



GATEWAY TO  
AFRICAN  
SPECIALTY  
COFFEES

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CALIFORNIA ORGANIC FARMING

# EXPLORING AFRICAN GREAT LAKES COFFEES

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EJOURNAL

## **Introduction**

This masterpiece has no other objective than gathering the varietal, cultivar, terroir, processing techniques and the amazing profile and flavor notes. Therefore, this journal is an enthusiast's guide to selecting, brewing and sourcing exquisite coffee from African Great Lakes region.

The story of African Great Lakes coffee over the past several years is one of a nimble and innovative response to profound changes in the high-end specialty coffee market. Historically, coffee farmers took their coffee fruits to large and centralized mills for processing. Growing elevations were usually high, so the cup was bright and substantial in mouth feel. The tree varieties were classic, though not particularly distinctive in the cup quality. The centralized mills generally did an impeccable job of wet-processing the fruit. All of this added up to the admired but predictable African great lakes coffees of recent tradition; clean, bright and dependable. Coffees were typically sold by exporters by growing region and grade.

The coffee economy in the Great Lakes region does not take into consideration the well-being of the various actors in the chain, particularly the producers who are the weakest link in this relationship. More precisely, a sustainable coffee farmer will meet long term environmental and social goals while being able to compete effectively with other market participants and achieve prices that cover his/her production costs and allow him to earn an acceptable profit margin. The question that needs to be addressed is whether coffee growing is sustainable in Africa.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Characteristics of the African Great Lakes region coffee sector.**

#### **Area under coffee and number of farmers**

In almost all African Great Lakes region countries coffee farming is dominated by smallholdings varying in size from half a hectare to 5 hectares per farm<sup>2</sup>. Large plantations or coffee estates represent only a tiny proportion of farms. In Kenya, estate farms contribute 40% of the total production. The total number of coffee farmers directly involved in production activities in East Africa is estimated at between 1 and 2 million. This figure may differ from other sources depending on the strict definition of the concept of individual farmers and farmer households. The total number of households involved in coffee growing activity is estimated at 2 million and the average size of a household is two adults (husband and wife). In some cases both husband and wife are registered as coffee farmers but in a number of cases it is only the men that are considered to be coffee farmers. In reality, women are more involved in production than men. For

instance, women are involved in 60% of the production chain in Rwanda.

### **Land ownership mechanism**

Coffee land holding patterns in the African Great Lakes Region vary from country to country and from region to region within the same country. Land used for coffee is significant in areas where the choice of crops grown for export is limited. By contrast, areas which offer the possibility for significant crop diversification have less land devoted to coffee. It should be noted that the key decisions on coffee issues in East Africa are largely made by men as the majority of the households are headed by men. As a result, a family of a married couple with both man and wife farming coffee is generally considered as one farmer instead of two.

### **Age group**

Another important characteristic of coffee farming in East Africa is the ageing population. The average age of farmers is over 60 despite the region being dominated by a huge number of young people. Indeed, the young and educated do not engage in coffee production due to the low returns. The youth after their education move to cities and urban settlements in pursuit for better life and employment.



**Figure 1: Young coffee farmers after undertaking a training.**

## **Farming systems**

With a few exceptions, smallholdings are generally poorly developed owing to a lack of equipment, which is in turn due to limited capital investment to increase efficiency. Many of these smallholder farmers grow additional cash and food crops. In many countries these crops have been managed on an extensive system with minimum inputs giving low yields. This extensive farming system has had a negative environmental impact in terms of deforestation and water use. Family labour is generally used for crop maintenance with the assistance of hired labour in some cases. Mixed farming (coffee trees intercropped with food crops such as bananas, beans, potatoes, and others) is generally practiced throughout the Great Lakes.



**Figure 2: Growing coffee plants intercropped with bananas.**

Most coffee plantations were established several decades ago and their average age is now over 30 years. However, improved planting materials have been introduced recently in these East African producing countries. Coffee research institutions supply planting materials to farmers, but due to the institutions' limited resources, the needs of farmers in a number of countries are not always satisfied.

### **Production Cost**

Costs of production are difficult to assess as small scale farmers rely on family and occasional hired labour. The lack of record keeping is also a limiting factor in assessing costs of production. In almost all countries, coffee farmers do not have structured production cost control systems. There are no reliable indicators to benchmark the performance of farmers on the various factors normally used to assess economic competitiveness. Production costs include land, water, coffee trees, fertilizers, pesticides and labour. These costs vary widely from one country to another due to the differing marketing systems, physical infrastructure (roads, transports, etc.), land ownership and available credits. Labour

and fertilizers are the most critical factors in determining production costs. As both mechanization and the use of fertilizers are rare in the East African countries, labour costs represent more than 70% of the total production cost.

