



POWER SHIFT

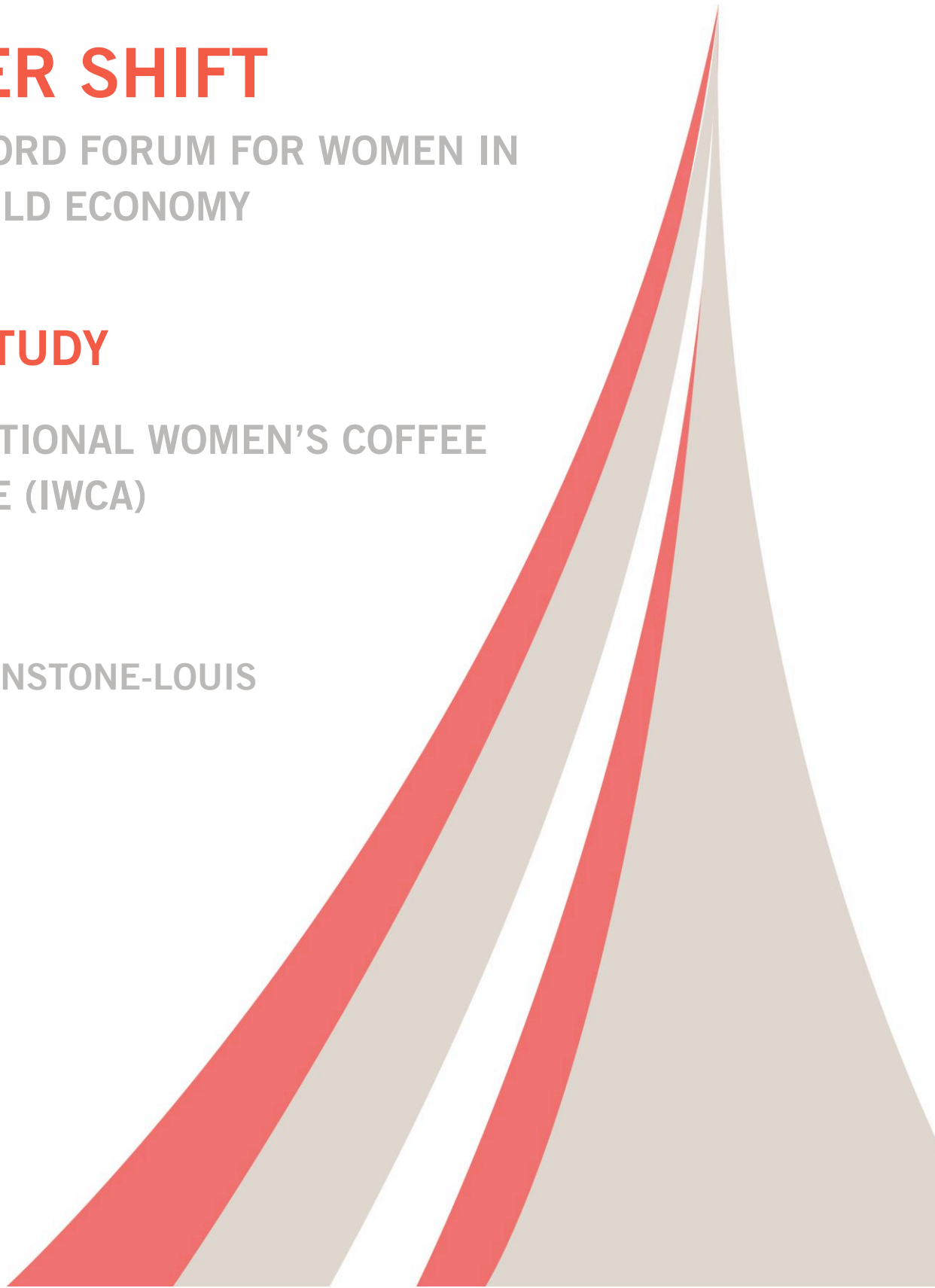
THE OXFORD FORUM FOR WOMEN IN
THE WORLD ECONOMY

CASE STUDY

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S COFFEE
ALLIANCE (IWCA)

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International Women's Coffee Alliance

Saïd Business School, University of Oxford, United Kingdom

[Phyllis Johnson](#) hung up the phone. A Chicago coffee buyer she knew well had given up on a transaction she had been helping to broker for months. A coffee importer herself, Johnson knew industry competition was intense. As board member of the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA), a global organization that united women in the coffee value chain, pursuing commercial transactions was not necessarily core to her remit. But still, she felt deeply discouraged by the collapse of the deal. This particular contract would have resulted in the first large purchase from IWCA Burundi, where [Isabelle Sinamenye](#) had been tirelessly leading hundreds of women – many living in remote areas and tragically affected by a history of genocide – to produce coffee at international quality standards. The Chicago buyer was sure her customers would be captivated by this story, but she was worried about shipping risk, and had therefore abandoned the purchase.

“Last time she purchased from a new geography, the shipment arrived two months late,” Phyllis later explained to the IWCA board, “She had to source elsewhere to fill the gap, and when the coffee arrived, it wasn't fresh.”

The concern about transportation delays might have been overcome by a compelling narrative about the source of the coffee. However, the cost of communications materials to tell the IWCA Burundi story (plus the potential for shipping problems) made the whole exercise unappealing. Burundi was not an [established](#) source of coffee for mainstream buyers. “I know we are not a commercial entity,” Phyllis continued, “But the IWCA network can open doors for our members to gain contracts they'd be unlikely to make on their own. With a bit of effort, we could make the proposition more attractive by sorting out the communications aspect for buyers. Buyers like my friend in Chicago just do not have the bandwidth to do the branding themselves.” A board member fired back: “Do we have the bandwidth”?

