



# "Evaluating The Influence Of International Coffee Organization (ICO) Initiatives On Women Labor Empowerment In Indian Coffee Plantations: A Critical Perspective"

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## Abstract

This research critically analyses the impact of the International Coffee Organization (ICO) initiatives on women labor empowerment in coffee plantations. It examines how the ICO's programs and policies have influenced women's roles, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes within the coffee sector. The study highlights both the successes and challenges of these initiatives, providing insights into the effectiveness of gender-focused interventions in promoting sustainable development and gender equality in the coffee industry. The International Coffee Organization (ICO) has implemented various initiatives aimed at promoting sustainable coffee production and improving the livelihoods of coffee farmers and laborers. There are still significant challenges to be addressed, including limited access to education and training, and persistent gender-based discrimination. The International Coffee Organization (ICO) plays a crucial role in promoting women's empowerment in coffee plantations worldwide.

**Keywords:** International Coffee Organization (ICO), Women Empowerment, Coffee Plantations, Gender Equality, Labor Rights.

## Introduction

The coffee industry is a significant global economic sector, employing millions of individuals worldwide. Among these workers, women constitute a substantial portion of the labor force, particularly in coffee plantations. Despite their essential contributions, women often face numerous challenges, including limited access to resources, training, and decision-making opportunities. Addressing these issues is crucial for promoting gender equality and empowering women within the coffee sector. The coffee industry is a significant contributor to the global economy, with over approximately 2.25 billion cups of coffee consumed every day.

One of the ICO's primary goals is to address gender disparities and empower women laborers within the coffee industry. Through various initiatives, the ICO aims to enhance women's access to resources, provide educational and training opportunities, and promote their participation in decision-making at both local and international levels. By examining the successes and challenges of these gender-focused interventions, the study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of the ICO's efforts in fostering sustainable development and gender equality in the coffee sector. Furthermore, it aims to highlight areas where additional efforts are

needed to ensure that women laborers can fully participate in and benefit from the growth and development of the coffee industry in India.

## Background of the International Coffee Organization (ICO)

The **International Coffee Organization (ICO)** was established in **1963** under the auspices of the United Nations. This followed the approval of the first **International Coffee Agreement (ICA)** in **1962**. The ICO is the only intergovernmental organization dedicated to coffee, bringing together both exporting and importing governments.

### Key Milestones:

- **1962:** The first International Coffee Agreement was signed at the United Nations in New York City.
- **1963:** The ICO was formally established in London. Its mission is to strengthen the global coffee sector and promote its sustainable expansion.
- **1968, 1976, 1983, 1994, 2007:** The ICA was renegotiated several times to address evolving challenges in the coffee sector.
- **2018:** The United States officially withdrew from the International Coffee Agreement.

The ICO provides a unique forum for dialogue among governments, the private sector, development partners, civil society, and all coffee stakeholders. It collects and compiles independent official statistics on coffee production, trade, and consumption, supports the development and funding of technical cooperation projects, and promotes sustainability and coffee consumption.

**Unique Intergovernmental Organization:** ICO holds the distinction of being the sole intergovernmental organization dedicated to coffee. It serves as a platform that brings together governments engaged in coffee exporting and importing.

**Global Representation:** Currently, the ICO collectively represents a substantial share of the world's coffee activities, with its member countries contributing to approximately 93% of global coffee production and accounting for approximately 63% of global coffee consumption.

**Mission:** The primary mission of the ICO is to enhance and fortify the worldwide coffee sector while fostering its sustainable growth within a market-oriented framework. This approach is designed to benefit all stakeholders involved in the Global Coffee Value Chain.

**Indian Involvement:** India is an active member of the International Coffee Organization, participating in its initiatives and contributing to its mission and objectives. International Coffee Organization (ICO), in collaboration with the Coffee Board of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, Government of Karnataka is hosting the 5th World Coffee Conference (WCC) at Bengaluru in 9<sup>th</sup> February 2024.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Research on women's empowerment in agricultural value chains reveals mixed outcomes. While some initiatives fail to significantly improve gender equity in asset ownership or decision-making power, they can increase women's organizational participation and access to land titles (Lyon et al., 2018). Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs in India show potential for promoting gender equality and economic opportunities for women, though challenges remain in implementation across diverse sectors (Ramar, 2024). The Indian government has taken various initiatives to empower women, enshrining gender equality in the Constitution and adopting positive discrimination measures (Srivastava & Dubey, 2017). However, fair and ethical trade initiatives in South Indian plantations have limited engagement with the most marginalized workers and smallholders, potentially exacerbating inequalities within regional production systems. These initiatives tend to benefit producers oriented towards affluent Western markets while leaving others regulated by traditional state mechanisms (Neilsno & Pritchard, 2010).

