

AFRICA'S COFFEE SHIFT FROM RITUAL TO REVOLUTION



By Gerd Müller-Pfeiffer,
International Coffee Consulting,
www.mueller-pfeiffer.com

Africa is no longer just a historical origin of coffee - it is becoming a fast-paced growth market, a hub for specialty, and a laboratory for premium consumer experiences.

Coffee as Culture: A Foundation of Heritage

In the Middle East and Africa (MEA), coffee is not merely consumed - it's celebrated. From the Ethiopian coffee ceremony to Saudi Arabian gahwa, coffee represents hospitality, identity, and community. Across the region, traditional preparation methods are being preserved, even as global specialty standards find their way into homes and cafés.

What's remarkable is how this cultural depth is now informing product innovation. Coffee mixology is on the rise—think cardamom-infused cold brews or saffron flat whites. These blends of tradition and trend are captivating younger audiences who seek experiences as much as beverages.

Consumption is growing, and so are expectations

Coffee consumption in Africa is accelerating, especially in urban centers like Cairo, Nairobi, and Cape Town. This growth is driven by an increasingly young, mobile, and curious population.

Consumers here are more digitally connected and globally informed than ever. They want quality, storytelling, and sustainability - without compromising on convenience. That means:

- **Third-wave cafés with transparent sourcing,**
- **Subscription-based cold brew deliveries, and**
- **app-based loyalty platforms in premium outlets.**

The Cold Revolution: Coffee Beyond Hot Cups

Cold coffee formats are no longer niche. Especially in the Gulf states and Northern Africa, where high temperatures meet youthful demographics, cold brew, nitro, and coffee-based mocktails are booming. Here's where the MEA region shines with creativity: local flavors like *date syrup, rose water, saffron, or clove* are being integrated into these beverages - creating a unique regional coffee identity that resonates globally.

Sustainability Goes Mainstream

Gen Z and Millennial consumers are making their voices heard. They expect ethical sourcing, traceability, carbon-neutral operations, and sustainable packaging.



“

From Ethiopia to Egypt,
women are gaining visibility
and leadership in coffee -
be it as farmers, exporters,
roasters, or café owners.

As a result, MEA-based roasters and cafés are shifting from commodity chains to **direct relationships with African producers**. Rwanda, Kenya, Ethiopia, and Tanzania are seeing more interest from regional buyers who want **farm-to-cup narratives** and real impact. In Dubai, I highlighted several roasters working directly with East African cooperatives - enabling better margins for farmers and more authentic positioning for brands.

Women Rising: Changing the Face of Coffee

From Ethiopia to Egypt, women are gaining visibility and leadership in coffee - be it as farmers, exporters, roasters, or café owners.

Initiatives across the region are supporting **female entrepreneurship, training, and financing**. In Nairobi, women-led roasteries are thriving. In Cairo and Cape Town, new cafés are being opened and operated by young women defying convention.

This transformation is not just about equity—it's about unlocking the full potential of MEA's coffee value chain.

Technology, Premiumization & Lifestyle

MEA coffee drinkers are early adopters of smart technology. App-based ordering, AI-driven personalization, and smart machines with brew profiles are becoming standard in premium outlets.

Coffee is increasingly viewed as a lifestyle marker, not

just a functional beverage. The rise of:

- **Coffee sommeliers,**
- **Sensorial tasting events, and**
- **Exclusive subscription models**

...reflects a strong move toward luxury coffee experiences - especially in the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and South Africa.

Looking Ahead: Local Roots, Global Wings

So, what's next? Based on what I observed in Dubai and beyond, the future of coffee in MEA lies at the intersection of:

- **Local pride** in cultural and agricultural heritage, and
- **Global inspiration** from the specialty movement, sustainability frameworks, and digital innovation.

Storytelling, authenticity, and meaningful engagement will be the pillars of coffee growth in MEA. This region is not just catching up—it is beginning to lead.

Final Thoughts: A Region on the Rise

From my keynote stage in Dubai to conversations with roasters and entrepreneurs, one thing became clear: **MEA is positioning itself as a global player in coffee** - with local producers, women leaders, and tech-savvy consumers driving the transformation.

The Middle East and Africa are not just part of coffee's past - they are shaping its future.



ALLIANCES
FOR ACTION

UNLOCKING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

for African coffee with the International Trade Centre's Alliances for Action

The International Trade Centre's Alliances for Action initiative is driving the transformation of Africa's coffee sector by empowering youth and enhancing competitiveness across the value chain. Through the ACP Business-Friendly Programme, funded by the European Union (EU) and the Organisation of African, Caribbean, and Pacific States (OACPS), we are fostering product diversification, promoting value addition at origin, and building sustainable market linkages.

Join us in creating a resilient, innovative, and sustainable future for African coffee – one that adds value at every step, from farm to cup.

For more details visit:
www.intracen.org

Write to us at:
alliances@intracen.org
or M. Mory Diawara at mdiawara@intracen.org