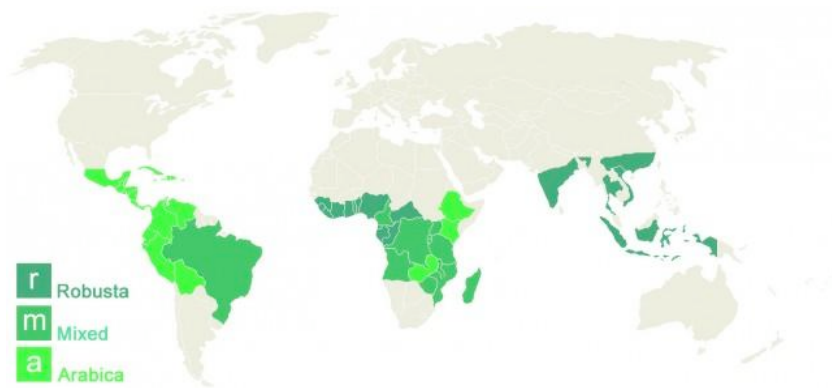
The IWCA board faced three potential options for improving the appeal of a women-friendly coffee: First, they could attempt to develop an IWCA brand, managed centrally, and applied to all of their global chapters. Second, they could seek to partner with coffee importers, roasters or retailers on such a project. Third, they could embrace the emerging trend in which their country chapters launched their own lines of coffee using the IWCA logo. But was the market ready for IWCA coffee at all? Would the organization's scarce resources in fact be better spent on advocacy and awareness-raising within the industry?

The World of Coffee

[Coffee](#) was one of the most valuable agricultural commodities in the world. It was particularly central to the economies of countries in which it was grown, often developing nations. Because it grew best at high altitudes in tropical climates, it was cultivated in an equatorial belt stretching from Colombia to Cameroon and Tanzania to the Philippines and Papua New Guinea (Figure 1). Many coffee-growing areas faced political instability and battled the ever-present threat of agricultural blight, which could [devastate](#) communities in a single season. Coffee could be cultivated on mechanized plantations, on large farms where it

would be picked, sorted, and dried by hand, or on small household plots. Each setting provided unique challenges and opportunities to those who gained their livelihood from the industry. (Video: [Coffee cultivation, Finca La Bohemia, Guatemala](#)).

Figure 1: Map of coffee growing countries



The two main [varieties](#) of coffee, *arabica* and *robusta*, are indicated on the map. Image source: Coffee Machine

Roasting facilities were usually unavailable locally; most coffee beans were still green when shipped. The majority of value was added to coffee at the point of roasting and branding, which were almost exclusively conducted in non-coffee growing countries (see Appendix 1: Coffee Value Chain).

Coffee consumption was predominantly a Western habit: by retail value, the United States drank the most, while Europe, Canada, and Australia downed much of the rest. Despite times of economic recession, coffee sales had shown consistent growth across the 2000's. In 2012, prices were at a thirty-year high. But consumers tended to consider coffee an “affordable luxury,” forgoing many things before their morning cup even in the face of price increases and economic downturn.ⁱ

Because coffee was typically exported unprocessed, most coffee-growing countries did not have a strong culture of domestic consumption. So, coffee producers had seldom actually tasted the beverage their beans were used to make. This inexperience with the final product created a further inequity in exchange. Because coffee, like wine, varied a great deal and required a cultivated palate to judge its quality, those who had never tasted coffee were at a distinct bargaining disadvantage—they had little basis on which to evaluate the quality of their product and, therefore, the price it could command. Further, without the ability to discern nuances in taste, growers could not improve coffee as it was cultivated and, thus, increase the desirability of their output.

Consumers were beginning to appreciate specific taste and quality aspects of coffee, as well as show interest in the environmental and social impact of its production. Perhaps due in part to the evident economic distance between coffee producers and coffee drinkers, there was a growing market for “ethical” product offerings, with particular interest shown in imports that provided easily identifiable benefits to grower communities.ⁱⁱ Though both men and women drank coffee “on the go,” women dominated food and beverage purchasing for home consumption overall and thus, according to several reports, could be expected to be the primary consumer segment.ⁱⁱⁱ

Women in Coffee

When I started going to coffee growing countries . . . I'm going to the fields. I'm going in the processing mills. I'm going in the trading offices. I'm going in the little cafes. And I'm seeing women everywhere. But when I'm going to the [industry] leadership conferences, I'm not seeing them on the stage. I'm not seeing them on the boards of directors of their local organizations. And I asked myself, "What's wrong with this picture"?... So there was a group of us who started to talk to each other and ask, "What if we looked at the global supply chain? What if we could connect women from seed to cup"?... If you look at the resources that some of the women who work in the global industry have... there really should be tremendous support available.

- [Margaret Swallow](#), Former Executive Director of the Coffee Quality Institute, IWCA Co-founder

The labor to grow coffee was mostly supplied by women. Findings of a study conducted for the IWCA Kenya chapter, shown in Table 1, were dramatic, but not atypical: women and children performed the work until the crop was taken to market; from there, men tended to take over.

Throughout the developing world, men were also migrating from the countryside to cities, leaving women to cultivate farms, whatever the crop. Women, therefore, would become even more central to coffee production going forward. However, because they often had little training or market experience, they were even more vulnerable to the vicissitudes of agricultural livelihoods than men.^v

The founding members of IWCA were an international cadre of female coffee buyers, importers, roasters, and retailers who had each developed an interest in the issues facing women in the industry and wanted to increase women's participation at every point in the value chain. IWCA began as a non-profit based in the United States in the early 2000's. The organization grew quickly, garnering partners from influential players in the trade, men and women alike. IWCA had no paid staff, but ran entirely on volunteers. These passionate members, some among the most senior people in the industry, were known to pay for their own travel and share hotel rooms at events to make their work happen.