The production costs of Robusta coffee tend to be lower than Arabica due to Arabica requiring more inputs and processing to prepare it for the market. In addition, fertilizers are more widely used by Arabica producers than Robusta producers. In East Africa, the use of fertilizers and pesticides requires an average expenditure of over US\$600 per hectare. Disease control accounts for over 30% of this cost. Costs of production are generally lower for smallholding farms than estate farms. In Burundi, for example, the average cost of production for a farmer who adopts good agricultural practices (fertilizers and labour) varies between 50.1 US to 57.6 US cents per tree. The average size of a farm is 100 trees.

### **Financing of the coffee sector**

Despite the importance of agriculture in the East African economy, its funding has been marginalized as the banking sector has traditionally shied away from lending to agriculture due to the perceived and real inherent risks. In many countries, the agricultural sector receives less than 4% of bank financing compared to the secondary and tertiary sectors which absorb over 30% and 60% respectively. Estate farmers are generally able to obtain credit more easily or raise finance through the banking sector than smallholder farmers. Moreover, operations connected with crops and livestock production are of less interest to the banks than commercial activities. Since liberalization, many state-owned

development and agricultural banks have been dismantled in a number of coffee producing countries.

Nonetheless in some countries, notably Kenya, recent initiatives have helped to plug the funding gap for the coffee sector in particular and all agricultural production in general. Additionally, the Coffee Development Fund (CoDF) was established in 2006 to act as a governmental channel to finance agricultural development and production. It seeks to achieve this goal by providing farmers with sustainable and affordable credit facilities to finance agricultural inputs and operations to speed up the production of high quality coffee and improved farmer incomes. The CoDF has recently been merged into one large fund known as the Commodities Fund. Its mandate has extended to cover several agricultural products, including sugar, tea, horticulture, sisal, cotton, cereals, tubers and many others.

## **Bean classification**

Coffee is one of the leading commercial products in the world therefore strictly speaking, grade indicators are used to describe the size of the beans and are commonly expressed in 1/64 of inch for example beans of grade 18 will pass through screen 18( holes with a diameter of 18/64) but are retained by screen 16 or 17 .The theory behind classification based on bean size of the coffee of the highest altitude, similarly coffees develop more slowly at higher altitudes and often have the best flavor profiles. The size and size distribution of beans also has an impact on optimization of roasting conditions .in world war 11 each country had a different classification scale, since then there is has been no global classification system for coffee supplies but grading and classification systems are usually

- Altitude
- Region
- Botanical variety
- Preparation method (wet vs dry)
- Bean (screen) size
- Bean shape and color
- Number of defects
- Permissible defects
- Bean density
- Cup Quality

## **Uganda**

The harvest season for Arabica green coffees is October through February and all year for the Robusta Crop ( peaking

in November through February).After harvesting, the coffees are either natural or washed ( known locally as "Wugar") Washed Uganda Arabica Coffee or Natural processed ("Drugar")Dry Ugandan Arabica.

Ugandan Coffees are graded either "A"(15/16 screen -equal to Colombian "Exelso" size) or "AA"(17/18 screen -equal to Colombian "supreme" size)

Tanzania's high Elevation qualifies almost all of its coffee as strictly High grown (SHG) e.g. (1400 to 2000) meters Above sea Level than Robusta. Most of Tanzanian coffee is wet processed (washed) with some (natural ) sun dried coffees ,the Tanzanian coffee grading system is similar to Kenyan coffee grading system with Tanzania AA being the highest grade followed by A,B etc.

## **Kenya**

Classification by defects (natural)

Mbuni- Deterirated beans, processed by dry method

MH- Mbuni Heavy= large beans

M+buni("coffee berry")

Noun mbuni (mi class plural Mbuni)

Coffee plant (mkahawa) kahawa ("coffee")

### Typical Description

Kenya AB FAG fly crop

Kenya Arabica grade AB, based on internal grading system above, fair average Quality, There are 10 classes of Kenyan coffee dependent on cup Quality.

1 being the best and 10 the poorest, various description include fine,Good,fair to Good, fair to average Quality (FAQ),fair, poor to fair and finally poor .These classes and

descriptors are becoming obsolete ,and FAQ is the only one still commonly used .main crop coffee is usually better than fly crop coffees.

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