

# Connecting the Global Women in Crop Science community

Report from Global Coffee Mornings held during the week of 5-9<sup>th</sup> of September 2022

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## Background

During the week of 5-9<sup>th</sup> of September 2022, we co-ordinated a Women in Crop Science coffee morning around the world. Hosts from 24 different organizations, institutions and universities organized an event in their local area. The main goal of the coffee mornings was to bring women working in crop science together in an informal setting to spark discussion among peers, to connect women from different career levels and to create networking opportunities. This report summarizes some of the discussions and recommendations from the coffee mornings. Building on the success of the events we are planning the next Global Coffee Morning during the week of **20-24<sup>th</sup> March 2023**.



These are some of the topics that came up most during the Coffee Mornings. These are also the topics we will try to focus on in the future (lectures, trainings, ...):

- The need and guidance on how to approach, identify and cultivate **mentorship opportunities** to foster growth.
- Tips and guidance on **networking**
- The request of **leadership workshops or programs** and different **trainings** in general.

## **Overview of Global Coffee Morning organizations and locations (*hosts in italics*):**

1. CIMMYT, Inifap and PIEAES: *Araceli Torres, Vicky Ordoñez and Ana Rosa Garcia*, Ciudad Obregón, Mexico
2. University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC): *Christy Gibson, Mike Ponte, Lucienne Burrus, Katherine Meacham-Hensold and Rachel Paul*, Urbana, Illinois, United States
3. PMAS Arid Agriculture University Islamabad: *Aneela Ulfat, Fozia Abasi and Mehwish Shabir Hussain*, Islamabad, Pakistan
4. CIMMYT Nairobi (ICRAF Campus): *Pauline Muindi and Rachel Voss*, Nairobi, Kenya
5. NIAB: *Stéphanie Swarbreck*, Cambridge, UK
6. James Hutton Institute: *Miriam Schreiber, Jessie Shadbolt and colleagues*, Dundee, Scotland
7. CSIRO-Australian National University: *Jessica Hyles, Fernanda Dreccer and Maja Arsic and Caitlin Byrt*, Canberra, Australia
8. Ghazi University, *Shahzadi Mahpara*, Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan
9. The University of Queensland, *Millicent Smith and Hannah Robinson*, Brisbane, Australia
10. CIMMYT Mexico, *Itria Ibba, Carolina Alma Riviera and Natalia Palacios*, Texcoco, Mexico
11. John Innes Centre, *Anna Backhaus, Marina Millan-Blanquez, Marianna Pasquariello, Sophie Carpenter, Isabel Faci-Gomez, Rose McNelly, Azam Lashkari and Philippa Borrill*, Norwich, UK
12. Nuclear Institute of Agriculture (NIA), *Saima Mir Arain*, Hyderabad, Pakistan
13. ICARDA, *Neha Tiwari*, Bhopal, India
14. University of Leeds, *Laura Dixon*, Leeds, UK
15. Keele University, *Trisna Tungadi*, Stoke-on-Trent, UK
16. The University of Western Australia, *Judith Lichtenzveig*, Perth, Australia
17. Carlsberg Research Laboratory, *Elizabeth Chapman*, Copenhagen, Denmark
18. CIMMYT Zimbabwe, *Jill Crains and Vimbayi Chimonyo*, Harare, Zimbabwe
19. The University of Adelaide, *Megan Shelden*, Adelaide, Australia
20. The Mohammed VI Polytechnic University (UM6P), *Maryam Rafiqi*, Ben Guerir, Morocco
21. CIP (International Potato Center), *Hannele Lindqvist-Kreuze*, Lima, Peru
22. Charles Sturt University, *Felicity Harris*, Wagga Wagga, Australia
23. Ege University, Faculty of Science, Department of Biology, *Rengin Ozgur*, Izmir, Turkey
24. CAS-AFS, University of Agriculture Faisalabad, *Sabin Aslam and Raheela Malik*, Faisalabad, Pakistan

