Brand Aid and Coffee Value Chain Development Interventions
Is Starbucks Working Aid Out of Business?

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Abstract

In spring 2016, Starbucks launched its first single-origin specialty coffee from South Kivu, Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). This coffee was produced with support from a partnership known as *Kahawa Bora*—a value chain development intervention (VCDI) combining a coffee corporation (Starbucks), a celebrity (Ben Affleck) and a development agency (USAID). Moving from disengaged cause-marketing to engaged development interventions, these types of partnerships promise to help beneficiaries, provide good feelings to consumers and promote the brands of corporations and NGOs. This paper applies a value chain approach to the concept of 'Brand Aid' as a modality of development intervention to parse the possibilities and limitations of involving corporations and celebrities in development interventions and to address a considerable research gap on the local effects that Brand Aid partnerships have on their intended beneficiaries in the global South. On the basis of original data from fieldwork in DRC, a desk study and interviews with stakeholders of the project, we compare *Kahawa Bora*'s formation, development and outcomes to those of a more traditional and less glitzy VCDI that has been operating in the same areas of Eastern Congo. We find that *Kahawa Bora* has attracted considerably more attention than other VCDIs, with little to show in terms of coffee supply and tangible benefits to farmers. We conclude that while Brand Aid forms of VCDIs promise to 'work aid out of business', they actually serve the interests of business and celebrities, while their actual impact on the ground is limited and uncertain.

Key words: Partnerships; Brand Aid; Global Value Chains (GVCs); Coffee; Celebrity Humanitarianism; Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC)

Introduction

Coffee is one of the most traded commodities in the world and Starbucks purchases 3% of all the world's coffee[1] and 40% of all high-quality speciality arabica beans (Almeida 2019). Under the guise of helping farmers in the global South, Starbucks partners with celebrities, traditional development implementers and consumers to actually test a new business model in view of catering to the shifting demands of elite coffee drinkers around the globe. In spring 2016, Starbucks launched its first single-origin specialty coffee from South Kivu (DR Congo) in 1,500 of its stores across North America and online.[2] This coffee was sourced through a four-year project funded by USAID and American philanthropist Howard G. Buffett's foundation. Known as *Kahawa Bora ya Kivu* ('better coffee of Kivu' in Kiswahili), the project was implemented by Catholic Relief Services, World Coffee Research and American actor Ben Affleck's Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) (citation removed). Launching the initiative, a message from the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) encouraged development partnership straight from your smartphone: 'Click This Link to Help Congolese Farmers Win 25K from Starbucks!' and 'You can help ECI supported coffee farming communities thrive!'[3] Consumers are asked to watch, like and share a two-minute video about the transformation brought to coffee farmers in Congo. In 'reserve stores'[4] of the global chain, Starbucks offers 'a cup of hope.'

This paper explores the paradox of why an initiative that engages celebrities and philanthropists does not seem to be making much of a difference on the ground – yet it is being heralded in the halls of US Congress and its coffee is sold to consumers in the global North who want to drink 'better' coffee. We argue that this new form of celebrity-driven 'value chain development intervention' (VCDI) allows these actors to jointly leverage resources to meet their need for global visibility and public approval. This partnership produces incentives that prioritize Northern audiences (consumers, politicians and celebrity fans), while reducing the need to deliver sustainable outcomes on ground to their beneficiaries – Congolese coffee producers. While some of the reasons for its failures may be common in development interventions more generally – such as lack of meaningful local participation, cooperatives' dependence on only one buyer, poor organizational structures, and/or top-down management – what makes *Kahawa Bora*'s experience particularly relevant is that its celebrity backing and high political profile made it 'too important to fail'. While other VCDIs would have been shut down, given the challenges and lack of results in the first few years of operation, the celebrity factor kept *Kahawa Bora* alive. These observations thus provide important insights into the potential and limitations of VCDIs that may consider celebrity backing or involvement in their organization and operations, something that has not yet been explored in the literature.