The coffee plantation sector in India faces significant challenges related to labor dynamics and gender disparities. Mechanization, particularly the introduction of mechanical dryers, has led to a 54% reduction in female employment while increasing male employment by 70% (Chattopadhyay, 2022). Labor shortages

have become prevalent, especially affecting medium and large plantations, with yield reductions of up to 30% (Akarsha & Hartmann, 2009). This scarcity has doubled agricultural wages over five years, impacting farm profitability. Women, who constitute nearly 63% of the economically active agricultural workforce, often perform tedious and back-breaking tasks, yet their work remains largely unpaid and undervalued (Hiremath, 2014). The changing employment patterns and labor shortages pose risks to the sustainability of coffee plantations and local economies. Addressing these issues requires strategies to overcome labor scarcity, improve working conditions, and recognize the crucial role of women in agriculture.

Agricultural women workers in India face significant occupational health hazards, impacting their physical and mental well-being (Meenakshi, 2020). The social determinants of health for women tea plantation workers in India, including poverty, poor living conditions, and inadequate health services, further compound these challenges (Rajbangshi, 2020). In Mexico, women coffee producers experience time poverty, limiting their participation in organizational governance and exacerbating their labour burdens (Lyon, 2017). The diverse work activities of rural women workers globally, including precarious working conditions and the burden of unpaid labour, contribute to their health challenges (Beserra, 2023).

### Objectives of the Study

- To Assess the initiatives by international coffee organization for the betterment of women labourer in coffee plantation.

### Overview of ICO and International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) Initiatives

The ICO has launched several initiatives aimed at addressing gender disparities in the coffee sector. These initiatives focus on providing women with access to resources, training, and financial services, as well as promoting their participation in decision-making processes.

The International Coffee Organization (ICO) and the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA) have launched several initiatives aimed at improving the lives of women laborers in coffee plantations.

1. **Empowerment Programs:** The IWCA focuses on empowering women in the coffee industry through various programs that provide access to markets, financing, and continuous training on Voluntary Sustainability Standards (VSS) programs. These initiatives help women gain financial literacy and improve their coffee cupping skills.
2. **Sustainable Livelihoods:** The IWCA supports projects that promote sustainable livelihoods for women in the global coffee supply chain. These projects address challenges such as climate change, pricing volatility, and supply chain disruptions.
3. **Educational Support:** The NAYAN TARA project in India provides educational support to the daughters of women coffee plantation workers, aiming to uplift these young women and improve their future prospects.
4. **Health and Safety:** The ICO and the International Labour Organization (ILO) have launched the #CoffeePeople campaign to promote the right to a safe and healthy working environment in the coffee supply chain. This initiative is part of the Vision Zero Fund, which aims to achieve zero severe and fatal work-related accidents, injuries, and diseases in global supply chains.
5. **Global Network:** IWCA unites a global network of chapters, each focusing on local needs while sharing the common mission of empowering women in the coffee industry.

## Impact on Women Labor Empowerment

1. **Access to Resources:** The ICO has worked to ensure that women have better access to land, labor, and financial services. This has helped women to increase their productivity and improve their livelihoods.
2. **Training and Education:** The ICO has implemented training programs to enhance women's skills and knowledge in coffee production. This has empowered women to take on leadership roles and make informed decisions about their work.
3. **Financial Services:** The ICO has facilitated access to financial services for women, enabling them to invest in their farms and improve their production. This has led to higher yields and better-quality coffee.
4. **Participation in Decision-Making:** The ICO has promoted the inclusion of women in decision-making processes at both the local and international levels. This has helped to ensure that women's voices are heard and their needs are addressed.
5. **Market Access:** The ICO helps women gain better access to markets, ensuring that they can sell their coffee at fair prices and improve their economic stability.

## Collaboration and Support

- **World Coffee Conference:** The ICO organized the 5th edition of the World Coffee Conference (WCC) in Bengaluru, India, in 2023. This event was a collaboration with the Coffee Board of India, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, the Government of India, and the Government of Karnataka.
- **Coffee Development Projects:** The ICO supports various coffee development projects in India, focusing on sustainability, productivity, and market access for Indian coffee growers.

## Market Integration

- **Price Linkages:** Studies have shown that the ICO and international markets like New York and London have a significant influence on the prices of coffee in Indian domestic markets such as Bangalore, Chennai, and Hyderabad. This integration helps stabilize prices and ensures better market access for Indian coffee.

## Empowerment Initiatives

- **Women Empowerment:** The ICO's initiatives to promote gender equality and empower women in the coffee sector are also relevant to India. These initiatives aim to provide women with access to resources, training, and financial services, promoting their participation in decision-making processes.