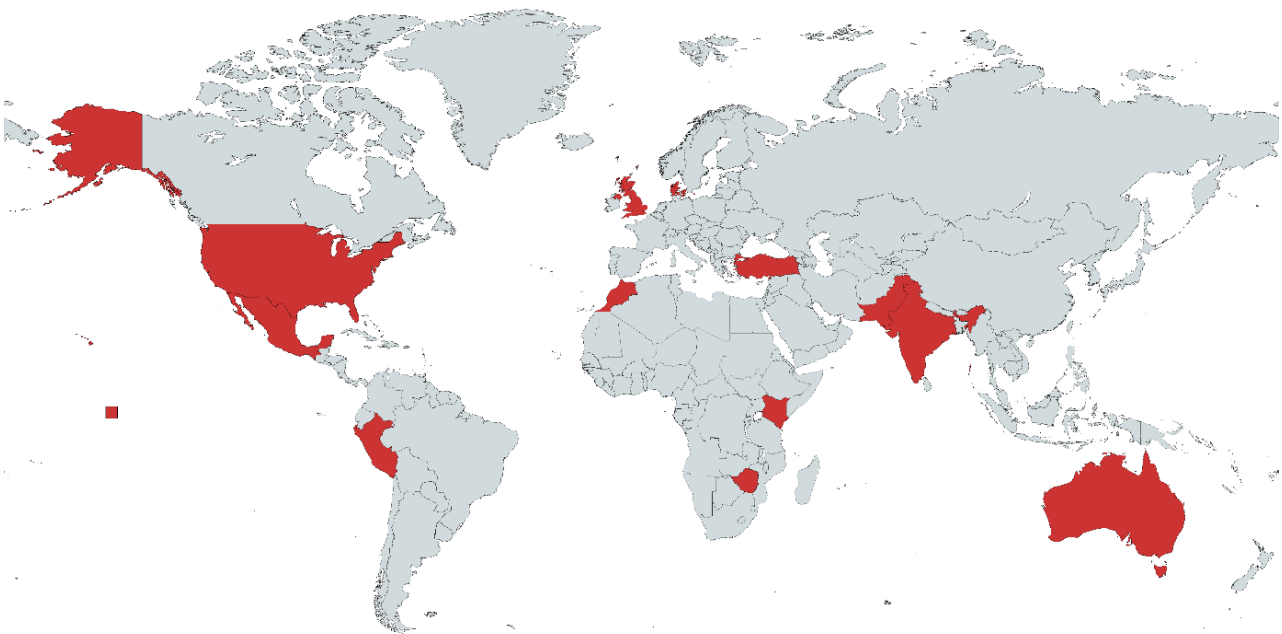


Figure 1: Participating countries in the WiCS coffee events

## CIMMYT, Inifap and PIEAES, Obregon (Mexico)

**Date:** Tuesday 6 September 2022

**Hosts:** Araceli Torres, Vicky Ordoñez, Ana Rosa Garcia

**Place:** Norman E. Borlaug Experimental Station (CENEB), meeting room of PIEAES (research and experimentation board of the South of Sonora), Obregon, Mexico

**Number of Participants:** A total of 19 women participated in the event, representing three institutions: CIMMYT, Inifap and PIEAES

**Format:** Free group discussion

### **Main topics discussed:**

- Formation of an interinstitutional committee (made up of women from the three institutions: CIMMYT, PIEAES and Inifap).
- Learn about the labour rights we have.
- Recognition of achievements of women involved in agricultural sciences.
- Knowing how to act when confronted with harassment of any kind (what to do and where to go).
- Create spaces to show the work done in our areas (Symposium).
- Have a means of institutional transportation for the three institutions.
- Form a support network to foster growth (Mentorship).
- Support between women for labour issues as well as other areas.
- Raise awareness of the supports already available, review and suggest changes.
- Share experiences and support for mothers with special needs children.
- Sensitization on sorority among women.
- Reconciliation of work and family life.
- Labour equity and improvement in recruitment processes.



## University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), Urbana (USA)

**Date:** Friday 9 September 2022

**Hosts:** Academic Women in STEM (A-WIS)

Team members leading the organization of the coffee hour: Christy Gibson (A-WIS chair), Mike Ponte (communications), Lucienne Burrus (venue and refreshments), Katherine Meacham-Hensold (communications), Rachel Paul (Discussion Leader)

