

Gasharu Coffee Family Story

The story of Gasharu Coffee starts back in 1973 with a story of a 14-year-old boy, Celestin Rumenerangabo, raised by a poor single mum who was internally displaced after the death of her husband during the 1959 uprising that led to the groups of Hutus to launch attacks on the Tutsis. After three years of primary school, due to the mother's economic hardship, he decided to take a three-day walk trip from Nyamasheke (South-West of Rwanda) to Kigali, the capital. The 14-year-old boy worked as a house made for a loving family in Kigali (precisely Kicukiro) for three years. In 1976, despite being requested by the host family that they wanted to adopt him as a member of the family, he decided to collect all of his savings for the three years and head back to the village to support his single mother who was living alone.

Arrived back to the village, he used most of his savings for the last three years to buy his first land, where he planted his first 380 coffee trees plantation and the remaining to start coffee trading locally. As he was getting started, his mother helped him to take care of the land and he was able to explore more aspects of the coffee as he started working with the local brokers.

From 1978, as he got started with local coffee collection and trading there were no coffee washing stations. Local people would sell coffee cherries or parchments by cups locally known as "Mironko" or by the kilogram.

It was assumed that one "Mironko Cup" is equivalent to "one Kilogram" when the scale was not available. He would buy either cherries or parchments and resell them to local brokers once he has collected a reasonable amount ranging from a few bags to a truck. In those instances where he had bought cherries, he would add them together with the cherries from his own land and depulp these with a Hand-crank Machine.

From 1978 to 1983, he expanded his local business and established several local partnerships with coffee farmers. The year 1983 was a turning point for the grown-up boy, he got married to Marie Goretti, who was a 22 years-old teacher.

With two women in the house, his wife and his mother, the coffee business became truly a family business, it established more partnerships with coffee farmers, established new farms and because of Marie's teaching background, the business started to support schooling for children from coffee farming families working with the family.

From 1978 to 1994, when the Tutsi Genocide occurred, the business had grown remarkably, it had distributed nearly 7 hand-crank machines since they were not readily accessible nor easily affordable and had established more than 14 coffee collection sites in partnership with other local farmers and provided them with coffee scales for accuracy as they measured the coffee cherries and parchments.

The 1994 genocide of Tutsis that got nearly one million Tutsis killed and many people fleeing the country, was a tragic experience and devastating for the family, many local partners were killed,

others fled the country and the family itself left Rwanda and spent four years at Idjwi Island, in Lake Kivu, belonging to the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the second-largest inland island in Africa, and the tenth largest in the world. In 1998, Marie and Celestin with their six children returned to Rwanda and restarted the business from zero. Although the coffee farms were still intact, getting started again was extremely difficult, having lost the majority of partners and his mother no longer in good health, and no cash in hand.

Nevertheless, as a family that had contributed a lot to the community and that was a community leader in coffee trading, the community got behind family and with support from a former partner coffee broker, he got started again and was trading nearly 30 tones of parchments after two years. In the early 2000s, the Government of Rwanda advised local coffee processors and traders to adapt to more advanced methods of coffee processing to ensure the highest quality with high returns. In 2006, the family decided to establish its first coffee washing station “Birembo Coffee Station” which had to be sold only six years later due to a high influx of international coffee corporations limiting access to the international market for local small companies and controlling the local market.

The family experience with losing Birembo Coffee Station was a wake-up call to realize that the coffee industry has changed. This experience is not uncommon among local coffee farmers who got their coffee stations bought out or lost them due to loans that could not be paid off. The coffee industry especially in the south-west has been flooded by large multinational companies that have direct access to the global market which in addition to having larger capital, also have more flexibility with prices and easier access to finance.

Although a family-owned local business may find it difficult to compete with multinational companies, the loss of Birembo coffee and going out of business for two years, felt like a loss of the family legacy and letting down our community who were used to collecting advance for school fees or healthcare bills. This sense of community responsibility is what got the family back to business, with the recognition that it will have to step up its game in business, and the belief that with nine children, the family will have the physical and brainpower needed to succeed and continue the legacy of the social responsibility that the family has always carried in the last 43 years.

Since 2014, with the support of the second and fourth born trained as Medical Doctor and agriculture respectively, the family was able to get back on its feet and established Gasharu and Muhororo Coffee stations. Given the fact that more than 85% of coffee stations are owned by international companies with high financial power, the family had to embark on the process to establish relationships with roasters and retailers on the global market although it only managed to start export in 2019.

The goal of our family business is to make Gasharu Coffee a model for farmer-owned coffee businesses, bringing the highest quality coffee from farms to cups, invest in the community and social development projects, and offer the highest possible price to the small-farm coffee producers. We promote high-quality coffee and good living standards of coffee farmers in our community particularly those working with Gasharu Coffee. With the goal to enable the production of better-quality coffee and allow farmers to receive better prices. Every year, our family works closely with 1,650 farmers from 12 main coffee village farms. We also continue to improve coffee quality and farmers' income by involving farmers throughout all stages of coffee processing. Every year we employ around 320 local workers from the local community during the peak of the crop with 70% of the workers being women. Gasharu coffee promotes sustainable farming philosophy that integrates good production practices with environmental preservation, community sensitivity, and long-term coffee viability.

