



project results

ACCESSING NEW MARKETS THROUGH CERTIFICATION FOR COFFEE PRODUCERS IN RWANDA



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Beneficiary organisation

TROPIC COFFEE COMPANY Ltd. (TROPIC) is a Rwandan coffee producer, aggregator and exporter that works with cooperatives, companies, and a network of more than **3,000 smallholder coffee farmers** in different areas of the country. The company sources coffee from cooperatives and individual farmers and pulps it from its three washing stations located in the Southern and Western provinces. TROPIC's business strategy centres on increasing coffee volumes; acquiring sufficient, well priced and timely working capital, identifying buyers able to purchase and pay a premium for higher quality (organic certified) coffee, and securing the certifications to better support the farmers they work with.

The challenge

As demand for Rainforest Alliance (RFA)-certified Rwandan coffee grew – driven by European and American buyers increasingly requiring Fairtrade or Rainforest Alliance certification – **TROPIC faced the challenge of transitioning its farmers and cooperative network from the now-merged UTZ (Good Coffee) certification to the new RFA standards.** This required updated compliance while preserving the momentum built through its monthly training programs in Good Agricultural Practices (GAP), group management, transparency, and farm accounting. TROPIC needed to adapt its entire support framework to RFA's more comprehensive criteria without disrupting the supply stability it had carefully built. Achieving RFA certification also presented TROPIC with the opportunity to command higher pricing, strengthen demand from existing buyers, and access new customers and markets.

The proposed solution

RFA certification is achieved through a structured process combining farmer training, group reorganisation, and operational improvements. Reorganising farmer groups into a structured network ensures smoother compliance and a more manageable certification process. Pre-certification training sessions conducted for both farmers and staff build the knowledge and capacity needed to meet RFA standards, while registration in the RFA Management Information System (MIS) ensures traceability and transparency across the supply chain. Trained staff members can then cascade knowledge on the economic, social, and environmental outcomes of the RFA standard across the wider farmer network, extending the reach and impact of the certification. Engaging an authorised certification body to conduct a transition audit resolve any non-conformities and issue a transition certificate covering certified volumes which provides TROPIC with access to premium markets, higher prices, and strengthened relationships with existing and new buyers.

The expected outcomes of the project were:

- 1 The training of **630 smallholder farmers** on RFA standards.
- 2 The RFA-certification of **350 smallholder farmers** suppliers.
- 3 The attraction of **4 new buyers** and increased sales volumes with existing ones.

PRIORITY TOPICS

Environment and climate change 
Fair agrifood systems 

IMPACT INVESTOR

alterfin 

BENEFICIARY ORGANISATION

TROPIC COFFEE COMPANY Ltd
Rwanda

NUMBER OF FARMERS REACHED

661

AGRICULTURAL VALUE CHAIN

Coffee

START DATE

February 2023

END DATE

February 2024

TOTAL EXPENDITURE

€ 19,715
Including € 15,769 (80%)
financed by SSNUP





key results



RFA-compliant documentation developed



Processing, milling, packing, warehousing and trading sites registered



Field staff and MIS team trained on RFA certification and equipped with inspection techniques



Supplier farmers registered in RFA MIS



661

26% women

smallholder farmers trained on sustainable agriculture standards and farm requirements & certified on RFA standards



including 21 lead farmers

Strong interest in RFA certification across the farming community, combined with a train-the-trainer approach enabled the inclusion of additional beneficiaries



21,8 metric tons of coffee supplied by certified farmers



RWF 130,897,500 paid to farmers following certification implementation

Equivalent to approximately EUR 100,000 or EUR 150 per farmer



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new buyer attracted for certified coffee



Other aggregators in the sector replicated TROPIC's capacity-building and certification model

SDGs supported by the project



1. No poverty

1.5 Building the resilience of vulnerable people

2. Zero hunger

2.3 Improving agricultural productivity and increasing smallholder farmers' income

2.4 Adoption of productive, sustainable and resilient agricultural practices

13. Climate action

13.1 Strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity to climate change



lessons learnt



Building on existing certification frameworks accelerates results

Prior experience with recognised sustainability standards can significantly ease the transition to more demanding requirements. Where farmers have already been organised into groups, exposed to training, and introduced to documentation and compliance practices, the groundwork for higher-level certification is largely in place. Rather than starting from scratch, organisations can redirect existing structures, relationships, and knowledge, reducing the time, cost, and complexity of the process. Familiarity with core concepts such as group management, record-keeping, and agricultural standards provides a solid foundation on which new or updated requirements can be layered.



Imitation effects amplify sector-wide impact

A well-designed and demonstrably successful certification initiative can generate positive externalities beyond its original scope. When an organisation (or farmers) visibly benefits from adopting sustainable practices – through higher prices, new market access, and stronger buyer relationships – competitors and peers are incentivised to replicate similar approaches, leading to a broader shift in industry norms and practices.



Registration and traceability systems are foundational

Integrating farmers into an MIS is a critical prerequisite for certification. Without systematic registration, farmers cannot be formally included in the certification scope and traceability of certified volumes cannot be guaranteed. Prioritising farmer registration and data management from the outset therefore reduces delays, strengthens compliance monitoring, and builds the supply chain credibility that buyers require.

Outlook

Between 2023 and 2025, **TROPIC grew its sourcing farmer base from 2,767 to 3,384**, reflecting the increasing appeal of its model among farming communities. TROPIC is currently pursuing Fairtrade certification which, combined with its existing Organic and RFA certifications, would consolidate its position as a fully multi-certified operator and reinforce its attractiveness to sustainability-driven buyers worldwide.

Check out another SSNUP project with TROPIC



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c/o ADA asbl • 39, rue Glesener • L-1631 Luxembourg • +352 45 68 68 1 • ssnup@ADAimpact.lu • www.ssnup.org

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