



SOMETHING GOOD IS BREWING IN BURMA

The USAID-funded Value Chains for Rural Development project helps smallholder coffee farmers increase quality and link to new markets, improving incomes and contributing to inclusive economic growth in one of Asia's poorest countries.

When Winrock International's Farmer-to-Farmer (F2F) program invited Rick Peyser, a volunteer expert from Vermont's Green Mountain Coffee, to visit coffee farmers in Burma, few people knew coffee even existed in the land of a million pagodas. The country's love affair with tea was unrivaled by any other brew, and it seemed a stretch to think coffee could help poor rural farmers improve incomes and contribute to economic growth in a nation emerging from decades of isolation. That has changed rapidly, however, thanks to the hard work of Burma's ultra-motivated smallholder coffee farmers supported by technical and market linkage help from Winrock.



Burma's coffee farmers are now using simple but innovative new practices including composting, selective harvesting, drying racks and natural processing techniques to boost quality and tap lucrative new export markets. As a result, in July 2016, 36 MT of *Coffea Arabica* traveled to the U.S. on a pair of cargo vessels in the first-ever shipment of smallholder community-grown coffee from the country to North America. (Another container of coffee from Myanmar's 2015/16 harvest shipped to Switzerland and two more went to Taiwan.) With multiple high-end specialty roasters and suppliers lined up, Burma coffee is now officially on the map, fetching prices two to three times higher than previously, enabling smallholder farmers in remote areas to enter the fast-growing global specialty coffee market for the first time in history.

FAST FACT: Smallholders grow 80 percent of Burma's coffee on farms averaging 0.4-0.6 hectares. The remainder comes from larger estates and larger smallholders.

Focus on Quality

After his trip to Burma as an F2F volunteer, Peyser published a story in a major coffee trade publication, noting that the varieties of Arabica grown there were of good quality. Elevations and conditions were right for Arabica, and Peyser opined that simple tweaks might turn Burma's pretty good coffee into something special that would attract buyers willing to pay premium prices. Sensing an opportunity to give Burma's 14,000 rural coffee farmers a boost, the Value Chains project linked up with the nonprofit Coffee Quality Institute (CQI) for a closer look. CQI was enthused, but identified a potential stumbling block: few people in the country's nascent coffee industry knew a good cup of coffee from a bad one.

The project approached the new Myanmar Coffee Association (MCA) about hosting a nationwide "Coffee Cupping Competition" with the dual goals of identifying the country's best coffees and highlighting the importance of assessing quality, or "knowing your cup." In order for smallholder coffee farmers to compete in the global market, they would need to produce consistently high-quality coffee and filter out mediocre or poor coffees. Knowing how to "cup" — conduct a detailed sensory analysis — is critical to avoid producing subpar coffee that can drive down prices and tarnish a producer's — or even a new origin's — reputation.

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FAST FACT: Winrock and CQI helped MCA hold Burma's first ever national Coffee Cupping Competitions in 2015 and 2016. In the 2016 competition, quality rose across the board, with 56 out of 60 samples submitted exceeding the 80-point specialty grade threshold. Ma Mi Nyo, a smallholder from Pway Na Phar Village in Southern Shan, received the highest score in 2016. Her coffee was among 36 MTs purchased by a North American trader after the competition. A total of 6,000 farmers have been assisted through the Value Chains for Rural Development project.

No Internet? No Problem

Farmers in rural parts of Southern Shan State, where the majority of Arabica is grown, are interested in promoting their product but don't have access to the internet or the budget to attend trade shows. To address these constraints, the Value Chains project and partner CQI teamed up with private sector coffee businesses and MCA in 2016 to bring global buyers directly into the remote coffee lands around Ywangan Township in Southern Shan. Buyers were recruited based on their interest in investing in direct-trade relationships with community-based producers to support sustainable economic growth. In Shan, buyers from the United Kingdom, U.S. and Australia met hundreds of smallholder coffee farmers, including a local producer/processor named Ma Su Su Aung.

Before the buyers' visit, Su Su had never before cupped her own coffee, and she credited the interaction with raising her awareness of cupping to identify the unique characteristics and flavor profile that well-tended, specialty-grade coffees should exhibit. Su Su's coffee earned a top-10 finish at the 2016 Cupping Competition, with a score of 84.5, attracting attention from global buyers and enabling her to sell her coffee to exporters. Her experience inspired her to form the Ywangan Women's Coffee Group, with members from six villages. The group's objective is to improve women's capacity as coffee entrepreneurs, create new job opportunities for women, increase incomes and improve technology accessed by women in the coffee business.

"I hope there will be more women in leadership positions in coffee," Su Su said. "We need more training, and growers need to know that good prices will come with good coffee, if the quality is there."



Ma Su Su Aung (purple sweater) and her kids meet Stacy Bocskor of Allegro Coffee Company (supplier of Whole Foods Markets) during the buyers' tour in Southern Shan in 2016.