

# Junior Scientists Tandems

## Final Report

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**Start and end date of stay at IARC / GRI: 16.07.2024 to 17.01.2025**

**Title: Institutional Innovations and Cooperation in Colombian and Ugandan  
Coffee Seed Systems**

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## Introduction

As part of my master's thesis at the University of Hohenheim, titled "Institutional Innovations and Cooperation in Colombian and Ugandan Coffee Seed Systems", I undertook a Junior Scientist internship at the CGIAR Centre Alliance Bioversity & CIAT from July 2024 to January 2025. I worked within the Climate Action group at the CIAT headquarters in Palmira, Colombia, as well as at the CIAT facilities in Kawanda, Uganda.

At CIAT, I was hosted as a visiting researcher conducting fieldwork to support my thesis and deepen my understanding of international research collaboration and seed system governance. I spent approximately two and a half months in Uganda, followed by a longer stay in Colombia, where I remained after completing my fieldwork to begin writing my thesis.

## Host Institutions and Work Environment

I had the opportunity to work at two different CIAT campuses – one located in Kawanda, Uganda, and the other at the Latin American Hub headquarters in Palmira, Colombia. Both sites offer a supportive and picturesque work environment, surrounded by lush vegetation and a great community among the scientific and technical staff. In Uganda, the campus is located on the grounds of a National Agricultural Research Facility, surrounded by a plethora of field trials (mainly cooking banana, but also beans, vegetables etc.) and some laboratories. That made it easy to come in contact not only with the CIAT staff but also with other national and international scientists and students which fostered spontaneous opportunities for both professional and cultural exchange. The Colombian campus is surrounded by sugar cane fields and hosts numerous research groups, including the state-of-the-art gene bank facility. It also offers staff benefits such as access to sports facilities and courses.

In Uganda, for the field trips to the countryside or remote institutions, I was accompanied by a driver who also assisted with translation, and at times I worked together with another master's student based at CIAT. In Colombia, my fieldwork was more independent, with occasional meetings joined by my supervisor. Both locations provided rich opportunities for collaboration, exchange, and professional development. When assistance, guidance, or feedback was needed, I could receive it without delay and usually exceeding my expectations in helpfulness.

## Activities and Responsibilities

My primary responsibilities during the internship were closely tied to my master's thesis research, focusing on the governance and institutional dynamics of coffee seed systems in Uganda and Colombia. The core of my work involved conducting qualitative field research, including semi-structured interviews with key informants and stakeholders, focus group discussions, and institutional visits. These activities allowed me to explore the perspectives of a wide range of actors, such as public institutions, private nurseries, research bodies, and development agencies.

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In both countries, I applied the Process Net-Map methodology to visualise actor relationships and decision-making structures within the seed system. This included organising and moderating sessions, often in cooperation with local staff or with assistance such as translation, depending on the session. Beyond field research, my responsibilities included logistical planning, acquiring of contacts and coordination of travel and appointments.

## Key Learning Experiences

Through this internship, I gained deep insights into both the technical and institutional aspects of coffee production systems, particularly in relation to seed system governance. I developed a better understanding of the complexity of varietal development, distribution structures, and the challenges of ensuring access to high-quality planting material.

From a methodological perspective, I learned how to plan and conduct qualitative fieldwork in different cultural contexts, including interview facilitation, the organisation of field trips, and the application of participatory mapping tools such as Process Net-Map. I also had to adjust quickly to unexpected situations, including last-minute appointment changes and logistical delays, which strengthened my flexibility and organisational skills.

Intercultural communication was another key learning area. I experienced first-hand the diversity of working cultures and expectations across teams and countries. Navigating these differences enhanced my ability to work collaboratively and respectfully in international and multidisciplinary environments.

## Challenges and How I Addressed Them

Throughout the internship, I encountered several challenges that are common in international field research. Language barriers and differing expectations around scheduling occasionally complicated communication. In Uganda, this was addressed by working more closely with extension officers or with local students and logistical support, ensuring that conversations could still be meaningful and accurate.

Logistical and scheduling issues were also frequent. Some interviews were cancelled or rescheduled multiple times, requiring a high level of flexibility and patience. These experiences taught me to manage uncertainty and adapt quickly to changing circumstances, while also maintaining professional communication with interview partners.

Finally, I also faced occasional uncertainty when applying research methods in unfamiliar field contexts. Adjusting the Process Net-Map methodology to each local situation required creativity and careful facilitation. I overcame these challenges by drawing on the support of CIAT colleagues, staying open to my supervisor's feedback, and reflecting regularly on my field experiences.