**Place:** Carl R. Woese Institute of Genomic Biology Urbana, Illinois (USA)

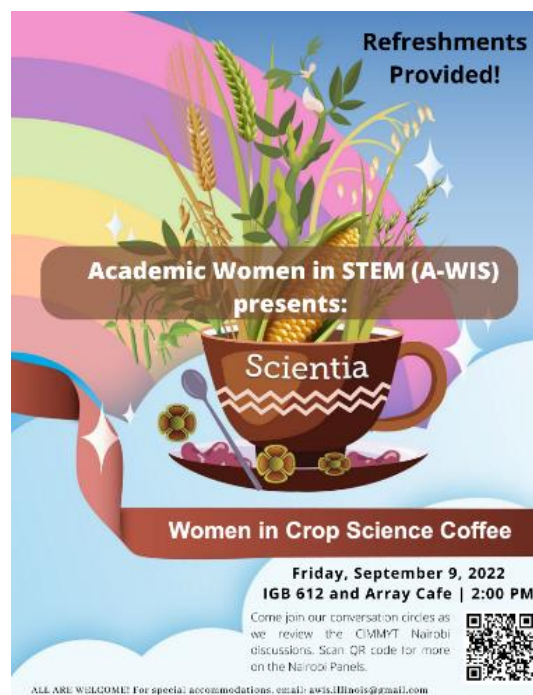
**Number of Participants:** 20

**Format:** First we started with a general how is everyone. We then held an informal conversation circle discussing the CIMMYT questions. We spent most of our time on question 1: What do you want in a mentor?

### **Main topics discussed:**

Participants wanted redefine mentor or, address the lack of boundaries and expectations in mentors.

- A mentor is someone who can help you address problems, not necessarily someone to vent to.
- Folks should separate their venting circle (friends) from an actual mentor unless they have experienced harassment or abuse and want to escalate. This was discussed as we often forget that mentors have a bandwidth and mental health to maintain. Additional, great mentors in the Academic Space is often limited. This means that mentor may be mentoring several people and “stretched thin”.
- Point three led to discussions on how to better find mentors or encourage others to be mentors. We didn’t come to a consensus on this because even when formally assigning mentors we can end up with different mentors or the relationship is not maintained.
- A suggestion for meetings with mentors is to have an idea about what you need, state what you need in that instance, and ask for help in how to acquire needs.
- In general, we need to work on systemic issues. We couldn’t suggest anything further as we ran out of time.



## PMAS Arid Agriculture University Islamabad, Islamabad (Pakistan)

**Date:** Thursday 8 September 2022

**Hosts:** Aneela Ulfat, Fozia Abasi and Mehwish Shabir Hussain

**Place:** PMAS Arid Agriculture University Islamabad (Pakistan)

**Format:** The guest speakers were prominent young scientists Dr. Raheela Rehman working as Assistant Prof, University of Agriculture Faisalabad (UAF) and Dr. Sabin, a Postdoc fellow at UAF.

### Main topics discussed:

The key points of #WiCS #GlobalWiCScoffee addressed the importance of a strong community of women in agriculture and means to promote women's presence in science. Need to institutionalize expertise to help communities develop by revolutionizing their respective agriculture systems. There should be more of such opportunities to highlight women's achievements in science.



## CIMMYT and ICRAF Campus, Nairobi (Kenya)

**Date:** Wednesday 7 September 2022

**Hosts:** Pauline Muindi (CIMMYT) and Rachel Voss (CIMMYT)

**Place** ICRAF, Cocoa Room, Nairobi (Kenya)

**Number of Participants:** 22 participants from different institutes including, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), World Agroforestry Center (ICRAF) and International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics (ICRISAT).

**Format:** An overview of the Women in Crop Science led by Julie Van Vlasselaer and Rachel Voss followed by a “Meet & Greet” Session (Short self-introduction of all women present) and a group discussion.

### Main topics discussed:

- Most of the young women technicians, emphasized on the need and guidance on how to approach, identify and cultivate mentorship opportunities. There is a need to move beyond, seasonal mentorships to a long-term mentorship that serve to grow women scientists in their early career to senior scientists. This is because there are different facets in a woman’s career. The right and equal support from the supervisors would make their work better or easier.
- Some of the women researchers noted how much they enjoyed participatory research - working with communities to prioritize what they need and want, offering solutions, understanding what assets they can build on, and then working on solutions together. One of the most rewarding parts of agricultural research is getting to work directly with farmers and other partners, so we can be sure our research is grounded in their realities and responsive to their interests and priorities.
- Some women mentioned that the best decision they ever made was to take their current job, where they have had a lot of opportunities to learn and work in different areas, develop new skills, and meet great colleagues.
- Need for opportunities for career development that can run parallel to current roles in research organizations. Ideally it would be better if all can be able to access such opportunities, especially through funding provided by CGIAR organizations.
- Women from the different centers, exchanged their contact information details with each other and requested for continued opportunities (such as women in science coffee morning) to network, learn and share their experiences working as women researchers.