Gasharu Fully Washed Grade 1

Gasharu washing station is located on the shores of Lake Kivu and a stone's throw from Nyungwe National Park which is one of the largest montane and most preserved montane rainforests in Central Africa, home to huge biodiversity and an estimated 25% of Africa's primates. This region's elevation, soil, and climate are what coffee trees love best. Once the cherries are picked and brought to the washing stations, cherries are floated and pulped with a disc pulper. Parchment then goes into a dry fermentation for 12 to 14 hours before mucilage is washed off. Beans are graded by density in the grading channel with very clean water that separates them into three different qualities: Grade A, Grade B, Grade C. Coffee is then hand-sorted at the pre-drying tables and then dried on raised beds with a mesh bottom, allowing for more circulation of air. The coffee is air and sun-dried between 9 am and 3 pm depending on the sun's intensity. The drying process takes 14 to 20 days depending on the weather. When dried, the coffee is well kept until it is hulled and sorted by experienced women and then packed in Grainpro and Jute bags for export. This lot gets formed by Grade A coffee only.

Key flavor Notes: Plum, Sugarcane, Dried Fruit, Black tea

Gasharu Natural Grade 1

Coffee plantations in the Gasharu region benefit from their proximity to the continuous of Nyungwe National Park. They get a good amount of rainfall to make the cherries juicier and the coffee fruity. The cherries selected for this lot are collected at altitudes between 1700 m and 2100 m. When they are received at the washing station they are sorted and floated to ensure consistent and good density beans are separated from the others. These beans undergo intense sorting at the pre-drying tables, floating and are later dried on the raised wooden beds for 4-6 weeks. Once dried, the coffee is well kept and stored in good conditions before being hulled and sorted by well-trained women and then packed in GrainPro and Jute bags for export. The processing at the washing station is carried out by young coffee farmers and the sorting on tables by slightly older coffee farmers, mainly women, providing them with more income.

Key Flavor Notes: Strawberry, Milk Chocolate ,Stone fruit, Floral Rose ,Citrus fruit ,Spice

Gasharu Anaerobic Natural

The Ireme (Authentic) experimental lot is inspired by the emotional connection of our family to the coffee community as a whole. Coffee farming, processing, and distribution for consumption have been kept in silos and our family believes that this can change. The idea of this coffee is to provide the most authentic coffee cup of Rwandan coffee to coffee lovers, making the consumer think of the producer as the grower also keeps the buyer in mind when processing the coffee.

Gasharu Coffee's team takes great care to monitor and enhance the fermentation process and duration to achieve the desired complexity and depth that will provide a memorable experience to coffee lovers. At Gasharu Coffee we believe that a cup of authentic coffee can truly connect communities.

As a coffee farming family and member of a coffee community, our hope is that Ireme (Authentic) Coffee will convey our motivation to connect with the consumers and their communities and build meaningful and sustainable relationships between both communities.

The process

The coffee used for the Ireme experimental coffee are from the potential farms of our regions at the altitude above 1700 msl where belong our farm of 7,5 ha. Once collected at the washing station, The cherries are sorted and floated to ensure consistent and good density beans are separated from the others. then they are put in the tank where they undergo 72 hours of an anaerobic fermentation to attain the best flavor and taste that can be achieved and then dried on the raised African beds for about 25 to 30 days.

Key flavor notes: Raspberry, Pineapple, Red ripe fruit, Rummy, Winey, Lychee, Rose

Iriba Coffee (Peaberry)

Iriba" holds profound significance as more than just a well; it symbolizes communal life, cultural heritage, and spiritual connection. Dating back centuries, iribas were not merely sources of water but served as gathering places for communities, where people exchanged stories, shared news, and celebrated traditions. These wells were integral to the social fabric, often located in central areas where people converged daily. Beyond practicality, iribas held spiritual importance, believed to be endowed with mystical properties and guarded by ancestral spirits. They were sites for rituals and ceremonies, fostering a deep sense of belonging and identity among the Rwandan people. Despite modernization and technological advancements, iribas remain emblematic of Rwanda's rich history and cultural heritage, embodying the resilience and interconnectedness of its communities across generations.

The significance of Iriba extends beyond its literal meaning. It reflects the deep-rooted belief in shared resources and collective well-being. Villagers understood the interconnectedness of their lives, cultivating a culture of cooperation and empathy. Iriba's legacy remains in Rwanda's cultural identity, a reminder of their history and the importance of unity. Just as water flows from its source, Iriba represents the flow of tradition, knowledge, and unity through generations, fostering resilience and a strong sense of community.

