

Chebumba, Kalehe, South Kivu, Democratic Republic of the Congo

 VARIETY: SL34	 PROCESS: Washed	 HARVEST TIME: September–December & February–June	 FLOWER SEASON: February–March & June–July
		 WET MILLING: 12 hours dry, 24 hours wet	
 ELEVATION: 1480–2000 MASL	 PRODUCER: Smallholder Farmers	 DRYING: 12–21 days on raised beds, down to 10–12% moisture	 DRY MILLING: Coffee is milled on site at the coop, then taken by truck through Rwanda for export at ports in either Kenya or Tanzania.

CUP SCORE:
86.25

PARTNER SINCE:
2021

The Atlas Collection is a line of limited-release coffees intended to highlight our sourcing values—quality, ethics, collaboration, and integrity—our tools for exploring the complex world of coffee. This coffee from South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo is a wonderful example of integrity.

The Congo region of central Africa is home to millions of people who form a linguistically diverse multicultural society with long and unique histories tied to Europe, the Middle East, and Asia. The communities who live in this part of the world have long been connected to globalization and transnational exchange—culturally and materially. Western imperialism arrived in the Congo with King Leopold II of Belgium, who, with the complacent affirmation¹ of the United States and Europe, exemplified Western values of possession, wealth, and white supremacy as the absolute ruler.



After establishing private authority over what he called the Congo Free State, King Leopold II was able to preside over an era of Belgian society that saw enhanced social and labor protections and general enrichment at the expense of the inhabitants of the Congo Free State, who were enslaved, brutalized, and murdered. Some reports say that King Leopold II is responsible for the deaths of half of the population of this area during his reign and the term “crimes against humanity” was coined to describe his activities there. In 1908, under pressure to control human rights abuses, the Belgian government acquired the

Congo Free State from King Leopold II, and continued to govern the region as a colonial territory until 1960. The damage of Western intervention, however, continues to this day—efforts to implement a government that adheres to Western principles, in spite of the region’s cultural and social complexities, have been consistently marked by chaos.

The exploitation continues, too, even if it has transformed; while the Congo region is no longer under formal imperial control, some of the wealthiest companies in the world—mostly from the United States—profit off of its resources. Imperialism today lives in the batteries of our smartphones, computers, electric cars, etc. In 2019, Apple, Google, Microsoft, Dell, and Tesla “were accused in a lawsuit of being complicit in the deaths of children mining cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.”²

1. <https://www.thoughtco.com/berlin-conference-1884-1885-divide-africa-1433556>

2. <https://www.blackenterprise.com/apple-microsoft-sued-congo-cobalt-mine-child-labor-deaths>

As the companies seek to have the case dismissed, the US Government recently published a list of critically important minerals and a plan to invest in strengthening those supply chains³, including those obtained in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Even though the DRC is the richest country in the world in terms of mineral wealth, it has the lowest GDP per capita, resulting in the world's most severe individual poverty. Forces of Western capitalism and the legacy of colonialism continue to coincide with ethnic conflict resulting in violence around competition for political power, resource control, wealth, and territory.

Even as (or because) many African societies have struggled to adapt after the end of direct colonial rule, innovation has defined that transformation. Mobile money systems, a community-oriented technology that reflects and serves the financial needs and habits of the economically disenfranchised, originates in East Africa and has been predicted to spur significant societal transformation⁴ across East and Sub-Saharan Africa, including in the DRC⁵. Even though the total impact cannot yet be measured, this activity has caught the attention of Western finance companies. Disruptive mobile money technologies are improving life for millions of people in Africa and Asia, where the technology is being used in ways in which people who suffer from structural poverty in the US and other Western countries could benefit from, too.⁶



Many East African and Sub-Saharan countries also have ideal conditions for cultivating the world's finest coffees. In the Congo, while coffee agriculture declined rapidly during the years of conflict in the Kivus, its later resurgence has been led, in part, by a transition from robusta coffee production to arabica. Many farmers have learned that well-cultivated specialty coffee commands a premium price in the market. This represents an innovation, too—represented by the vision and faith needed to risk putting in the work it takes to produce high quality coffees consistently. A complex set of challenges—including the violence that still lingers on the fringes of life in the Kivus, government corruption, and a lack of infrastructure—have made it difficult for Congolese farmers to bring

their coffees directly to market. Many coffee farmers in South Kivu make the dangerous journey across Lake Kivu to smuggle their product into Rwanda for immediate sale. From there, the coffee is absorbed into and re-sold as Rwandan coffee. These dangers aside, the growth of specialty coffee agriculture and the strengthening presence of community-governed cooperatives are contributing to self-directed transitional paths out of poverty and violence and into stability and growth.