## Economic Impact

- **Exports:** India is one of the major coffee-producing countries, and the ICO plays a crucial role in promoting Indian coffee on the global stage. Indian coffee exports are valued at billions of dollars, and the ICO's efforts help enhance the profitability and sustainability of the coffee sector in India.

## Challenges of ICO

While the ICO's initiatives have made significant progress, there are still challenges to overcome. Gender disparities in access to resources and services remain a barrier to women's full participation in the coffee sector. Additionally, social and cultural norms can limit women's opportunities for empowerment. Empowering women laborers in the coffee industry presents several challenges for organizations like the International Coffee Organization (ICO) and the International Women's Coffee Alliance (IWCA).

1. **Access to Resources:** Women often have limited access to essential resources such as land, credit, and information. This disparity can result in lower yields, productivity, and farm income compared to their male counterparts.
2. **Gender Gap in Economic Outcomes:** There is a measurable gender gap in economic outcomes, including lower revenues from selling coffee and reduced household income. Closing this gap requires targeted interventions to ensure women have equal opportunities and support.

3. **Social and Cultural Barriers:** Traditional gender roles and societal norms can hinder women's participation in decision-making processes and leadership positions within the coffee sector. Overcoming these barriers requires cultural change and advocacy for gender equality.
4. **Labor Availability:** Women often juggle multiple responsibilities, including household chores and childcare, which can limit their availability for coffee-related work. Addressing this challenge involves creating supportive policies and programs that recognize and accommodate women's dual roles.
5. **Access to Training and Education:** Women may have less access to training and educational opportunities compared to men. Providing gender-sensitive training programs and educational resources is crucial for empowering women and enhancing their skills.
6. **Health and Safety:** Ensuring a safe and healthy working environment is essential for women laborers. This includes addressing issues such as workplace harassment, physical strain, and exposure to harmful chemicals.
7. **Market Access:** Women often face barriers to accessing markets and fair prices for their coffee. Strengthening market linkages and promoting fair trade practices can help women achieve better economic outcomes.
8. **Complete Sustainability:** Achieving complete sustainability in the coffee sector remains a long-term goal, requiring continuous efforts to address environmental, social, and economic challenges.

Addressing these challenges requires a collaborative effort from governments, organizations, and communities to create an inclusive and equitable coffee industry. By empowering women, ICO can enhance the sustainability and productivity of the coffee sector as a whole. These challenges highlight the complexity of managing a global coffee supply chain and the importance of collaborative efforts to ensure a sustainable future for the industry.

### Opportunities of ICO

The International Coffee Organization (ICO) has several opportunities to enhance the global coffee sector and promote sustainability.

1. **Promoting Sustainable Practices:** The ICO can continue to promote sustainable agricultural practices, such as regenerative agriculture and circular economy principles, to reduce waste and close income gaps.
2. **Public-Private Partnerships:** Collaborating with governments, private sector entities, and development partners can lead to innovative projects and funding initiatives that support sustainable growth and resilience in the coffee sector.
3. **Global Coffee Sustainability and Resilience Fund:** The establishment of this fund aims to attract greater investment, focusing on vulnerable countries and communities, especially in Africa, and supporting smallholder farmers, women, and youth.
4. **Data and Analysis:** Providing world-class data, analysis, and information to industry stakeholders and policymakers can help inform better decision-making and drive improvements in the coffee sector.
5. **Dialogue and Collaboration:** The ICO serves as a unique forum for dialogue among governments, the private sector, civil society, and all coffee stakeholders. This platform can be used to address challenges and nurture opportunities through international cooperation.
6. **Technical Cooperation Projects:** Supporting the development and funding of technical cooperation projects can help improve productivity, quality, and sustainability in the coffee sector.
7. **Education and Training:** Offering training programs and educational resources can empower coffee farmers and workers, enhancing their skills and knowledge to improve their livelihoods.
8. **Market Access and Fair Trade:** Strengthening market linkages and promoting fair trade practices can help ensure that coffee producers receive fair prices for their products, improving their economic outcomes.

By leveraging these opportunities, the ICO can contribute to a more sustainable, inclusive, and resilient global coffee sector and empowerment of women labour in coffee sector.