Key flavor Notes: Floral, Grapefruit, Berry, Citrus, Black tea, Dried Fruit

Key elements Facts about our coffee Stations

Manager: Valentin Kimenyi (Our Family Fourth Born) Trained in Agricultural science and Business.

Capacity of production: 8 containers

Processes done there: Natural, Washed, Honey and Anaerobic Experiments processing.

The altitude of the farms where cherry is collected: 1,600-2,100 masl

Average climate: Good weather, Enough rainfall and medium temperature

Average yearly rainfall: 1,300-1,400 mm

Type of soil: Acidic Soil

Number of farmers working with our family: 1,650 farmers

General cup profile: Fruity Flavor, Sweet acidity, lemon, medium body, Well balanced, Clean cup and long finish

Processes that can be done (natural, washed, honey...): Natural, Washed, Honey and Anaerobic Experiments processing.

Uniqueness of our coffee quality: Higher altitude of the coffee farms, clean water to wash the coffee and the follow up all coffee processing steps, Consistency of quality, consistent weather

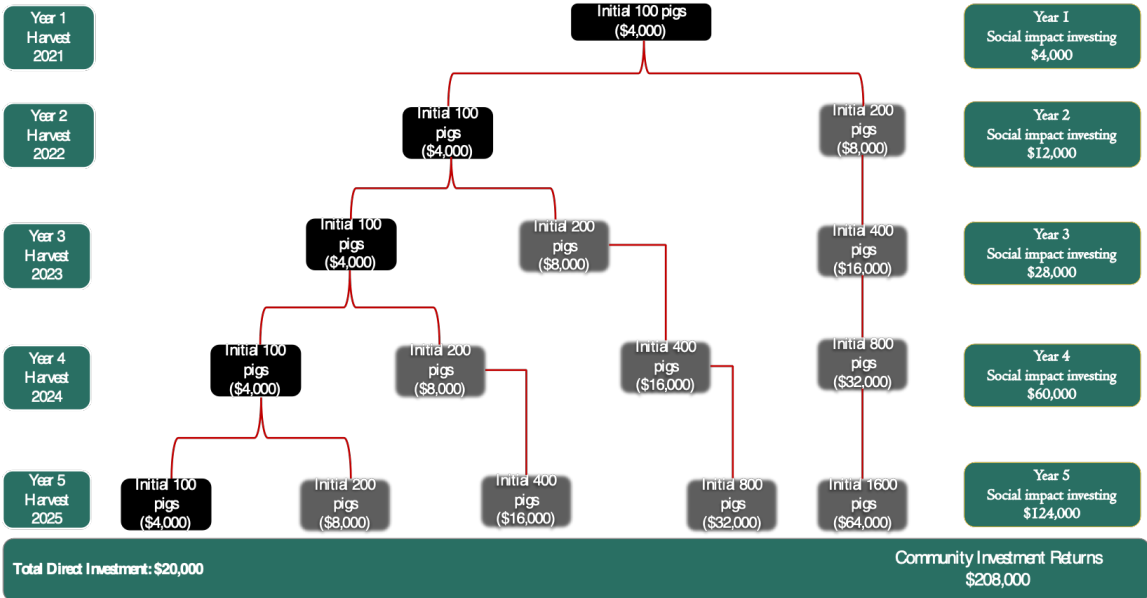
Gasharu Community and social welfare project

For more than four decades our family has been a resource to the local community. Many people come to collect cash advance with no interest for their coffee mainly to cover kids' school fees, healthcare costs and weddings. However, the ability to support the community in this way has increasingly become more challenging given the lower coffee prices and unreliable coffee buyers. The family has had to strategize and develop a more step-by-step to establish a strong business that would continue to become a resource for the community in a sustainable manner. Our family believes that this plan will become a reality as more relationships are created with coffee roasters and consumers on the international market.

One component of this plan is to establish a daycare facility at each coffee station to provide women working at the coffee farms and stations with space to bring their children and ensure

that the children do not go malnourished while their parents are busy with very demanding coffee harvest and processing work. Currently parents have to leave children to their neighbors or with their siblings to be able to work and sometimes they have no options than taking the kids with them to work. This facility will be a space for women to bring their young children while working and will be a space for them to access basic healthcare services which otherwise could not be an option to them. This plan reduces health risks to women and children in Gasharu Coffee catchment area and contributes to the betterment of families' welfare.

The other component of this plan is to develop a livestock and kitchen garden project that contributed to the health, economic development and social cohesion of the farmer's community. Due to the high returns, this project will be established around pigs. With an investment of \$4000 for five years, the returns to the community as a whole are projected to be around \$200,000 assuming that each pig yields two piglets each year that go back to the community as illustrated on the figure below.



The image below illustrates the kitchen gardens that will be established for each household parallel to the livestock described above. These gardens last for years and yield a variety of vegetables and other crops.



Photo: New Times - A demonstration of how a kitchen garden can be built. Jean De Deu Nsabimana.

<https://www.corpsafrica.org/kitchen-gardens>



Photo: Corps Africa - Kitchen-gardens