



KOKOWAGAYO CO-OP: Members of this women's Sumatra cooperative take a break from coffee production.

CAFÉ FEMENINO



Growing Equity at Origin By Anastasia Prikhodko

For many coffee drinkers, the realities of coffee production are a distant thought. But as we continue to consume and enjoy our daily brew, it's time to take into account how our actions can manifest positive change in coffee-producing regions—such as Sumatra.

On the northwest tip of Sumatra Island is **Aceh**, a deeply religious region that has a serious knack for growing coffee. Here, women are the backbone of coffee farming. They take on the majority of labor, from planting and pruning, to fertilizing, harvesting, and drying the coffee.

Once prepared, the coffee gets passed on to the men who sell it to traders. Men are able to sell the coffee because they own the land. This is commonplace in conservative regions where women farmers have no land rights, no control of their income, and they are unable to make important decisions. This ultimately puts women in a vulnerable position, with high chances of living in poverty, abuse, and fear.

According to the International Finance Corporation, a sister organization of the World Bank, women make up 80% of coffee farm workers in North Sumatra and Indonesia. Despite their key role in coffee cultivation, processing, and marketing, they are often excluded from training and other development opportunities.

With this in mind, the Café Femenino Program helped the women there become established in the global coffee industry and their local community.

"It took almost a year of work to implement the Café Femenino Program in Sumatra," explains program director Connie Kolosvary. "Areas of the Aceh region happen to produce amazing coffee, and the fact that there are gender equity challenges there simply called us to do something."

The Café Femenino Program was founded in 2003 in a partnership with Organic Products Trading Company (OPTCO), a green coffee importing company, and their long-time partners, CECANOR cooperative in Peru. The program was created and designed to give women coffee farmers fair pay, decision-making power, and leadership roles within their communities and coffee cooperatives. The program now operates in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, Rwanda, and most recently, Sumatra.

"Before we began the process of implementing a Café Femenino Program in a region ruled by Sharia Law, we did our homework. We talked to people, communicated with women leaders, asked a thousand questions, and through that process, we became friends," Kolosvary explains. "Men are a big part of the change. So when it comes to obtaining land rights for women in those areas where Sharia leadership administers local laws and it is traditionally prohibited, the men have to be on board for the change to happen. This was the biggest challenge for the cooperative in order to become a Café Femenino Program."

At first the male-dominated government did not support the idea. But after some time, a solution to the problem of ownership was made. All the women in Sumatra who entered the Café Femenino Program had an affidavit signed by their husbands that gave complete control of the land to the women. This document was recorded with the local municipality. Once given authority, women were able to own land with full administrative power over it. Finally, women were

able to sell coffee and most importantly, receive income from the sale.

With 476 members from six villages within the Gayo highlands of Sumatra, Kokowagayo became the first cooperative just for women. The name is an acronym of Koporasi Kopi Wanita Gayo, which translates to Gayo Women's Coffee Cooperative.

"In a traditional fair trade cooperative, the men vote for how the social premiums are to be invested. Oftentimes, the women's priorities are different and our voices are not heard. This was the motivation to form the first all-women cooperative," says Ernani Muzaputri, member of the Kokowagayo cooperative. She also serves as coordinator of social training and is acting head of a nonprofit that provides training to the cooperative.

Rizkani Ahmad is Kokowagayo's chairwoman and coordinator of the Café Femenino Program. "Since participating in the program, women have gained confidence because they can deliver their ideas freely and could make their own decisions," Ahmad says. "Some women have also drastically changed in how they cultivate their coffee farm and the crops. They also understood about good sales if they have high-quality coffee."

The co-op members receive a higher premium for their beans along with political and economic benefits including leadership positions within their cooperatives, and the opportunity to contribute to financial and business decisions.

When the first Café Femenino premiums were paid to the women in Kokowagayo, they collectively built a space where they could meet regularly and provide training for their members.

Other positive changes included the reduction in physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Family incomes increased. »

More men participated in childcare and domestic responsibilities, school attendance among girls increased, and women had higher self-esteem from recognition for the work they do in the home and on the farm.

Several women are also undergoing training to become collectors for the cooperative, which traditionally was always a man's job.

Participating coffee roasters are also integral to the program. They donate five cents (\$0.05) per pound of coffee purchased to the Café Femenino Foundation, the non-profit arm that works within the Café Femenino Program to fund projects and grant requests proposed by the women farmers themselves. Roasters may also split their donation between the Café Femenino Foundation and a local nonprofit that supports women crisis organizations.



SUMATRA: Members of the Kokowagayo cooperative with Café Femenino program directory Connie Kolosvary (back, far right) and former director of trade, Katherine Oglietti (back, far left).

Mutu Coffee Roasters is one of Café Femenino's most ardent supporters. "As we were forming Mutu Coffee Roasters, and doing our research, we quickly realized that women were doing the majority of the coffee production and played a vital role in its success as specialty coffee producers for export," says Russell Fleming, managing director of the roastery.


"I have this value and I speak it often to whoever will listen. I wouldn't roast coffee and participate in an industry that would deepen the poverty and social injustices in the world," he says.

When forming Mutu Coffee Roasters, Fleming felt his company should be "a force for good in everything we do in the world—from the farmer to the experience that our customers taste in the final cup."

By participating in the Café Femenino Program, roasters like Fleming help support women farmers and the positive changes that spring from it.

"Educating customers is vital to the success of coffee and to Mutu Coffee Roasters. We communicate to our prospective customers that when they make well-informed choices in their purchases, these choices continue the momentum of good, spreading throughout their communities and across the globe. By educating customers, we can make a difference."

With the support of roasters and consumers, women coffee farmers can be owners and decision makers, just like their male counterparts.

"We connect with the women in Sumatra on so many levels: as parents, as leaders, as businesspeople," Kolosvary says. "We all want the same thing in the end, and that is to be able to pay our bills and raise our kids in a way that they will go on to be productive humans. Pretty simple." 

KOPERASI KETIARA

Ibu Rahmah is founder of Koperasi Ketiara, a fair trade cooperative in the Gayo Highlands of Sumatra. Like the Café Femenino Program, Rahmah is also challenging the norms of equality, but in her own way.

"I come from a family of coffee farmers and coffee traders," Rahmah says. "I am inspired to continue the work of my grandparents and parents."

Rahmah started as a small coffee trader, purchasing a few pounds of coffee cherries from farmers and reselling them to larger traders. As demand and interest from coffee businesses increased, Rahmah decided to establish a cooperative whose members were mostly women.

According to Rahmah, women in the cooperative would "equate with men, but still uphold the honor of being a woman like any other housewife."

In 2009, she organized 37 other coffee traders and farmers to found the Ketiara cooperative. With her guidance, the cooperative has grown to nearly 2,000 smallholder farmers, including about 40% women members.

Although Ketiara is a cooperative for men and women, Rahmah is particularly invested in improving the lives of women farmers. This is reflected in the cooperative's line of coffee that is grown only by women, called "Queen Ketiara."

For future generations of women coffee farmers, Rahmah hopes to see improvement in the quality and production of the farmers, better transparency, mutual respect, and mutual benefits between the buyer and the farmer.

Rahmah wants women's groups to rise higher, attract those who have not joined a co-op yet, spread the message of equality, and improve the quality of resources.



IBU RAHMAH