IWCA worked through chapters in coffee-producing nations. The organization encouraged these chapters to register as legal, independently governed entities, which allowed women to interact with their local government and market as a group, rather than as individuals (Appendix 2: Excerpt of Kenya IWCA activities 2012-17). A chapter typically comprised a

Table 1

Who is responsible for each of the following roles in coffee production? Please pick one.	Responses (%)			
	Men	Women	Girls	Boys
Cultivating for coffee bushes	5	74	11	9
Picking coffee	7	54	20	19
Sorting coffee at home	4	60	29	7
Sorting coffee at the factory	9	45	31	14
Taking to the factory for processing	7	44	27	22
Taking it to the market	33	54	8	5
Collecting the money from coffee beans sales	87	13	0	0
Who owns the coffee?	95	5	0	0

Source: IWCA Kenya 2011^{iv}

leadership team of four to eight, and most had several hundred members. A crucial partner in this process had been the [International Trade Center](#) (ITC). The ITC, a subsidiary of the World Trade Organization and the United Nations, provided policy advice and technical assistance to support exports from developing countries. Data pointing to unequal gender representation in various export sectors led ITC to form the [Women and Trade Program](#), which provided funding and access that greatly facilitated IWCA's work.

In 2008, IWCA and ITC partnered with the [African Fine Coffees Association](#) (AFCA) to host the first-ever gathering for women in the coffee industry in East Africa. In a series of sessions held in Kampala, Uganda, women from across the region communicated a common set of desires and concerns: they wanted to gain rights to own land and maintain control over their earnings, they wanted better market access, and they wanted training and mentorship. The challenges raised were complex and appeared to reach across the entire industry hierarchy (Videos: [IWCA Burundi](#), and [IWCA Guatemala](#)). As one IWCA board member described, "So many things prevent women from being where they need to be... From the basic level, getting permission and childcare to be able to go attend training, to the high-level, how to really get business done. Opportunity has not been available to them to gain information, let alone confidence, that, 'I know how to get this done.' Few women are there. Few women understand how to get success in trade relationship."

As IWCA's mission unfolded, consistent issues and themes emerged across most coffee-producing countries. These could be grouped, though not exhaustively, into challenges associated with available work time and physical mobility, skills and knowledge, visibility within the industry, access to and control resources (including income, land, and assets), and personal safety.

Time and Mobility

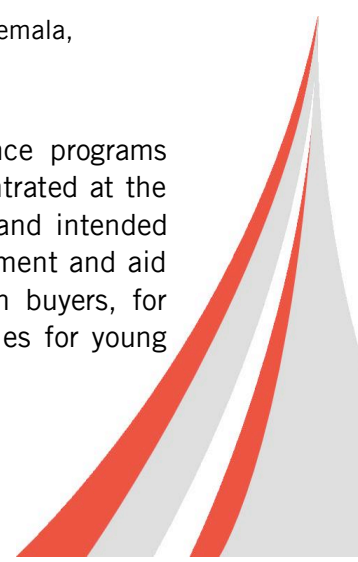
The role of a woman in her family and her society means that coffee is only a small part of what faces a woman in her daily life. . . . How much time does a woman possibly have on her hands to attend training and still do everything else that her domestic situation demands without some level of flexibility?

- Mbula Musau, African Fine Coffees Association, 2007-12

Fathers don't like it if their daughters travel [to training sessions] alone, because who knows what they might learn there? Who knows what people will say to them? And it's not good that other men see your daughter going places alone. Who knows what they will think of her?

- Coffee worker and father, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, 2013

In many countries, ensuring that government services and technical assistance programs reached women was notoriously [difficult](#). Particularly when women were concentrated at the beginning of a long agricultural value chain, the distances between the cities and intended audiences presented a daunting challenge. Not only was it difficult for government and aid programs to reach women, but attending training courses, or networking with buyers, for example, was simply impractical for many. In many cases, care responsibilities for young



children or the elderly in their communities meant that women rarely ventured far from home (Video: [Meeting prior to founding of IWCA Burundi](#)). If taken, the trip itself might have meant a difficult and dangerous bus journey with many stops, often very expensive in the scheme of household affairs. Since women didn't often travel, the prospect of a trip to a market or training session could be unsettling to husbands and fathers, who often feared women might bring dishonor while away, come to harm, or even choose not to return. Women tended to carry a burden of housework and care expected of them regardless of what they did to earn a living. Indeed, women's heavy work responsibilities often meant that children tended crops alongside their mothers instead of attending school. This was especially true for girls, who were more likely to be perceived as a poor educational investment; likely to follow in their mothers' footsteps rather than enter the paid labor market. Women often had no access to cash, relying on male relatives for travel money. Many times, it was necessary to receive permission from a husband or father to go anywhere, and consent was not always forthcoming.

Lack of time and mobility made it difficult for women to gather to organize IWCA chapters, even though prospective members were typically enthusiastic: As Isabelle Sinamenye, founder of IWCA Burundi recounted, "When I met women in coffee, I would ask them, 'Do you want to know what I did in Kampala? Do you want to learn about how we can connect with other women in coffee?' And each one said 'Yes, yes!'" The task of gathering everyone slowed everything down. In Burundi, for instance, it took three years of work for the hundred-strong IWCA chapter to be formed. Sinamenye remembered: "I reached out to each president of each coffee federation in all the regions of Burundi and asked him to select women from his area who are clever, who are willing work, and who are free to come to meetings without facing pressure from her husband. Especially widows or women without a husband. Those were the qualities I needed to start off with... [The women I was trying to recruit] all asked me 'How can we meet together'? This is a problem because they all need to take busses for many hours. . . . They cannot leave the family alone and behind to come meet... Finally, after several years, we signed a letter [to launch the chapter]." This letter opened the door for IWCA Burundi to become established as a legal entity, a move which allowed the group, for example, to interact with government agencies and industry groups, as well as enter into contracts and apply for grant funding.

