

Female-owned farms and companies are growing Ghana's taste for coffee

From dozens of farms nestled among the hills of Ghana's Volta region to the cafes and restaurants of the capital, Accra, the women farming and marketing Ghanaian coffee are working to gain a firmer foothold in the small but growing sector.

By Francis Kokoroko and Cooper Inveen ^{24 Feb 2023}



A female coffee grower scoops coffee beans from a sack as Benedicta Tamakloe, 37, a coffee entrepreneur, tests its moisture content in the Dzogbede community in the Volta Region, Ghana. Source: Reuters/Francis Kokoroko

Ghana is the world's second-largest cocoa producer behind neighbour Côte d'Ivoire, but is one of Africa's smallest in terms of coffee output. Most smallholder farmers lack access to the resources needed to market their beans.

Benedicta Tamakloe, a former computer science teacher and founder of the Accra-based roaster Bean Masters, decided to help by working with female farmers who were struggling in the male-dominated sector.

"At first, I just wanted to help these women in my home village find buyers," Tamakloe told Reuters, thinking back to when Bean Masters, one of the few female-owned coffee companies in Ghana, began in 2018.

"Then a friend told me: you have to be in the game to know the game," she said.

Bean Masters exclusively sources beans from female-owned farmers who form a collective of around 200 growers - the country's largest of its kind which also helps members harvest their crop.

"We want to ensure we're getting the best beans possible," Tamakloe said to Isha Pagniw, owner of a farm near the top of a forested mountain on Ghana's eastern border with Togo where a group of women were plucking bright red coffee fruit from branches dappled by the morning sun.

As the women worked, Tamakloe walked among them with a device to test the coffee beans' moisture content.



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Funding development projects

The collective produced around 10 tonnes of coffee last year, much of which Tamakloe roasts herself at a chocolate factory in Accra. A portion of the proceeds funds development projects in the villages where the women farm.

Today, Bean Masters coffee is mostly sold in bulk to high-end restaurants and hotels. But Tamakloe aims expand her production of retail-sized bags this year to make Bean Masters available to all kinds of consumers.



A mixologist prepares a glass of espresso martini at a bar in Accra, Ghana. Source: Reuters/Francis Kokoroko

At Kozo, an Afro-Asian fusion restaurant in Accra, Tamakloe and the staff sipped espressos made with Bean Masters coffee. The owner visited Pagniw's farm with Tamakloe in 2021 and has exclusively stocked Bean Masters ever since.

"It's a company that fosters women empowerment, sustainability and authenticity," said aspiring sommelie Ivy Esinam Lanyoh. "That is a vision that needs to be supported."