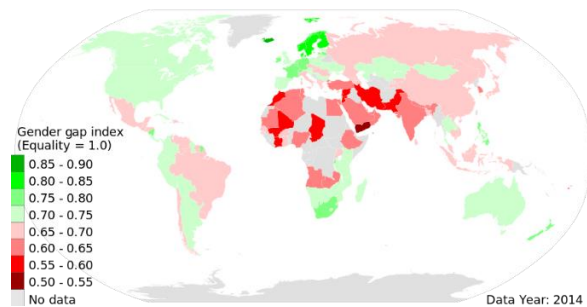


## WOMEN'S CONTRIBUTION IN COFFEE SECTOR IN BRAZIL INVISIBLE!

By Catherine van der Wees<sup>1</sup>



Brazil is the largest coffee producing country, and after the US, the second largest consumer. Some 3.5 million people are involved in the industry, mostly in rural areas. Lack of data makes women's involvement in the coffee sector invisible. Neither their contribution nor their specific constraints are noticed.



This map shows the gender gap index, as calculated by World Economic Forum in its 2014 report. Gender gap index is a measure of gender inequality. Equality is 1.0 and inequality is 0. The map shows that in Brazil ranks 71, out of a total of 142 countries, with a score of 0.694 which is exactly in the middle<sup>2</sup> below most of the Western world and in between Macedonia and Romania.

**Josiane Cotrim Macieira**, a Brazilian journalist, who is very active in the International Women in

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Coffee Alliance (ICWA), Brazil chapter, is involved in a large scale research where many institutions and people work on a voluntary basis, to make Brazilian women in coffee visible and recognized. Catherine van der Wees<sup>3</sup> independent international consultant specializing in gender mainstreaming in global commodity chains, spoke with her.



Josiane Cotrim and the president of Cooperbio, both women are actively involved in data gathering on women in coffee

### Could you please explain briefly who you are and what your connection is with women in coffee in Brazil?

I am a Brazilian journalist married to a Brazilian diplomat, mother of 2 daughters, presently living in Norway, and frequently travelling to Brazil. I grew up in a coffee farm in Brazil, in Minas Gerais state, which is responsible for 50% of the coffee produced in Brazil. At home coffee was the main activity. I grew up listening about rain forecast – if it is at right time, not too much, or too little, price volatility. Will next year will be better? ... the reality of the coffee farmers. When I told my parents that I would like to

<sup>2</sup> World Economic Forum 2014, part 2, Country Profiles, Brazil.



continue studying, my father started a coffee nursery to have extra money for me to go to college. My mother was the one in charge of the nursery. She always “helped” my father – as women everywhere in coffee producer countries do – but she never had a voice in decisions regarding the commercialization of the coffee, for example. I am convinced my father would have done better business, if he had listened to her. When she became a widow she struggled along with her best friend, also widowed, to preserve the property in a very male dominant environment, where women are discriminated.

Also, I remember, when I was a child, the female coffee pickers would come back from work, carrying wood on their head. They would arrive home, make a fire to cook with, feed the family and start all over again on the next day. Women have always worked in the fields, and still do.

#### **How is the Brazilian coffee sector organized?**

To answer that truly, we need data on coffee!!!!

The last agricultural census dates from 2006.

This census is not only on coffee but the whole agri-business and it takes place once every 10 years. Normally it would happen this year again, however I cannot confirm that. The sector talks a lot about the need of a “geo-referencing” to find information on the number of farmers, farm-size, number of coffee plants, cultivated area, average production etc. I would add here sex-disaggregated discriminated data too.

In Brazil, coffee is produced on small, medium and large scale farms<sup>4</sup> : small are the ones able to access the PRONAF – “Programa Nacional da Agricultura Familiar”. These farms are less than 20 ha (the national average is 8 ha, but it is not rare to find people who have 2 or 3 ha). The small are what we call “family agriculture”. They

comprise 70% of the coffee producers and are responsible for 30% of the total coffee produced in the country. Annual average production is less than 800 (60 kg) bags.

The medium farms comprise around 20% of the producers and are responsible for 40% of the total coffee produced in Brazil. The area is from 20 to 250 ha and the average production from 800 to 5000 bags.

The large farms comprise 10% of the total, amounting to 30% of the total coffee area and more than 250 ha. Average productivity is above 5000 bags.

The large producers are well established with resources to access the market but the challenges are the same – climate change is a reality for all. In the coffee sector people are very aware of the need of taking care of the environment. Brazil produces sustainable coffee, no doubt about that, but I don’t think the market recognizes this, nor does it compensate their efforts or pay a better price for those coffees.

They are mostly organized in cooperatives and associations. There are many women working in cooperatives but not often on the board with decision making power.

