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COLOMBIA

FIRST PERSON A Woman with Great Taste

Amid grounds of coffee, a young Colombian finds her calling as a “cupper”



Photo: Juan Pablo Castro

Renowned coffee tasting expert Lilium Mayini Macías operates a machine to process coffee. USAID-funded training helped her discover and hone her talent.

“My life has changed since I joined the specialty coffee program. I realized that there is a career in coffee production and it is well paid,” said Lilium Mayini Macías.

Telling Our Story
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Lilium Mayini Macías is only 20 years old, but already an expert in specialty coffee.

While other young women in Colombia’s vulnerable rural areas are forced to work in illicit activities to earn an income, Lilium participated in a USAID-funded alternative development project in the central Colombian Department of Tolima.

The specialty coffee program works with small coffee producers to reduce coca and poppy cultivation by increasing the production of exportable specialty coffees (and, as a result, producers’ incomes). Specialty coffee refers to high quality coffee grown in special microclimates. Violence and coca once plagued Tolima, but through this program small farmers have found an alternative to illicit crops in coffee growing.

Lilium received training in coffee tasting (“cupping”) and soon proved to be a talented cupper. Due to her advanced cupping abilities, she traveled to the United States for additional training with American private sector specialty coffee companies in California and Vermont. Lilium is now a renowned coffee cupper and is responsible for quality control of the coffee produced by her community.

“My life has changed since I joined the specialty coffee program. I realized that there is a promising career in specialty coffee production and it is well paid. The training we have received is wonderful but more importantly, we have made great achievements as a community and as coffee growers,” she said.

But her goals are not limited to these achievements alone. Lilium is now studying agronomy. During her spare time, she enjoys sharing her coffee knowledge with others. Twice, she has served as a judge in the National Barista Championship held in Bogotá, evaluating the participants’ skills.

To date, over 6,400 families have benefited from the specialty coffee program and more than 17,500 hectares (43,243 acres) of illicit crops have been manually eradicated.