## NIAB, Cambridge (UK)

**Date:** Wednesday 9 September 2022

**Hosts:** Stéphanie Swarbreck

**Place** Cambridge (UK)

**Number of Participants:** 15

**Format:** The format was very unformal. Women were invited to come in the coffee room (fairly public place), have a coffee/tea with biscuits and fruits, and to have a chat. We had post-it notes for people to add their thoughts to 3 questions: (1) What do you need from a Women in Crop Science Network? (2) Who would you like to hear from in our WiCS interview series? And (3) How can NIAB be more inclusive?

### **Main topic discussed:**

I have worked in this organisation for 3 years now and this is the first event that discussed equality and diversity issues. Women listed need for more local connections in Cambridge, mentoring opportunity and a guide from women who have children on ways to make it work. We also received many suggestions of amazing women in crop sciences to interview. Finally, to make our institution more inclusive we also received specific suggestions ranging from ensuring that hiring guidelines are inclusive to support for a peri-menopause/menopause support group and having free menstrual products in the bathroom. Crucially, we had one representative of human resources attending and explicit strong support from the CEO. Some of the feedback I received in setting this up is that it was restrictive to only mention women, what about non-binary people? The take home message was that for our specific organisation, events should be more widely open.



## James Hutton Institute, Dundee (Scotland)

**Date:** Monday 5 September 2022

**Hosts:** Miriam Schreiber, Jessie Shadbolt and colleagues

**Place:** Dundee (Scotland)

**Number of Participants:** 15 participants

**Format:** Coffee afternoon

**Main topic discussed:**

Feedback was, that people would be interested to have “women in crop science” coffee meetings more on a regular basis if possible.

We put some flipchart paper out for comments. Two things were mentioned multiple times: Setting up something like mentee/mentor program would be of interest, and what options are available for leadership workshop/programs.





## CSIRO, Canberra (Australia)

**Date:** Monday 22 August 2022

**Hosts:** Jessica Hyles, Fernanda Dreccer and Maja Arsic (CSIRO), Caitlin Byrt (Australian National University)

**Place:** CSIRO Canberra (Australia)

**Number of Participants:** The event had 40 in-person attendees, plus 20 online participants.

**Format:** The event included an introductory short talk by Jen Taylor (CSIRO Acting Business Unit Director), Jess Hyles (CSIRO Group Leader, Cotton Biotechnology) and a presentation by Alison Bentley (CIMMYT Global Wheat Program). This was followed by a networking morning tea with discussions and interactions supported by the CSIRO Inclusion and Diversity Initiative.

### Main topics discussed:

#### *Background areas covered*

- A recent analysis by Caitlin Byrt (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7084163>) highlights the fact that in the last decade, three times more male mid-career plant science researchers in Australia have been awarded fellowships compared to females at the same career stage.
- Many organizations in Australia, including CSIRO, have made great progress in promoting and enhancing diversity.

#### *Topics discussed and summary of ideas captured*

During the morning tea, three topics were discussed by participants using flip charts to capture a range of ideas

- How can we support career development for under-represented groups?
- How do we collectively address non-inclusive behaviours?
- How do we address gender bias in awards and funding?

To read the full report, please visit the Women in Crop Science Zenodo page:

<https://zenodo.org/record/7133164#.YzwPh3ZBxPY>



## Ghazi University, Punjab (Pakistan)

**Date:** Thursday 8 September 2022

**Hosts:** Dr. Shahzadi Mahpara, Dr. Ijaz Rasool Noorka and all faculty members of the department.

**Place:** Ghazi University. Dera Ghazi Khan, Pakistan

**Number of Participants:** 12 students from different departments including department of Plant Breeding & Genetics

**Format:** The format was formal. Both male and female students were invited to learn about R-studio and some statistical skills which are useful for their research and studies

### Main topics discussed:

During morning tea, different statistical techniques were discussed for analysis of variance, correlation analysis, bi-plot analysis, cluster analysis and t-test and chi-square tests were discussed and practiced by the students. Students also gave feedback on conducting this table discussion that encourage me.



## University of Queensland, Queensland (Australia)

**Date:** Tuesday 6 September 2022

**Hosts:** Millicent Smith, Hannah Robinson

**Place:** University of Queensland Gatton Campus, QLD, Australia

**Number of Participants:** 30 participants

**Format:** Morning tea + panel discussion.

### Main topics discussed:

Panellists were from a range of locations/career stages and included Judy Eglitis-Sexton (PhD Candidate, School of Agriculture and Food Sciences, University of Queensland), Kylie Wenham (Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, University of Queensland), Alison Kelly (QLD Department of Agriculture and Fisheries), Fernanda Dreccer (CSIRO).