An IWCA leader in Guatemala tried to get around the issue of time and mobility by holding training programs at her own farm: "Unfortunately, either the relatives or the husbands do not allow the women to go for training... They don't like the women to travel in the bus and they don't like the women to be classmates with other people... I thought 'How can I do this'? At that time, I was the first woman on the board of directors [of the national coffee board], so I asked if they could [come to my farm and] give the training there, and that's what they did. But that is an exception. They had never done that. So the thing is, how do we convince the husbands and the relatives to allow women to attend training? That is the problem."

Indeed, a review conducted by [Mbula Musau](#), a then-AFCA (African Fine Coffees Association) staffer, for the influential industry organization's work with the ITC and IWCA suggested that of more than 40 major training events financed by bilateral aid and held in more than 10 African countries between 2004 and 2009, women comprised on average only 15% of attendees.^{vi} In response to this report, AFCA began to work with their own partners to draft their first official policy on gender in the coffee trade in East Africa (see Appendix 3: IWCA Declaration of Support for the African Fine Coffees Association's Gender Policy and Implementation Plan). Of this process, one IWCA leader observed: "Men in these societies are also realizing the importance of these activities; it's no longer a confrontation in every

country.” Anthere Simbaruhije, a coffee grower from Burundi, echoed the sentiment, explaining, “Even though I am a man, I’ve understood the importance of the IWCA Burundi project. My wife is a member... when a wife is promoted [advances economically]... the promotion is for the whole family.”

Skills and Knowledge

Not having the training to understand the quality and price aspects of coffee is very disempowering. Because you have no appreciation of the final product, your bargaining power and your ability to improve are hugely limited.

– IWCA board member

For coffee producers, access to training and land were key ingredients for success. Because of coffee’s importance as an export crop, governments in almost all coffee-producing countries dedicated resources to agricultural and market training for coffee producers. However, these programs seldom reached women – who were increasingly at the heart of coffee cultivation. So, IWCA chapters often worked to facilitate the delivery of an array of skills and information, ranging from basics on how to negotiate a better price to industry trade practices like coffee “cupping.” (Video: [IWCA coffee cupping, Rwanda](#)). Its aim was to focus directly on women and encourage local development of programs that could do the same over the long term.

A ritual specific to coffee, cupping was an established process of tasting and comparing the brews made from different beans. Rigorous training was required to be a certified coffee taster: the highest level tasters, called Q-graders, were required to pass a series of more than 20 tests before they were certified, and failure rates for the tests were high. In order to grade coffee and offer feedback to producers, one had to understand the product both technically and aesthetically. This was a highly sought after skill; very few women around the world possessed it. IWCA partnered with grading organizations such as the [Coffee Quality Institute](#), and leveraged its own members’ resources to attempt to bring training on cupping to women across the globe.

Chapters also attempted to train their members to stop picking and selling coffee in indiscriminate baskets and, instead, know their quality grade target, pick for that, and ask for a price accordingly. (Video: [Know Your Quality, Uganda](#)). Sinamenye remembered that, in Burundi, the women were thrilled when the IWCA letter of understanding was signed, making them one of very few formal women’s commercial organizations in the country: “But after that, the poverty was still there. . . I said to the women, ‘To have more money, you need to sell better quality coffee.’ And they ask me, ‘How to make our coffee better?’ And we taught them, over many meetings, how to pick their best coffee cherries.”

Visibility and Advancement

Ten years ago here on the farm, we were used to the idea that only men work in coffee. That is, as a field manager, or in the mill, or any other technical role. I was one of those women to whom [the farm owners] gave opportunity. They trusted me to work in [these roles] alongside men. It was very difficult for me. The men felt badly, working alongside me. . . But I knew I had to be there. Because it was my challenge; not to give up.

– Vilma Ruíz, Los Andes Farm, Guatemala

[T]he firm conviction to promote women developed from seeing the enormous benefits that have resulted for the families of our farm workers. Even most of the husbands now understand this!

– James Hazard, Los Andes Farm, Guatemala

IWCA's first chapters were launched in Central America following a series of visits to coffee farms for roasters and buyers. Unlike standard buyer visits, these “coffee tours” were focused on meeting the women involved with coffee production. IWCA founding members emphasized how surprised industry leaders often were to become aware of the crucial contribution women made to coffee production. Despite all their years of experience, many buyers and roasters had never considered women to be very involved. The visiting groups concluded that women were largely invisible to the coffee industry leadership because they were clustered at the bottom of the hierarchy, rarely able to travel nor lead.

Chapters pursued a variety of strategies to improve women's visibility across the industry. For instance, when IWCA member [Lorena Calvo](#) became the first woman appointed to Guatemala's National Coffee Association (*Asociación Nacional del Café* or [Anacafe](#)), she used the opportunity to bring visibility to women whose work was vital, but almost unrecognized in the coffee value chain—and one of her first acts was to create a committee within Anacafe dedicated to women's participation in the industry. No sooner had she floated the concept of this group than two of the most respected men on the board came forward to ask if they could support the effort. Yet, in 2006, almost 50 years after Anacafe's founding, Calvo herself was an anomaly. She recounted her first board meeting: “I think, in the very beginning, nobody knew what to expect... [the board meets in] this big, beautiful boardroom, and [the room had] two restrooms. Both restrooms had always been used for men. They had to change that for me... I remember the introduction during my first board meeting, ‘Well, gentlemen, we just want to remind you that from now on, the one on the left is going to be the women's restroom,’ and I was just laughing in front of them! Laughing and teasing, and I said, “Yes, men. I don't want any of you in my restroom.”