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## Personal Reflections and Future Outlook

One of the most impactful aspects of this internship was the opportunity to observe how many individuals and institutions work together toward shared goals – even within highly specific or technical areas such as coffee seed systems. Seeing this cooperation unfold across different organisational and national contexts made me appreciate the complexity and collaborative nature of agricultural and development work.

The internship confirmed my interest in international research and development. Working at CIAT gave me first-hand insight into applied research practices, interdisciplinary collaboration, and the practical relevance of governance studies in the Global South. I now strongly consider pursuing a career in research-for-development, ideally in projects that combine natural and social sciences with practical implementation.

This placement has not only strengthened my academic and professional profile, but also deepened my understanding of the practical implications of academic knowledge gained in the university and how to help translate such knowledge into practical application. It also left me with lasting impressions of the people, challenges, and opportunities involved in collaborative international research.

## Conclusion

This internship has been an enriching and constructive experience, both academically and personally. It offered me the rare opportunity to engage with complex agricultural systems in two distinct country contexts and to contribute meaningfully to an ongoing research agenda. The exposure to interdisciplinary teamwork, real-world challenges, and diverse institutional environments has expanded my perspective on international cooperation and development research. Moreover, this research design, while the topic was quite narrow and sometimes challenging, allowed me to get to know these countries and their people better than any before, even though I have already lived abroad for longer time periods.

Consequently, I can fully recommend conducting qualitative research in multi-actor-systems - not only for academic insights but also to better understand local cultures and everyday challenges faced by the population. I am grateful for the support and openness I experienced at both CIAT locations, for the chance to grow as a researcher and professional in such a dynamic setting, and the opportunity created through the ATSAF Academy. The experience has confirmed my motivation to pursue further work in the field of agricultural development and institutional innovation.

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## Annex: Visual Impressions from Fieldwork and Surrounding Events



The diagram is a project management or process flow chart titled "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force). It is drawn on a whiteboard with various sticky notes and handwritten text.

**Central Flow (Yellow Sticky Notes):**

- Top: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe (VUB)" (Soviet Air Force (VUB))
- Below it: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Below that: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Below that: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Below that: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Bottom: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)

**Side Notes (Pink Sticky Notes):**

- Left side: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe (VUB)" (Soviet Air Force (VUB))
- Right side: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Bottom right: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)

**Handwritten Notes:**

- Top left: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe (VUB)" (Soviet Air Force (VUB))
- Top right: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Bottom left: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)
- Bottom right: "Sowjetische Luftwaffe" (Soviet Air Force)

The diagram is divided into two main sections by a vertical line. The left section contains the central flow and the side notes. The right section contains the side notes and the bottom right note.

Picture 2: Process Net-Map created with breeding institution in Colombia





Picture 3: Youth cupping competition at the international coffee fair of Tolima (Col) 2024



Picture 4: Sign-post belonging to one of several big cooperatives that stopped operating in Uganda



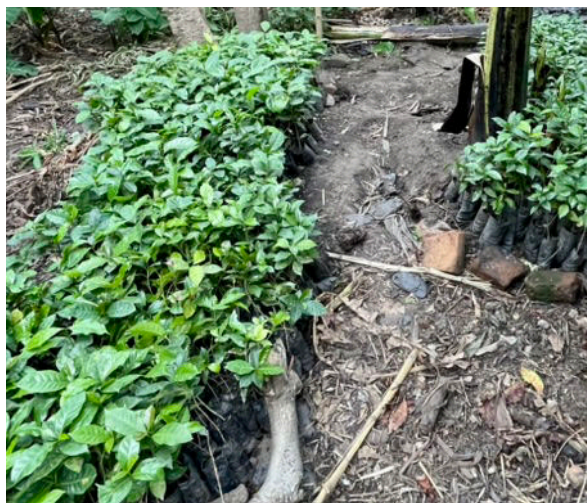
Picture 5: Exporter-owned Arabica nursery with free seedlings to be delivered in Uganda



**ATSAF Academy**  
Academy for International Agricultural Research for Development



Picture 6: Arabica nursery without production due to lack of demand in Uganda



Picture 7: Neglected and diseased Arabica plantlings in a private nursery in Uganda



Picture 8: Coffea Liberica trial plot on public research grounds in Kawanda, Ug



Picture 9: Private variety trial from exporter in the Western region