### Recommendations:

1. **Policy Recommendations:** Based on review of literature, researcher recommend to provide more health care facilities to women labour in coffee plantation.
2. **Collaborative Efforts:** Recommend increased collaboration between the ICO, local governments, NGOs, and other stakeholders to create a more supportive environment for women laborers.
3. **Sustainability Focus:** Emphasize the importance of sustainability in all initiatives. Encourage the ICO to adopt practices that not only empower women but also promote environmental sustainability.
4. **Long-term Impact Assessment:** Suggest the implementation of long-term impact assessment mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of initiatives over time. This can help in making data-driven decisions for future projects.
5. **Awareness Campaigns:** Recommend launching awareness campaigns to educate both women laborers and the broader community about the benefits of these initiatives. This can help in overcoming cultural barriers and increasing participation.
6. **Targeted Training Programs:** Develop training programs tailored to the specific needs of women laborers, focusing on skills development, financial literacy, and leadership.
7. **Community Engagement:** Foster community engagement initiatives that involve women laborers in decision-making processes and leadership roles.
8. **Awareness Campaigns:** Launch awareness campaigns to educate communities about the importance of gender equality and the benefits of empowering women laborers.
9. **Advocacy for Rights:** Advocate for the rights of women laborers, including fair wages, safe working conditions, and protection from workplace harassment.
10. **Impact Assessment:** Establish robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the impact of ICO initiatives on women laborers over time.
11. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Create feedback mechanisms that allow women laborers to share their experiences and suggest improvements to the initiatives.
12. **Environmental Practices:** Promote environmentally sustainable practices within coffee plantations that benefit both the workers and the ecosystem.
13. **Economic Sustainability:** Develop programs that ensure the economic sustainability of women laborers, such as access to fair trade markets and diversified income sources.

## Social work intervention

### 1. Community-Based Programs

**Self-Help Groups (SHGs):** Establish SHGs specifically for women laborers to promote mutual support, collective bargaining power, and economic empowerment. Provide initial seed funding and training on financial management.

**Capacity Building:** Conduct regular capacity-building sessions on leadership, entrepreneurship, and financial literacy to enable women to manage SHGs effectively.

**Savings and Credit:** Encourage savings and provide microcredit facilities within SHGs to finance small businesses and personal needs.

### 2. Community Education:

**Awareness Campaigns:** Implement educational campaigns focusing on gender equality, women's rights, and the benefits of empowering women in the community.

**Vocational Training:** Offer vocational training programs that are tailored to the local context and demands, such as artisanal crafts, organic farming, and value-added coffee products.

### 3. Advocacy and Policy Influence

**Engagement with Policymakers:** Collaborate with local and national policymakers to advocate for gender-inclusive policies that ensure fair wages, safe working conditions, and access to social security benefits for women laborers.

**Coalition Building:** Form coalitions with other NGOs, women's groups, and labor unions to strengthen advocacy efforts and present a unified voice for policy change.

**Legal Support Services:** Provide legal support and representation to women laborers facing workplace discrimination or harassment. Establish legal aid clinics in coffee-growing regions.

**Policy Monitoring:** Monitor the implementation of gender-inclusive policies and hold stakeholders accountable through regular reporting and public engagement.

### 4. Health and Well-being Initiatives

**Medical Services:** Organize health camps to provide medical check-ups, maternal and child health services, and nutrition education. Partner with local health providers to ensure continuity of care.

**Preventive Health Education:** Conduct workshops on preventive health measures, focusing on common health issues among women laborers, such as anemia and musculoskeletal disorders.

**Mental Health Support:**

**Counseling Services:** Establish counseling centers that offer mental health support and stress management programs. Train local counselors to provide culturally sensitive care.

**Community Outreach:** Raise awareness about mental health issues and reduce stigma through community outreach programs and peer support groups.

## 5. Economic Empowerment

**Tailored Training Programs:** Develop and implement training programs in advanced agricultural techniques, artisanal crafts, and small-scale entrepreneurship. Ensure training is accessible and relevant to women laborers' needs.

**Access to Credit:** Facilitate access to microfinance and small loans tailored to women laborers' needs. Partner with microfinance institutions to offer financial products that support business start-ups and expansions.

**Financial Literacy:** Conduct financial literacy workshops to equip women with the knowledge and skills to manage their finances effectively and make informed economic decisions.

By adopting these detailed social work interventions, ICO can provide a comprehensive and actionable set of strategies to empower women laborers, addressing their needs holistically and fostering long-term sustainable development in the coffee industry.

## Conclusion

In examining the influence of International Coffee Organization (ICO) initiatives on the empowerment of women laborers in Indian coffee plantations, this study has illuminated several key insights. The ICO's efforts, through various empowerment programs, sustainable livelihood projects, and partnerships with local organizations, have had a significant impact on improving the economic and social conditions of women in the coffee sector.

Despite these positive strides, several challenges remain, such as limited access to resources, entrenched social and cultural barriers, and the need for more inclusive policies. These obstacles highlight the necessity for continuous, targeted efforts to address the specific needs of women laborers and to ensure that they can fully benefit from the opportunities provided by ICO initiatives. It is crucial for the ICO to enhance its data collection and analysis capabilities, foster collaborative efforts, and implement robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks. By doing so, the organization can better tailor its programs to the unique context of Indian coffee plantations and ensure that the initiatives not only empower women but also contribute to the long-term sustainability of the coffee industry.

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