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— Mifta Sultan,  
Ethiopian barista champion

### Ethiopian barista serves his country's coffee to the world

Mifta Sultan grew up picking coffee in the Kaffa region of Ethiopia and knows first hand the impact of the price of a cup of coffee. As a barista, Mifta now serves coffee, but believes what he is doing today is not much different from what he did as a child. "Coffee is important to my country," he says, "Everyone should understand where it comes from, and then it is worth more to the customer." Mifta was part of a group of thirty baristas who took part in a USAID-ATEP program to train and educate the very people who serve as the main face of Ethiopian coffee to residents and visitors. Baristas directly influence the taste and presentation of coffee, and they also are key educators about coffee origins and value.

In addition to training, USAID-ATEP hosted the first-ever Ethiopian Barista Championship as part of a larger effort to connect Ethiopian specialty coffee to the world marketplace. Timed to coincide with the East African Fine Coffee Association Conference in Addis Ababa, the competition had baristas prepare drinks to showcase their skills to representatives of the 48 countries at the international conference.

Mifta won the competition and will travel to Tokyo to represent Ethiopia — known as the birthplace of coffee — at the World Barista Championships in competition with other baristas from

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Photos by Fintrac Inc.

Coffee beans processed at Asnakech Thomas' facility in Ethiopia.

## Ethiopian coffee growers find new markets, higher incomes

Asnakech Thomas was born on a coffee plantation and is proud that her family comes from coffee land deep in the Southern People's Region of Ethiopia. In February 2007, her coffee placed first in a pre-selection process for Ethiopia's first-ever private coffee auction. The result? She sold her coffee for \$2 per pound, a 50 percent increase from what she received before. Asnakech is a client of USAID's Agribusiness and Trade Expansion Program (ATEP) focused on improving specialty coffee production and quality.

USAID-ATEP assisted Asnakech in installing a coffee processing machine and showed her how to run the eco-friendly pulper. The project also deployed agronomists and consultants to her mill to advise her on how to create specialty level coffee at every step of coffee processing — from looking after trees, to picking, to drying cherries. At the same time, USAID-ATEP was working on the other side of the coffee chain by organizing an open outcry private specialty coffee auction. The 2007 Ethiopia Limited Coffee Auction connected



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— Asnakech Thomas

Ethiopian farmers with buyers from more than 40 countries. Whereas the current standard buying price for coffee is \$1.30 per pound, at the auction lots were purchased for as much as \$5 per pound, an increase of over 280 percent.

While Asnakech was finishing up processing coffee for the season, samples of her coffee and samples from 20 other growers were shipped around the world for buyers to taste and grade. The USAID-ATEP supported auction gave producers

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Coffee beans are dried and processed.

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Africa, North America, Europe, and Asia. As the winner, he received more than \$3,000 in prize money. A husband and father of three, Mifta says the money will come in handy, but what he wants even more is to continue to build coffee awareness in his country. Despite the fact that Ethiopia has the largest diversity of coffee in the world, most of the people who live in Ethiopia don't have the privilege of seeing and tasting the best quality coffees, which are usually exported. Ethiopia has always embraced a strong coffee culture and consumes more than half of the coffee it produces, but, according to Mifta, "people forget about the farmers."

As the 2007 Ethiopian Barista Champion, Mifta says his goal is to build coffee awareness. "Everyone goes to coffee shops every day," he says. "It is the job of a barista to serve good-quality coffee drinks that show the customer what the coffee should taste like. Then, the customer pays more." Mifta not only understands the connection to the local farmer, he thinks of his family. "When I serve better coffee," he says, "people like my mother and father get more money for the coffee they pick."

As a result of the USAID-ATEP initiative, local baristas have formed an organization to continue training and education. They will also host the next Barista Championship in 2008. Mifta says he plans to train the other baristas and teach them, both what it is like to pick it as a child, and how to best serve it to customers today.

Ethiopia is the birthplace of coffee and the fourth-largest coffee producing country in the world, but despite its status, the country's specialty coffee potential is largely untapped. USAID-ATEP has set about changing this through a range of programs geared to increase specialty coffee production and sales. The growing specialty coffee market pays large premiums for better quality. Accounting for less than 5 percent of Ethiopia's \$350 million in coffee export dollars, specialty coffee promises to substantially increase the country's agricultural earnings.



Women sort coffee beans at a processing facility in Ethiopia.

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like Asnakech an opportunity to reach new markets and showcase their specialty coffee. The lots sold at the auction were small and select, and enabled buyers and producers to connect and make long-term trade commitments. Asnakech's lot was bought by an exporter in the US, and, because of the auction, she has made connections with other buyers and set up sales accordingly. With USAID-ATEP's help she went all the way from planting her trees to selling her coffee.

"Before," Asnakech says, "I only knew coffee in the cup." She mimics holding a delicate porcelain cup between her thumb and forefinger and drinking from it. "Now I know exactly how many hands the coffee has to go through to get

there." As for her coffee placing first, Asnakech says that it was good, but not good enough. "I received a score of 95. Next time I want 100." USAID-ATEP is going to help make this happen by educating Asnakech about more technical selection processes to make her coffee even better. "I have two containers this year," Asnakech says. "Next year I want four." Asnakech knows she stands out in the coffee industry as a woman, but the fact that she is the only woman coffee producer and exporter makes her just want to try harder. "In the beginning, the farmers who bring their cherry to my mill could not believe a lady was in charge. Now they are used to it. It's good—almost 80 percent of the people who pick my coffee are women. I want to encourage them."