Calvo, along with the men she recruited from the board, pioneered an unexpectedly fruitful innovation, an array of awards given for exceptional skill in agricultural tasks typically performed by women. These national competitions created interest and recognition around aspects of work in coffee that had previously gone unnoticed, but turned out to be crucial to coffee quality and survival in the face of blight. Notably, because the competitions centered

on traditionally “feminine” skills¹, women encountered less resistance to travel to these events than to standard training sessions.

IWCA member farms in Central America had been among the first in the region to appoint women to senior agricultural roles, such as foremen or managers. Other chapters focused on the seemingly simple, but extremely important, step of counting the women involved in coffee. IWCA and their partners found that women, even when present at meetings, tended to linger in the background, not sign the register, and then slip away unrecognized and uncounted. In East Africa, for instance, Mbula Musau discovered that she had to “constantly motivate the women and ensure they signed in at coffee industry training sessions to ensure that they understood the importance of their participation.” She found that a wife seldom signed in if her husband was with her. It was not uncommon for husbands to object to their wife’s signing her name or giving out her number. Musau learned that she had to be firm and try to get the woman’s mobile number so that further communication could occur.

An overriding reason that women were so seldom seen in the upper echelons, however, appeared to be that they were not able to engage in trade or to control the income from their work and thus were unable to amass the wealth, skill, and prestige that paved the way to positions of influence. In one exploratory global study led by Musau, coffee organizations reported that women typically did 70% of field and harvest work and 75% of sorting coffee cherries, but participated in just 10% of in-country and 10% of export trade. Women owned the land used for coffee production in only 20% of cases. The situation was complex: depending on the structure of a country’s coffee cultivation, sometimes the land was owned by a woman’s husband, sometimes by a large landholder. In any case, women were reported to own 15% of harvested coffee, and only 10% of companies in the sector including exporters, laboratories, certifiers, and transporters.^{vii} Further research was necessary to be sure of these numbers, but the trends appeared stark. (Video: [Women’s roles in coffee production](#)). Many women reported being drawn to IWCA membership as a first step in trying to empower themselves: As one member from East Africa described, “For many years, I picked coffee from trees that belonged to my husband’s family. I had the coffee cherries I picked with my hands, but I did not know their proper price. And it was not me, but my husband, who went to sell them. The coffee belonged to him. If he left me, I would no longer be allowed to pick coffee from his land. I had nothing to pass on to my daughters. I knew I needed to become part of IWCA so I could learn about coffee and how the business is done.”

Rights over wealth and assets

In my country, women in coffee do not have land. The fact is, in Burundi, the owner of the land is the man. Your husband. The fruit of the agriculture belongs to the man. When you get married, you go to another family. You live on the land, but it belongs to your husband. You are not honored. It is not yours. You can work on it, but you can’t decide what to do with it. For example, if you have coffee, you grow and pick the coffee. But the sale of the coffee and the money, the man needs to manage. He says,

¹ One such skill was called “grafting”, a process through which the shoot of a single sprouted coffee bean was cut with a small razor and inserted by hand into the other, and then tied with specialty tape. This painstaking process involved significant skill and attention to detail. When done well, grafting could improve the health and robustness of coffee plants.

“This for my own spending, this for my cousin.” Women, they need to wait. Wait and see what is left over for them, and for the children.

– Isabelle Sinamenye, Founder and President, IWCA Burundi

In many nations with IWCA chapters, women were unable to own or inherit land. Because the person who owned the land was usually seen as the owner of its agricultural output—and wives were not seen as sharing in that ownership—women in coffee could work at a never-ending job from which they benefited very little. Women’s property rights, as well as other rights germane to the conduct of business (such as the right to sign contracts or take out a loan), were a topic of increasing concern for global institutions including the [World Bank](#). However, even in countries that had granted property rights to women by statute, provisions were often impossible to implement when customary norms held greater sway than formal legal systems. (Video: [Women and land, Rwanda](#)). In such situations, land was sometimes taken away from the woman by her community or her husband’s family—not infrequently by force.^{viii}

Since women seldom went to market to sell coffee, they may have never seen the money that came from the sale. Even when they were allowed to share in the income from coffee production, they often reported they were unable to retain control over the funds. Lack of formal savings institutions, especially in rural areas, and difficulty in accessing such accounts without formal documents or financial literacy, left women’s earnings vulnerable. Importantly, women were often unable to control family assets that could be used to collateralize a loan, leaving their entrepreneurial efforts substantially constrained.

Personal safety

In Congo, we find that women who grow coffee with their husbands do not have access to income generated after harvest. The coffee harvest is an occasion for men to drink alcohol and to marry several women, as they have money. And during this time, women are beaten and driven from their homes with their children without anything. Apart from that, while working in the field, women are often victims of rape by armed militia²... To fight against these practices, we educate women and girls about their human rights and sexual violence that they face daily in their coffee cultivation and in their households... That is why we have found useful to join the IWCA and seek the involvement of other women around the world so that together we can find solutions to various problems faced by women in the cultivation of coffee in our country.

