



## Nkaka Washing Station

## Mwumba Commune, Ngozi Province, Burundi

**Partner since:** 2021

**Traceable to:** 2400  
Smallholders

**Altitude:** 1650 MASL

**Varietals:** Red Bourbon

**Processing:** Cherries are collected at the washing station, and sorted to remove overripes and underripes before going into the cherry hopper. After an overnight fermentation underwater, cherries then dry on raised beds.

**Harvest:** April May June July

**Booking:** August September October

**Arrivals:** November December



Nkaka Washing Station near Gikingo (north of the large regional town, Ngozi and just south of the Rwanda border) is a longstanding washing station, having been built in 1979. It collects from roughly 2,400 smallholder farmers in the surrounding area. .



No other country excels in the smallholder context like Burundi. Here – more than any other producer country where we source – we find true smallholders, some producing coffee on such a small scale that they make more income from their dairy cow in a day than they do in a year from coffee. This of course carries its risks (when coffee is an afterthought), but, with the proper partners and washing stations in place, the organization and quality control bears unique, high scoring lots on both micro and full container scales.

For decades Burundi coffee has suffered due to lack of soil health, partly due to historical influences like colonial regulations requiring tree planting too close together, partly due to a lack of complete training in good agricultural practices. Tree health can be so poor here that, almost without fail, the productivity of the nation's coffee sector swings drastically from year to year (with dire consequences for annual farmer income and national GDP). During the 2019 harvest, for example, some suppliers reported their volumes down 80% from year prior.

Most coffees in Burundi are fully washed, the products of over 100 large washing stations, each able to produce several containers per year, across 5 main growing regions. Washing stations usually purchase from a range of 300 to 1,500 smallholder farmers living nearby. Prior to 2010 most exporters bulked together washing stations and simply sold container-load lots by grade or by the wider region name. But around 2010, thanks in part to a USAID funded program called Burundi Agribusiness Project, washing stations drastically improved their quality control practices and began marketing coffees under their own station names. Traceability to the washing station level may be commonplace now, but in these early days of Burundi specialty coffee, station by station traceability is truly what allowed the industry to grow and build a name for itself.

Now in the late 2010s we find ourselves not only sourcing coffees by station name, but by the "colline" (hill, around which farmers groups are usually organized), processing method or even single

farmer name. Our Burundi lot selection process each year (around June/July) usually involves dozens of lots per station, each separated by a day or week of harvest time. The industry is well and widely organized around cherry flotation, skilled washing, and daily/weekly lot separation (“lots journalieres”), making it one of our favorite origins. One where we don’t have to push hard to keep specialty lots separated for our quality control or product variety needs.

The bulk of the industry is still dominated by these washing stations, producing stellar lots. They are owned and managed by a variety of actors, including private individuals and corporations (many of them foreign-owned), cooperatives, and “Sogestals”, which are quasi-private entities leftover from the days of a nationalized coffee industry – now privately financed, but in many ways operate like cooperatives.

In an exciting shift away from volume-focused washing stations, a few single farmer “estates” began to pop up in the mid-2010s, also buying cherry from neighbors and thus acting as small outgrower program operators. We’ve seen a variety of alternative processing methods pop up in these locations, and the specialty backgrounds of many of their operators allow for high scores and high prices. Fortunately, these best practices spread around the region, from neighbor to neighbor, and many of the larger stations and Sogestals have upped their game.

Crop to Cup has worked in Burundi since 2010, much of the time with the same longstanding exporter, washing station and farmer partners. Since then we’ve been pleased to see a drastic reduction in potato cup, and a continual growth in cup score.