Consequently, there is a significant part of the population of producers that Icafé is not reaching.

#### 4. Lack of data:

Icafé currently lacks a standardised database backed and protected by Icafé, which can be accessed by the technicians, outreach staff and the management of the regional offices. This is essential for better dissemination of the functions of Icafé.

#### 5. Producers communicate using WhatsApp:

The findings show that most of the producers use WhatsApp as the main means of communication with the technicians. They use this application for receiving invitations to collective activities from Icafé as well as personalised technical support. Even though this is the main tool of communication, currently the institution does not have a strategy put in place for the use of this application.

### Recommendations:

In order to improve communication between producers and technicians and to mitigate some of the problems found in the research, the following recommendations are presented:

#### 1. WhatsApp as a tool for technical support:

It is required that all the Icafé regional offices operate a WhatsApp business account. This account must be monitored by a dedicated member of staff during the opening hours of each regional office. The services offered by WhatsApp are to complement the **technical support** currently in place, and to contribute to the already existing **dissemination and promotion** campaigns about the services Icafé offers producers. The report discloses a strategy for the use of this tool.

#### 2. Data collection:

The report describes in detail a voluntary campaign of producers' data collection (name, phone number and canton where the farm is located) that should be put into practice. These actions are necessary to access the producers Icafé has not been able to reach.

#### 3. Standardised database:

The data gathered in the campaign mentioned above should be saved in a database backed up by Icafé and accessible for all the technicians and secretaries working at the regional offices. The report clarifies the steps necessary to implement this.