To understand these dynamics, we draw on two development studies literatures that have been largely disconnected so far. One is scholarship on the development implications of participation and upgrading in global value chains, and on VCDIs in particular (see, inter alia, Neilson & Pritchard, 2007; Neilson, 2014; Thorpe, 2018). The other is scholarship interested in how celebrities and philanthropy shape new development partnerships (including the authors involved in this special issue). In the existing GVC literature, two main forms of VCDI are highlighted (see, inter alia, Altenburg, 2007; Humphrey and Navas-Alemán 2010; Thorpe, 2018). One form primarily leverages lead firms in value chains to facilitate upgrading among global South actors through supplier development programs. Another form focuses on weaker actors (usually, small-scale producers) to improve their terms of participation in the value chain. These two modes of intervention are not always mutually exclusive, but the first tends to work through partnerships with lead firms in GVCs to influence weaker actors, whereas the second works more directly with weaker actors. Often the choice of whether to work with lead firms and how depends on donors' political mandate, the facilitation support provided by the state (Thorpe, 2018), and sometimes simply on specific opportunities that arise for partnerships (Mitchell & Coles, 2011).

In this paper, we examine two VCDIs focused on coffee that operate in the same area of Eastern Congo. One, *Kahawa Bora,* more closely resembles a lead firm-driven partnership, but with the important addition that it also involves a celebrity-led organization (not examined in the VCDI literature so far). It is built around the sourcing needs of Starbucks (and includes an exclusive supply contract) and the political goals of Ben Affleck's own organization (the Eastern Congo Initiative) and its elite lobbyist and philanthropist partners – leaving little leverage to the coffee cooperatives involved. The other, coordinated by Rikolto[5] (a Belgian development organization), is more focused on how weaker actors can be better inserted in the value chain to capture the gains from upgrading. The Rikolto project also involves powerful actors (including large coffee buyers and a major retailer), but it is built around the cooperatives themselves and their capacity building needs, with various buyers having to compete to secure its coffee – a currently popular origin at the top-end of the specialty market.

We also draw from literature engaged with the role of celebrities in development and humanitarian interventions by leveraging on what Richey and Ponte (2011) call 'Brand Aid' – a modality of development financing and intervention that combines a branded product, a celebrity and a cause.[6] The term Brand Aid signals the unified purpose of 'aiding brands' (through cause-related marketing) and of 'branding aid' to change the public perception of aid as involving an expanded array of new actors and alliances (Richey and Ponte, 2014). The branded product is offered to consumers through the amplifying role of a celebrity – not just through advertising, but through the direct involvement of the celebrity-led development organization and its partnerships (Budabin, Rasmussen, & Richey, 2017). In this context, *Kahawa Bora* represents a form of Brand Aid, where the celebrity humanitarian is Ben Affleck, the product is *Kahawa Bora* coffee sold by Starbucks, and the cause is restoring the former glory of coffee production in DRC. Starbucks has been previously involved in a number of these Brand Aid partnerships studied in the literature.[7] But unlike in previous Brand Aid development initiatives where product and the cause were disconnected (see Ponte & Richey, 2014; Richey & Ponte, 2011), Starbucks' involvement in *Kahawa Bora* takes the specific shape of a celebrity-driven VCDI that connects the cause and the celebrity with the value chain and thus the producing, distributing and selling of the product itself.

Our original contribution thus rests on reflecting on the combination of two overlapping dynamics: (1) the observation that Brand Aid initiatives are moving towards more engaged forms (see below), where the cause and the beneficiaries are linked (e.g. Starbucks leveraging a celebrity-led organization to sell coffee in view of revitalizing DRC coffee instead of donating HIV/AIDS medication); and (2) the observation that VCDIs are experimenting with celebrity-led organizations in view of enhancing their political visibility and legitimacy (e.g. by engaging with non-traditional actors such as celebrities). We do so to parse the possibilities and limitations of involving corporations and celebrities in development interventions, with a particular emphasis on local outcomes (which have rarely been examined in the Brand Aid-related literature). We illustrate how products, celebrities and causes merge to create a form of development intervention that provides limited and mainly short-term benefits to beneficiaries it is supposed to 'help' on the ground. As corporations become more central in the business of aid, we question those corporations and their development partners who claim to be 'working aid out of business' – and highlight how 'Brand Aid VCDIs' are more likely to cater to the expectations of consumers and celebrity fans that those of farmers.