The panel discussed a range of topics with the discussion questions listed below:

1. Briefly introduce yourself and tell us how you got into crop science?
2. Can you tell us about a challenge you have faced as a woman in crop science and how you overcame it?
3. What career development opportunities would you like to see?
4. Can you share your experience and any advice in managing work/life balance? Particularly as a woman and in relation to any career interruptions you may have experienced.
5. What can we do to build a stronger network for women working in crop science in QLD?

Overall, the event was a great success with numerous participants commenting it would be great to see events like this one happening more frequently.



## CIMMYT HQ, Texcoco (Mexico)

**Date:** Friday 9 September 2022

**Hosts:** Maria Itria Ibba and Carolina Alma Rivera

**Place:** New auditorium, CIMMYT HQ, El Batán (Mexico)

**Number of Participants:** 40 in-person participants, 30 online participants

**Format:** Group discussion in the auditorium followed by an outdoor coffee break in the CIMMYT garden.

### Main topic discussed:

The group discussion in the auditorium was opened by Carolina Rivera and Maria Itria Ibba by presenting a short piece of text on 2 topics:

- Mentorship <https://irp.nih.gov/catalyst/v23i2/the-science-of-mentoring-women-in-science>
- Work-life balance <https://gimletmedia.com/shows/science-vs/o2h8rra>

Mentorship: The importance of having strong external mentors as well as a strong peer network you can rely on was discussed. One point of discussion was whether mentor-mentee relationships should be more formal or informal. Is an open-door policy better than working through appointments? Views on both sides were given and it most participants agreed that this was also dependent with whom the mentor-mentee relationship was, either a peer or an external professional mentor.

Work-life balance: A very lively debate on work life balance followed, clearly a hot topic! The discussion started with several people stating that workloads were overall too high in CIMMYT, independent on the level one is working. This resulted in bad retention of staff, burnouts and neglection of private lives reinforced by online meetings on every possible moment which was introduced by COVID. The next issue that was discussed is how to turn off thinking about work once the work is done and having something for yourself that has nothing to do with work. Several participants contributed to this discussion and gave ideas such as the need of a good hobby, doing sports to stay healthy, cooking, ... .Also compartmentalization can help! The final discussion was around ones' role as team leader and the importance of respecting the time of people working with you. Sometimes activities are passed on to people working for you, without acknowledging what was already on one's agenda. The challenge of saying no to additional work was a challenge for many.



## John Innes Centre (JIC), Norwich (UK)

**Date:** Thursday 8 September 2022

**Hosts:** Anna Backhaus, Marina Millan-Blanquez, Marianna Pasquariello, Sophie Carpenter, Isabel Faci-Gomez, Rose McNelly, Azam Lashkari and Philippa Borrill

**Place:** JIC conference Centre (Foyer), Norwich (UK)

**Number of Participants:** /

**Format:** We distributed 5 big white sheets of paper with a question in the middle. Everyone could walk around the tables and add their ideas and thoughts to the different topics. The discussions were fueled by a special WICs cake and coffee and the memory of the day were captured in a poster with polaroid pictures of everyone who attended on the day.

### Main topics discussed:

On the first table we presented some of the most recent data regarding female to male proportion of support staff, students, post-doc, group leaders. Having this data helped us to show where equal representation has been achieved, and where not. Other questions featured around barriers that exist for female career progression, what training we would like to have at JIC to address gender gaps, and also if we think gender equality is practiced in day-to-day situations at JIC.

A common theme was that participants thought there was a lack of female representation at higher levels, for example in group leader or managerial positions. This is a perceived barrier as it means there are fewer role models to look up to and approach for support. Many participants agreed that females didn't lack the skills or ability to reach these top positions but were disadvantaged by non-transparent, and sometimes biased, hiring processes. We also discussed that hiring or other factors must be even more biased for women on color as their representation is extremely low.

For females with caring responsibilities a barrier which was repeatedly brought up was the lack of support with childcare. Many people noted the expensive cost of childcare and that there was little help with these costs. The lack of flexible working options was also thought to be contributing to this problem. Suggestions for addressing this included promoting job sharing and part-time working on job adverts. These opinions were not specific to NBI, but participants seemed to think that they persisted across science more widely, and that academia needs to adapt to become more 'motherhood friendly'.

