



To put it simply, **we are India's first brand of genuinely sustainable coffee.**

Gaia's Cup is an exploration of how to use science to solve real-world environmental and development problems. We work in coffee landscapes in India to find innovations to reconcile agricultural production with biodiversity conservation. Our work is grounded in action-research, where we use empirical evidence to inform our understanding of how to achieve sustainability. Our aim is to create an ecologically sustainable and resilient farming practice that can withstand future shocks and crises, whether environmental or market-related.

#### **Gaia's Cup is not-for-profit.**

Our coffee exists because coffee growers need to be supported to grow coffee in sustainable ways. The revenue we generate from sales of our coffee goes right back into our biodiversity conservation work on farms. We do not measure our success by our profit margins. We simply use business practices as a means to enable participating coffee growers to maintain healthy ecosystems on their plantations.

#### **What makes us different from run-off-the-mill coffee brands?**

We think our non-business approach makes us darn special!

We are also a group of individuals who are trained conservationists. Our interests and skills lie in how to safeguard wildlife species, forests and other natural landscapes and livelihood security of natural-resource users. This means that when we say our coffee is **shade-grown**, we pretty much know what we're talking about. For us, shade-grown coffee is coffee grown under the canopy of a mosaic of diverse tree species, including species that are endemic, endangered and locally threatened. Think along the lines of *Ficus mysorensis*, *Garcinia gummi-gutta*, *Dysoxylum malabaricum*, *Artocarpus hirsutus*, *Canarium strictum* and a host of other trees that are ecologically important for the landscape. Our coffee is not shade-grown simply because we think it's cool...Our coffee is shade-grown because shade trees are critical to ecologically sustainable coffee production. You know what, we're more than shade-grown coffee.

## **We want to transform how coffee is grown and sold.**

Global markets for coffee operate in ways that neither support coffee growers nor enable biodiversity conservation. In systems which reward 'more' rather than 'better', innovation has focused on increasing productivity through agricultural intensification. From developing drought-resistant coffee plants to implementing subsidies for harmful chemicals, our production systems are out of sync with our living environments. The global race to produce the largest volumes of coffee doesn't help either. Maybe its time to take pride in producing less, but spectacular quality and through great processes.

Maybe its also time to take ownership of coffee commodity chains. Don't both coffee growers as well as consumers have the right to participate meaningfully in value chains? Currently, the 'value' in value chains (viz. profits, demands, supply, quality parameters and incentives for production) is controlled entirely by large corporate retailers and roasters. This makes important things like protecting the environment or securing the livelihoods of small-holder coffee producers extremely difficult. When a turn-over of billions of dollars is at stake, the conservation of trees is of least priority.

## **Gaia's Cup is a non-business operating in a non-market way!**

We know this makes us ambitious but we're not convinced that its impractical.

Our coffee is sourced directly from coffee farms, with whom we have longstanding relationships, that started with research. We support these farms to adopt sustainable farming practices. Coffee harvested from these farms is then processed, roasted and directly sold into the market, alongside outreach with consumers about sustainable living. Our hands-on and research-driven approach means that we are continuously on farms and engaged in dialogues about sustainability with coffee growers and other industry stakeholders. We believe in a 100% partnership with producers. We recognise the challenges faced to manage farms and respect that sustainable, sustainable farming is not always easy. But fundamentally, our profits, prices and purchases are not solely determined by global markets. We make decisions based on what is best for the environment and security of our producers.

## **We do more than certifications.**

Certifications are complicated. Our research tells us that sustainable coffee certifications (like Rainforest Alliance, UTZ-Certified and so on) are replete with challenges. These have limitations in what they can achieve in local places given their global nature. We are therefore more in favour of developing local, participatory guidelines for sustainability. This means that our 'standards' are a lot more targeted towards conservation or livelihood goals. We ask more of coffee producers and in return support them more as well. At present, we think side-stepping certification will allow us to do more in terms of conservation and human well-being. But we're still exploring, evolving and recognise that many consumers will want these more formal forms of attestations.

## **Our goal is to conserve the environment, not to sell coffee.**

But we think micro-enterprises are an important way to achieve our environmental goals. We believe that farmers will grow right if consumers demand it. More importantly, **selling coffee is only one of**

**the many things that we do.** Our research initiatives are a critical component of the design of our project. We recognise that such initiatives will work only if we are continuously clued into how landscapes are changing. We are also actively involved in engaging stakeholders, including coffee roasters, producers, traders and so on. Our coffee is unique because we push consumers to think about where their cup comes from, how it has been produced and its social and ecological footprint. [Read about this work on our 'Conservation Strategy' page.](#)

We are (and hopefully will always be) work in progress. While we get our model right, we will continuously iterate, adapt and evolve into different ways of being. However, our commitment to conservation of biodiversity and social well-being will remain non-negotiable!

[www.gaias-cup.org](http://www.gaias-cup.org)