Methodologically, our analysis is based on data collected in four phases. Phase 1, which lasted for the whole research period (2016-18), consisted of an internet search for all items related to the *Kahawa Bora* project, coffee and Eastern Congo, references to Ben Affleck's work in DRC on Google News and the ECI website and social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter). Phase 2, which took place in June 2016, involved the first authors' conducting 17 elite interviews with ECI, USAID, and other Congo-advocacy groups in Kinshasa, the US and UK. In phase 3 (October 2017-February 2018), we jointly conducted five online interviews with actors involved in the ECI project and other initiatives in Eastern Congo.[8] Phase 4 included a month of fieldwork in South Kivu, Eastern Congo (December 2017) conducted by a research collaborator with decades of experience with African farmers, coffee and cooperatives[9] and consisted of a comparative study of the three cooperatives (CPCK, KACCO and CCKA) from the *Kahawa Bora* ECI project and the CPNCK cooperative from the Rikolto project.[10]

Development in Partnership? Debates over Brand Aid and Global Value Chains

Contemporary Brand Aid: From 'Disengaged' Cause-Marketing to 'Engaged' Value Chain Development Interventions?

A growing development studies literature has moved beyond the analysis of 'traditional' aid actors – such as governments, international organizations and NGOs – to highlight how business (Prieto-Carrón, Lund-Thomsen, Chan, Muro, & Bhushan, 2006), consumers (Ponte & Richey, 2014), celebrities (Brockington, 2014a,b; Richey, 2016; Richey & Brockington, 2019), philanthropic organizations (Fejerskov, 2015; McGoey, 2015; Moran, 2014), diaspora groups (Mercer, Page, & Evans, 2008), and elites (Whitfield & Buur, 2014) act as new actors and enact new partnerships in development. Two key trends are the increasing role and influence of NGOs who partner with non-traditional actors (including businesses and celebrities) to form new alliances (Ashman, 2001; Brainard & Chollet, 2009; Brooks, 2017; Fejerskov, Lundsgaarde, & Cold-Ravnkilde, 2017),[11] and the significant changes experienced in the realm of development financing (Mawdsley, 2018). The literature has also examined the emerging role of 'non-traditional' donors (Kragelund, 2019; Mawdsley, 2010, 2012; Tan-Mullins, Mohan, & Power, 2010) including the Gulf States (Tok et al., 2014; Young 2017) and post-socialist states (Lightfoot, 2010; Szent-Ivanyi, 2012; Lightfoot & Szent-Iványi, 2017).

Brand Aid is one of these new development interventions, one that involves business, celebrities and development organizations that generate new sources for funding development. In *Brand Aid: Shopping Well to Save the World,* Richey and Ponte (2011) examined global AIDS funding to understand the implications of selling cause-marketed 'RED Products' to support African causes. This concept is used to identify when products are sold by business through the amplifying role of celebrities to support worthy causes to Western consumers who want to engage in low-cost heroism. Brand Aid has been a game changer in both representing development possibilities and in convening new actors. Their representational analysis of the Product RED initiative showed how development complexity is portrayed in simplified scripts of 'white saviourism' (Cole, 2012) to sell products through celebritized causes. Their political economy analysis of the case of Product RED demonstrated how Brand Aid was pushing the boundaries of traditional Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) towards disengaged action to save the lives of 'distant others' (Ponte & Richey, 2014; Richey & Ponte, 2014).

No explicit attempt was initially made through RED to link its initiatives to implementation of better work, social, or environmental conditions of the production of Brand Aid products. Most of the corporations first involved in RED had a low level of involvement with Africa in their day-to-day operations—thus were applying a 'disengaged' form of CSR. The heuristic in Figure 1 introduces different forms of CSR relating to corporate engagement on labor issues, the environment and/or causes that 'help' others.