3. <https://pbs.org/newshour/nation/the-u-s-is-worried-about-shortages-of-critical-minerals-for-electric-vehicles-military-tech>

4. <https://mckinsey.com/industries/technology-media-and-telecommunications/our-insights/lions-go-digital-the-internets-transformative-potential-in-africa>

5. <https://advances.sciencemag.org/content/7/1/eabc5831>

6. <https://vox.com/future-perfect/21420357/kenya-mobile-banking-unbanked-cellphone-money>

Across the mountains from the Congo's riverhead region, the Mapendo coffee is grown in South Kivu, a province extending west from the shore of Lake Kivu on the border between the DRC and Rwanda. In South Kivu and North Kivu (referred to as the "Kivus"), after many years of violent conflict, "coffee is slowly becoming a symbol of economic stability, peace, and prosperity across the country", according to Perfect Daily Grind⁷. When we asked Jim Ngokwey, the Managing Partner at Mighty Peace Coffee, if he felt this was an accurate assessment of the coffee industry as a societal stabilizer, he added that "coffee will play a major role and that's why we launched Mighty Peace Coffee... While there are many factors driving the conflicts, extreme poverty is the main culprit and that's why the jobs created and coffee purchased can make a difference in the short and long-term." Jim believes in peace with every sip and says that every coffee bag purchased through Mighty Peace Coffee makes a direct and tangible impact in the lives of farmers in post-conflict zones.

Jim, who hails from the Democratic Republic of Congo, has been working for several years to understand the economic conditions and business environment in the DRC. In addition to his role at Mighty Peace Coffee, a company that was "born out of the Congolese peace movement by an international team of business leaders, coffee experts and innovators, community organizers and human rights defenders," he is a co-founder of the Congolese Diaspora Impact Summit and an Advisor to the Sub-Saharan Africa Chamber of Commerce, among many other roles through which he can put his tireless advocacy for Congolese coffee and business to use. One of the founding principles of Mighty Peace Coffee is to reclaim the narrative by building up media resources and sharing stories from Congolese coffee farmers.



Mapendo, which is Swahili for "love", is entirely women-grown. Many producers behind the coffee are widows as a result of the conflicts that have destabilized parts of the DCR, and see gender justice as a key pillar in the foundation of their business. To incorporate these values directly into their practices, Mapendo producers have worked with organizations such as OXFAM around the implementation of Gender Action Learning Systems (GALS)—workshops designed to dismantle systemic inequalities and "strengthen[s] negotiation power of marginalized stakeholders and promot[es] collaboration, equity and respect between value chain actors."⁸

The program works to identify obstacles in localized economies, in order to give the people in those spaces the tools they need to enact change within it. Naturally, gender equity is one of the most important variables involved in making sure "vulnerable value chain stakeholders can control their own development process, organize themselves and negotiate with powerful stakeholders." GALS offers powerful tools for any business owner, and it has been implemented

7. <https://perfectdailygrind.com/2020/12/scaling-coffee-production-in-the-drc>

8. https://oxfamnovib.nl/Redactie/Downloads/English/publications/150115_Practical%20guide%20GALS%20summary%20Phase%201-2%20lr.pdf

in many different contexts, countries, and languages. The workshop begins with asking individuals to collectively define a vision, then define their current situation, and then break down milestones, challenges, and opportunities they can predict will come up on this journey to achieve their shared vision and goals. This group visioning and the action plans that come out of it can be strong catalysts for change.

Linda Mugaruka, Mighty Peace Coffee's Chief Quality Officer and Agronomy Engineer, works with the Mapendo coffee farmers to build the knowledge that will allow them to produce high-quality coffee consistently, year after year. Mighty Peace Coffee builds relationships with the smallholder producers to help ensure that the coffee trade results in the maximum economic benefit for them, while simultaneously gathering stories to help build human connections across political borders, oceans, and cultures.

Coffees in this region are harvested from February to June and September to December. The Mapendo is a washed SL34 grown between 1480-2000 meters above sea level with complex fruit and floral flavors—blackberry, rose—embedded in sturdy structures of sugar browning sweetness—mango and caramel. In great awe of the work of Congolese coffee farmers against enormous odds in dangerous conditions, we are proud to be able to offer the Mapendo women's coffee to the Joe community.