– Chantal Binwa, Founder, IWCA Democratic Republic of Congo

Many coffee producing countries were plagued by conflict and [reported](#) a high incidence of violence against women. On one of their early trips to Central America, IWCA founders were shocked to hear a local estimate that domestic violence affected nearly 85% of the women in the region hosting their visit. In Uganda, a major reason for establishing inheritance rights for

² Note that men were also victims of such militia. However, women were especially likely to be left to cultivate coffee, and yet were often particularly vulnerable when working outside unaccompanied.

women was to put a stop to the violence that often occurred upon the death of a husband, including ritual rape, as male kin attempted to reclaim ownership of land and transfer “ownership” of the widow with the other property. Similarly, women were liable to be attacked while working outside unaccompanied; indeed fear of violence was a key reason for hesitation to travel on the part of women and their families. Some IWCA leaders were shocked to learn that women in coffee communities often became mothers through sexual assault and that forcible early marriage was commonplace. In India, where an IWCA chapter was established in 2012, some estimates [suggested](#) that close to 90% of violent crimes reported to police the preceding year were committed against women. Governments of quite a few coffee-producing countries failed to enforce the United Nations’ [Convention for Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women](#) (CEDAW), particularly in the area of protection against violence (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Map of enforcement of CEDAW

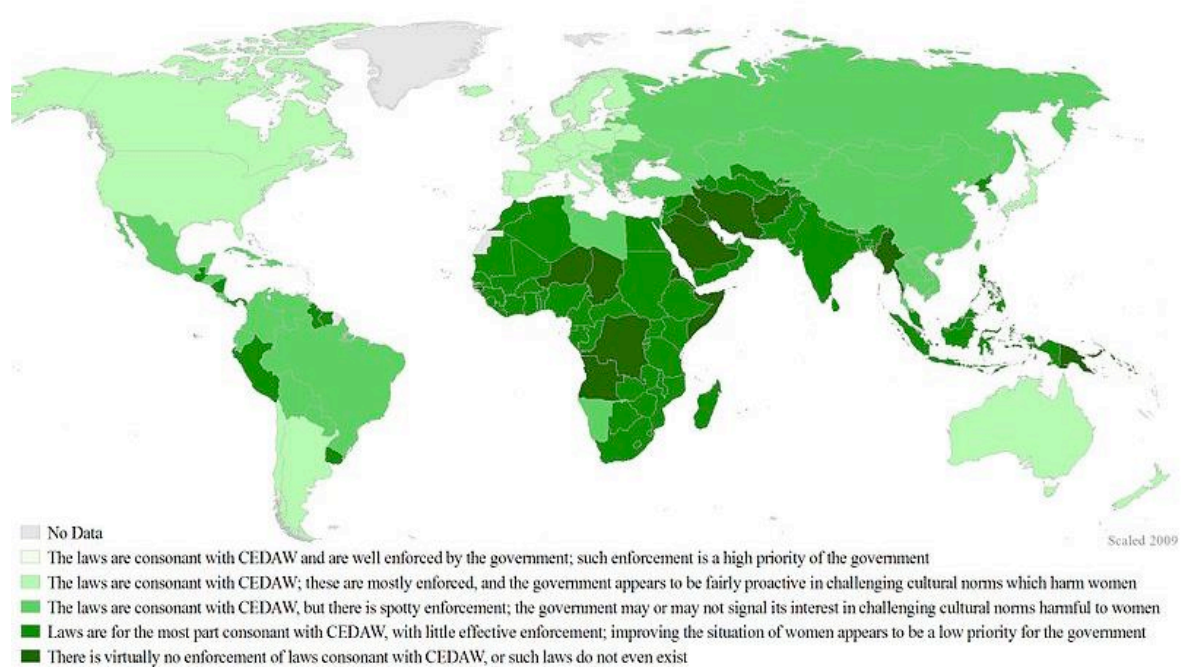


Image source: WomanStats Project

A challenge to gender norms was often perceived as a threat and punished by violence. Economic challenges were no exception. Reviews of programs intended to empower women economically did appear to indicate that, in the initial stages, it was not altogether uncommon for payees to be subject to increased levels of violence in the home and even from the community. Women who became economically autonomous sometimes did use the money to escape an abusive environment. Often, however, it appeared that the ability to contribute to household earnings could lead to new respect and a modicum of safety, at least at home. In this way, IWCA and their partners reasoned, economic rights could be an effective way to realize human rights for women.

Branding Coffee: If and How

A lot of people talk about how important women are – they talk about the need for diversity, empowerment, and equality. They talk about it. They don't necessarily do something about it. When you go to farm level in any agricultural commodity, you find women don't even get paid. Or the money disappears. Or they are abused. These issues are out in the open. We're attempting to [do something]... By giving a voice to women, they improve the living conditions for families, which in turn improves their community as a whole. They deserve to be heard about what their needs are in order to benefit the world around them. And we should be able to do that, especially if as consumers, we're willing to pay seven dollars for a couple of lattes, right?

– [Jennifer Gallegos](#), Director of Business Development for Coffee, Fair Trade USA and IWCA Board Member

The branding proposal at IWCA was given further credibility when a Canadian roaster/retailer successfully introduced a trial “women’s brand” into her chain of cafes. Spurred by that “test market,” IWCA engaged two well-known consultants to evaluate the potential of a women’s brand for coffee. Unfortunately, the two drew opposing conclusions: one^x argued the time was right for an “ethical” coffee brand based on women as producers; the other^x called attention to the over-proliferation of brand messaging in the coffee industry, as well as the emergence of other, similar offerings including [Cafe Femenino](#), [Las Hermanas](#), and [Almana Harvest](#), and recommended the IWCA instead devise a mark similar to the Fair Trade symbol that could be appended to any brand certified to meet an agreed list of “woman friendly” requirements.

These contradictory recommendations made three issues more salient for IWCA. First, they realized that they needed to be very clear about what the **objective** for branding (or a kind of certification symbol) would be for IWCA and what benefit their chapters might expect. Second, no matter which **method** they chose—branding or certification— an extensive verification system would be necessary to determine that contents were sourced as promised. Lastly, they must decide exactly what would be meant by a “women’s brand” coffee in order to establish a clear **platform**.