FIGURE 1 HERE

'Engaged' CSR activity refers to things that have a direct impact on company operations, thus impacting the normal functioning of business. Because this affects the business directly, it could potentially result in lower profits in the short term, but the business case for CSR assumes that long-term profitability will catch up because of positive brand image and other spin-offs (Matten & Moon, 2008; Ponte, 2019; Scherer, Rasche, Palazzo, & Spicer, 2016). The other column of 'disengaged' CSR is what is often considered as corporate philanthropy or charity where the activities are typically not linked to the operations of the firm itself. Thus, while this form may involve considerable impact and positive engagement, these activities do not affect the direct operations of the business itself. The complete de-linking of a company's practices and its charity work is often achieved by setting up a corporate charitable foundation (Herlin & Pedersen, 2013). Whether the CSR activity is engaged or disengaged, it can be aimed at beneficiaries that are within the company and/or its supply chain network (benefits for its own workers) and also to communities that are home to its activities. It can also choose beneficiaries that are geographically distant from its own locations, including 'global' causes.

Richey and Ponte (2011) argued that the first generation of Brand Aid initiatives was moving CSR from conscious consumption, in which consumers grade products in relation to how they are produced, to compassionate consumption – in which products are 'good' if they contribute to a 'good' cause. Both fair trade and ethical consumption perspectives focused on the product itself as the location of 'ethical' value (see Lekakis 2013). But rather than examining the conditions of production and exchange of a product, the first wave of Brand Aid initiatives embedded ethics into the causes that are 'sold' together with the products, and the celebrities that translate, communicate and embody an ethical leadership role in the management of consumers' desire to do good while shopping well.

What we argue here is that development interventions such as *Kahawa Bora* introduce a new and significantly different iteration of the Brand Aid model. This 'second generation' of Brand Aid is no longer disengaging products from the development beneficiaries, but inter-twining the two. As it engages within the actual value chain of the products it promotes, second generation Brand Aid provides not just funding, but shifts in the ways that power is wielded along the value chain. It is moving Brand Aid towards an 'engaged' form of CSR, which is now leveraged strategically for corporate ends, as we will illustrate below. Because the beneficiaries of these initiatives are also the producers of the branded products for sale, we can best understand the political economy of these partnerships through analysis using a Global Value Chain (GVC) approach.

Understanding Value Chain Development Interventions (VCDIs)

Because GVC approaches have been increasingly used to both analyze development trajectories (Gereffi, 1994) and to formulate specific kinds of projects, known as value chain development interventions (VCDIs), it is important to distinguish the approach offered by GVC analysis from the ontology of the VCDIs as the object of analysis. The term GVC generally refers to the full range of activities that firms, farmers and workers carry out to bring a product or service from its conception to its end use, recycling or re-use. These activities can include design, production, processing, assembly, distribution, maintenance, disposal/recycling, marketing, finance and consumer services. In this context, ‘lead firms’ are corporations, like Starbucks, that operate at particular functional positions along the chain and that are able to shape who does what, at what price, using what standards, to which specifications, and delivering in what form and at what point in time (Gereffi, Humphrey, & Sturgeon, 2005; Humphrey & Schmitz, 2001; Ponte & Sturgeon, 2014).

The GVC approach to explaining development trajectories focuses on understandings of two main themes: (1) *governance* – the set of concrete practices, power dynamics and organizational forms through which a specific division of labor between lead firms and other actors arise and is managed (Gereffi, 1995; Gibbon, Bair, & Ponte, 2008; Dallas, Ponte and Sturgeon, 2019); and (2) *upgrading* – the paths that value chain actors take in seeking to add value and extract more rent, eventually moving up the value chain to more sophisticated and skill-intensive operations (Gereffi, 1999, 2014; Schmitz, 2004). In its original orientation, the GVC approach was concerned with power, inequality and adverse incorporation (Phillips, 2011) of global South actors in the global economy. Yet, its increasing popularity among donors and international organizations has led to the development of applied tools and project design guidelines that have little to do with the original preoccupations of GVC analysis.[12]