#### **What is the involvement of women in the coffee sector? Do you have any estimates as to the number of women involved in the sector?**

Again, we need data. Women have always been present in the coffee production but we don’t know who they are nor where they are. The absence of consistent data on women in coffee makes them invisible and contributes to the absence of public policies for them. I hope I will be able to answer all these questions in 2018

<sup>4</sup> The information below is provided by Eduardo Sampaio, Utz Brazil, and on information collected at conferences



when the research we are doing will be released.

### **What production activities do women do vis a vis men?**

Women are present in all coffee processes – in the nurseries their presence is large scale. They are in the coffee field planting coffee, as well as in the postharvest process, drying both in the patio and controlling the dryer.



Young women harvesting

### **Are women involved in mechanized coffee farming?**

Yes, for example, on one of the biggest coffee farms in Brazil, “Daterra”, they offer a technical course to teach women how to operate machinery used in coffee production<sup>5</sup>. The first training took place in 2012, when 30 women were trained. These women used to be pickers. After the training they got better paid jobs as tractor drivers. The coffee farm itself employed 22 of these women.

### **Are women in management positions in the coffee sector? If so, in which positions? Do you know of any percentages?**

In the coops they are very present, as well as in machines- and fertilizers sales. But not in decision making positions. Again, we don’t have

consistent data and I don’t want to make the same mistake we have often seen – people giving information without any scientific basis. Statistics must be taken seriously.

### **Are young people interested to go into coffee? Why/why not? Is there a difference between young men and women? If so, which and why?**

I know many young men and women going into the family coffee business in Brazil when they own the land. It is a good option for them and they feel that their quality of life is better than in town. Now that communication is much easier, they don’t feel so isolated. However, for those who doesn’t have land there is little future in the country side and they migrate to towns.

### **Are young people studying coffee? Is there a difference between women and men?**

Many universities and federal institutes offer coffee courses. Again, here we need data. It is not complicated. But it is hard for us since we work on a voluntary basis.

### **What ambitions do women in the coffee sector have?**

They want a better life for their children, a future for them in coffee.

### **Are there general problems that women in the coffee sector face? How do they differ from men?**

“Machismo”, discrimination, particularly if they are not married, or if they are widowed or divorced. Again, based on my experience. We need to collect data first to know what women think, not come to conclusions, based only on an isolated opinion.

### **What are some specific problems women producers face?**

<sup>5</sup> For more information, see Coffee Talk December

2012: <http://magazine.coffeetalk.com/december12-gender-equality/>



Women often lack access to the market. All the women need is to have access to a market, that really recognizes the product they are producing with care, hard work and in a sustainable way. Market access is very empowering. That is why IWCA organizes cupping of coffee produced by women. In addition, training is most of the time directed to men. And those with resources to offer training don't know how to work with women.

**How are decisions made in coffee producing households? Do women have a say in the decision on how the income earned from coffee is spend?**

I don't know any study related to this. My experience is that women work hard, but the decisions about selling and how to spend the money are made by men.

**What support do women get in the coffee sector? From whom?**

In Brazil the creation of the International Women in Coffee Alliance (IWCA) Chapter has contributed a lot to the support of women. Many leaders from different regions have being identified and they are doing a great job in several different communities. Looking for training opportunities, strategic alliances, searching for resources they can access.

**What do you suggest different players in the coffee sector (i.e. government, coffee roasters, traders, and consumers) can do to overcome specific challenges women in coffee face?**

Give space to women, listen to them, they often have creative solutions!

**What research project are you involved in? Can you tell me more about it?**

I insist: we first need data! So, all hands on deck! The women in coffee in Brazil decided to

start a huge data collection to fill the gender data gap.

Everybody wants data and says it is important, but nobody wants to invest in this. So, the Brazilian women in coffee decided to do something about it themselves. We are working in a collaborative research to quantify women in coffee. The research is an initiative of the Brazilian chapter of the IWCA in partnership with Embrapa Café and several institutions from the whole country.

A group of researchers from universities, federal institutes, Embrapa Café with the cooperation of Solidaridad are already working together to identify women in coffee in Brazil, where they are, what they do and who they are<sup>6</sup>. It is a quantitative and qualitative research. The idea is to publish a book by 2018 and also to create a wiki platform to share the results. It is the first study of its kind on women in coffee in Brazil.

The next meeting will take place in the third week of September 2016, during the International Coffee Week in Belo Horizonte. Women from several coffee producer regions will be present.

The researchers are all volunteers and basically need funding for meetings in the different regions and a scholarship for a young researcher to do the logistic work of this huge research that we have already started.



<sup>6</sup> Last April there was a first meeting in Brasilia. See the link [http://www.redepeabirus.com.br/redes/form/post?topico\\_id=61146#sthash.wlf32jcx.iqq](http://www.redepeabirus.com.br/redes/form/post?topico_id=61146#sthash.wlf32jcx.iqq)