Objectives. Building a brand to increase sales or support price was actually a step outside the IWCA remit—the organization was never imagined as a profit-making entity. But increasing sales or profit for the women who produced the coffee in the IWCA supply chain was very much within their vision. Further, many IWCA members closest to the consumer expressed a moral imperative to try and pass some of the wealth that supported the developed world’s coffee habit to the producing countries, especially those with conditions hardest for women. Every year, many retailers and roasters travelled to the “coffee origin” (or “the source”), a rite that had become almost a pilgrimage in the industry. As a result, considerable momentum existed for an initiative in this spirit. But, like the Chicago roaster who balked at the last minute about shipments from Burundi, those near the point of purchase needed to have some compensation for the risk they took—the promise of customer loyalty and a higher margin from a well-branded line was important.

Around the world, some of the country chapters were already launching their own brands. The board worried that their own inertia would result in a proliferation of competing brands among the members, something that would inevitably reinforce the disadvantage of newer chapters

and countries, like Burundi and DR Congo, who were still wrestling with more fundamental challenges. Getting out there with a global brand would establish an umbrella that could cover everyone, into the future.

Method. Going with a symbol that would certify an existing brand as being “woman friendly” in some ways seemed, on first consideration, faster, simpler, and cheaper. However, it was unclear how the contracts and benefits would be managed. If an individual importer, for instance, contracted with a major roaster or retailer—let’s just say Starbucks for the purpose of illustration— to supply a shipment marked with the IWCA symbol, would that contract be seen as one in which IWCA had an interest and therefore deserved a cut of the higher profit expected? If individual members made their own deals, there was again the question of an evenly distributed benefit to the producers. The potential for discord would be a concern. And, without the story-telling spending needed to support a brand, or the means to verify and measure impact, the “woman friendly” symbol just might not be very meaningful – to consumer or IWCA members.

Platform. The whole question of verification raised further vexing questions. What exactly would be meant by a “women’s brand” of coffee? The basis for the claim needed to be clear, not only because it would drive messaging, but would suggest the distribution of funds, as well as the process of verification. For instance, to qualify as a “women’s brand,” would the coffee need to be grown by women or also exported and roasted by women? Delivering a brand produced by women from “seed to cup” was going to be very difficult indeed. Whether IWCA would require 100% of every bag to be produced by women or maybe, say, just 51%, also needed to be decided. Perhaps it would be enough simply to warrant that the money would go back to women, or to women’s organizations? For example, proceeds could go to providing coffee training or safe travel to meetings.

Another possibility was that the brand could stand for a “woman friendly” supply chain. If IWCA took that avenue, male producers who were sympathetic to the cause could be included and the messaging umbrella could encompass, for instance, safety for workers or educational programs that benefitted all the women in the supply chain for coffee, not only entrepreneurs. A key lesson IWCA members had learned from their experience was that the obstacles and dangers facing women in coffee were similar to those in other agricultural industries, all over the world. So, a general campaign about woman-friendliness might help raise awareness of truly global issues.

Discussion questions:

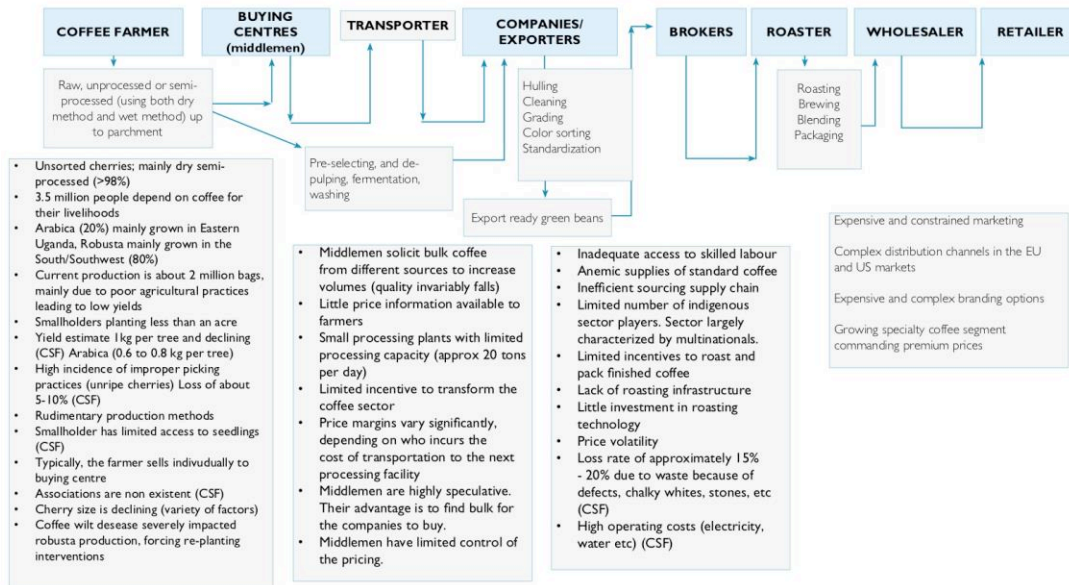
1. Should IWCA invest in developing a women’s brand or a certification symbol akin to Fair Trade? Or should they continue to focus on chapter formation, training, and those issues where they already appear to have made an impact?
2. Is building a “women’s coffee brand” premature? Should IWCA instead focus its efforts on raising awareness of the issues faced by women working in coffee? How would this message be communicated? Alongside which kind of partner(s)?
3. If IWCA does engage in a branding or certification program, what should be the platform of this brand? What should be the promise to consumers? To women in the coffee industry?

4. Why do roasters, retailers, and importers in the coffee industry care about women in the coffee value chain? Do they? If not, why not? What would need to change in order for them to care? What about consumers?