In our paper, we apply the analytical themes of the GVC approach, governance and upgrading, and a popular classification of different forms of value chain development (see above; Humphrey and Navas-Alemán 2010) to guide the analysis of two VCDIs: the *Kahawa Bora* and Rikolto projects. We classify *Kahawa Bora* as a lead firm-driven partnership, with the increased complexity brought through partnering with a celebrity-led organization; and we consider the Rikolto initiative as having more focus on how weaker actors are inserted in the value chain, even though several coffee buyers and a major retailer are involved in it. While *Kahawa Bora* includes an exclusive supply agreement to Starbucks, cooperatives in the Rikolto project can sell to a variety of coffee buyers. We show how Starbucks, as a 'lead firm', governs the coffee value chain also by partnering with a celebrity-led development organization to achieve its strategic sourcing goals. We examine the extent of *Kahawa Bora*'s provision of sustainable upgrading possibilities to coffee farmers *vis a vis* the Rikolto project. We also reflect on collective or individual forms of market participation and the terms of incorporation into value chains. Our empirical work will then be used to consider the contributions from linking the Brand Aid concept and GVC approach to understand these forms of development partnerships.

Contexts

The Global Coffee Value Chain and Starbucks

In order to understand how different VCDIs operate in Eastern Congo, the role played by Starbucks in one of these, and what actual and potential effects these interventions may have, we first need to briefly review the evolution of governance in the coffee GVCs (Ponte, 2002; Grabs, 2017). Three distinctive phases characterize its changes in the post-WWII period: the 'ICA regime' phase (1962-1989); the 'liberalization' phase (1990-2007); and the 'diversification and reconsolidation' phase (2008-present). Our case study is part of the *diversification and reconsolidation* phase, which started with the financial crisis. This phase has been marked first by increased fragmentation in the value chain, followed by a partial wave of 'portfolio-based reconsolidation of large roasters, their increasing use of traceability tools for supply chain management, the related decline of sustainability premiums and rise of quality expectations, and a recent movement by producing country actors to counter the renewed power of large roasters' (Grabs and Ponte, 2019: 4). Throughout this third period, the incidence and visibility of Brand Aid-type initiatives has also increased (Ponte & Richey, 2014).

Immediately after the financial crisis, the diversified multinationals that had previously held great market power sold or spun off their coffee portfolios amidst the global recession and a general slow-down in the sector. Then, the healthy growth of the specialty sector allowed some companies, such as Starbucks and Keurig Green Mountain, to increase their market shares (Grabs, 2017). As the economy recovered from 2012 onwards, the coffee value chain – and in particular its specialty segment – became increasingly recognized as a strategic long-term investment opportunity for private equity firms (Gasparro, 2015). After years of relatively unchallenged market leadership, Nestlé suddenly faced a serious contender for global dominance of the coffee market, the private equity firm JAB Holding (Gretler, 2015;

Key, 2015). The threat eventually led Nestlé and Starbucks to form a marketing alliance (Atkins, 2018). This battle for market dominance also reverberated across the industry, leading other roasters to strengthen their own portfolios of specialty, unique and 'exotic' coffees (Grabs & Ponte, 2019; Landini & Clarke, 2016).[13]

It is in this context of increasing consolidation and the search for new and profitable origins that the experience of VCDIs in Eastern Congo should be understood. According to an insider source in the company, 'Starbucks became involved in *Kahawa Bora* because it is always looking for new origins.'[14] This is part of their larger effort to develop a new business model that involves a network of cafés-cum-micro roasteries to move into the very high-end coffee market where the company has lost ground.[15] This setup does not need large volumes of coffee like in Starbucks' signature blends or origins, which are supplied to many or all of their outlets. In this segment, consumers expect different experiences each time, so they do not need to have the same amount of coffee volume and consistency from their suppliers. Such a business model entails, from the sourcing perspective, multiple and relatively short-lasting engagements with suppliers on the ground in view of managing sourcing risk and securing supplies of *en vogue* coffee origins. When micro-roasteries have a limited number of retail outlets and are not part of large conglomerate groups, power relations between them and coffee producers (or their cooperatives) can be fairly balanced. But when large coffee groups such as Starbucks, JAB Holdings and Nestlé enter this segment, or acquire existing players, they tend to tilt these relations to their advantage – for example by applying more demanding payment terms, or from the sheer fact that their global reach makes them less reliant on any one origin at any time for their top-end coffees (Grabs and Ponte, 2019).