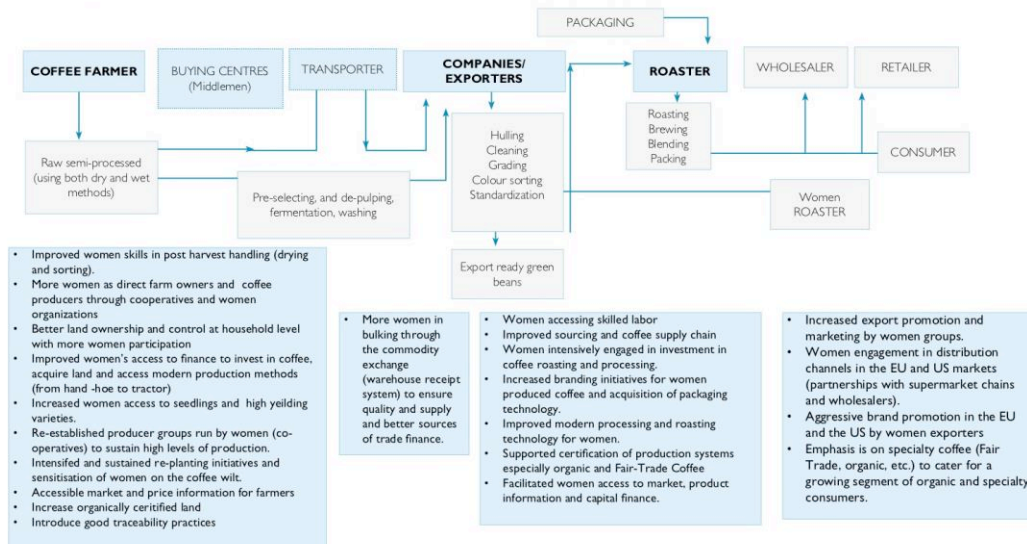
5. Why does women's visibility in the coffee industry matter? To whom does it matter?

Appendix 1: Coffee Value Chain^{xi}

Current Coffee Value Chain



Engendered Coffee Value Chain



Appendix 2: Excerpt of Kenya IWCA activities 2012-17^{xii}

The following is an excerpt of planned activities from the IWCA Kenya chapter (AWIC) for the years 2012-17:

- Undertake a gender audit of the current laws and identify the gaps and lobby for the required changes
- Lobby the ministry of cooperatives development and agriculture to support the amendments of the cooperatives constitution to ensure at least one third of the leaders are women and have a provision for the youth
- Package a model that will ensure women and youth are allocated coffee bushes by men and have access to income from them. AWIC will document practices in the dairy sector, tea (KTDA affiliated) and horticulture that recognises the producers and not the owners of land and use them to lobby the cooperatives for adoption
- Lobby the coffee cooperatives and with the support of the Ministry of cooperatives to review the criteria for membership to ensure women and youth allocated coffee bushes are recognised as members and are allowed to participate in the leadership
- Review the constitutions, policies and by laws of the cooperatives and identify gaps that lead to the exclusion of women, youth and are sources of poor governance and lobby for their review in partnership with the ministry of cooperatives
- Conduct sensitization meetings on the need to involve women and youth in coffee sector.
- Lobby to ensure all coffee institutions have a provision for women in coffee slots as leaders
- Conduct a census of women who own coffee and document the number of bushes and expected production from the initial participating coffee factories
- Estimate the expected initial quantities of coffee produced by the women
- Assess the availability of processing facilities at the factories and the willingness of the factories to process and package women coffee separately
- Identify millers willing to partner with AWIC to support effective milling and packaging of women coffee and organize for shipment logistics
- Develop an AWIC related brand of women coffee and promote it internationally and locally
- Document buyers interested in purchasing women coffee and organize for the shipment
- Create office infrastructure required to procure coffee from the women and ensure buyers' needs are met and women receive payment on timely basis
- Develop a system to document this business model and impact to the women and to the general society

Appendix 3: IWCA Declaration of Support for the African Fine Coffees Association's Gender Policy and Implementation Plan

Please click [here](#) to view the document

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- ⁱ 'Hot Drinks 2012 Overview: Trends and Opportunities', Euromonitor Report, July 2012.
- ⁱⁱ 'Global Women's Coffee Brand', Report by Carmichael Lynch for IWCA, October 2010.
- ⁱⁱⁱ 'Global Women's Coffee Brand', Report by Carmichael Lynch for IWCA, October 2010.
- ^{iv} 'Alliance of Women in Coffee: Strategic Plan July 2012-August 2017', Report by Liaison Consulting Ltd. for IWCA Kenya, July 2012.
- ^v 'Women's Rights and the Right to Food', Report by Olivier De Schutter to the Human Rights Council, December 2012. Available at:
http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/AHRC2250_English.PDF.
- ^{vi} 'Women in the Coffee Sector', Report by International Trade Center and African Fine Coffees Association, through Mbula Musau, February 2009 (internal document).
- ^{vii} 'Women in the Coffee Sector', Report by International Trade Center and African Fine Coffees Association, through Mbula Musau, February 2009 (internal document).
- ^{viii} 'Inheritance Rights in Uganda', Rachel C. Loftspring, University of Pennsylvania International Law Review, 2007, Vol. 29, 243-281.
- ^{ix} 'Global Women's Coffee Brand', Report by Carmichael Lynch for IWCA, October 2010.
- ^x 'Women-coffee: Branding, labeling, or what – that is the question', Report by Peter Gilson (BRAND-U, The Netherlands) for IWCA and ITC, August 2011 (internal document).
- ^{xi} 'Women-coffee: Branding, labeling, or what – that is the question', Report by Peter Gilson (BRAND-U, The Netherlands) for IWCA and ITC, August 2011 (internal document).
- ^{xii} 'National Export Strategy Gender Dimension', Report by Uganda Export Promotion Board and the International Trade Center for the Republic of Uganda, 2008