Our analytical perspective combining a GVC approach with that of Brand Aid means that in addition to the materialist approaches typical to the GVC literature, we also engage the representations and ideas that are sold together with the products in the VCDI partnerships we study. Hence, the next section will turn to celebrity humanitarianism and the powerful imaginaries it supports when literally marketing development solutions together with coffee.

Celebrity Humanitarianism on Behalf of Eastern Congo

The American actor Ben Affleck's form of entrepreneurial celebrity humanitarianism (Richey & Brockington, 2019; see also Kapoor 2013) and his organization's partnership with Starbucks have a powerful impact on the imaginaries of development linking coffee consumers with coffee farmers in Eastern Congo. This draws on a long history of marketing DRC as a cause for partnership and of celebrity humanitarianism (citation removed). The successful marketing of Starbucks coffee from DRC can be traced to the trajectory of selling African causes through imaginations of Africa dominated by the logics of whiteness (Gabay, 2018). DRC has long suffered from colonialist and imperialist 'imaginings' that downplay Western responsibility and sustain myths around 'new barbarism' and violence (Dunn 2003; Chiwengo 2008), also framing through economic and neoconservative lenses that regard Congo as a site of commerce or, alternatively, a potential hotbed of terrorism (Trefon, 2011). DRC is also specifically framed to a Western audience using a moral lens on human rights (Autesserre, 2014; Coundouriotis, 2012). These virtualisms (Carrier and Miller, 1998) of DRC as a site for interventions by foreign entities mixing humanitarian and business concerns are powerful marketing for the possibilities of partnerships. Yet this is not new: Hochschild (1998) chronicles celebrity humanitarianism back to the Victorian era with "white men trying to stop other white men from brutalizing Africans" (Hochschild 1998: 207; see also Brockington 2014b; Kabemba 2013; citation removed 2021).

These representations of Congo create the context in which in 2010, Ben Affleck launched the Eastern Congo Initiative (ECI) that partners with business and benefits from the promotion of Congo as a 'cause' (Budabin et al., 2017; Budabin & Richey, 2018; Richey & Budabin, 2016). ECI was an organization with two offices: a staff of four working out of Washington, DC and a staff of twenty working out of Goma, DRC. Despite its limited capacity in the field, as a celebrity-led development organization (Budabin, Rasmussen and Richey, 2017) ECI convenes extraordinary resources for publicizing its work. Indicating his expert credibility, Affleck, together with Bill Gates, was called to speak before the US Senate hearing on 'Diplomacy, Development and National Security.' Affleck testified on how the partnership between Starbucks and ECI has 'transformed the lives of thousands of families in Eastern DRC;' he concluded 'This isn't charity or aid in the traditional sense. It's good business.'[16]

Ben Affleck speaks as a development expert on behalf of DRC not only to US Congress, but also through op-eds, media appearances and speeches – and he does not do this alone. ECI's former director Harper McConnell, who later became Director of Starbucks Global Coffee and Tea, gave a TedX talk entitled, 'Can Aid Work Itself Out of Business' posted on December 2, 2015. In this performance, she described the origin story of ECI's involvement in DRC coffee:

> I'm a huge coffee drinker. Despite growing some of the best Arabica coffee beans in Congo, I couldn't find good Congolese coffee in Congo and I couldn't find it on the

> international specialty market. So we got to thinking, what would it take to take this Congolese coffee bean into your cup here in America and in the process, could we increase the income of Congolese farmers? So we went to talk farmers about revitalizing the markets. And they all had lucid memories of their parents and grandparents being able to renovate their house and pay for health care due to the cash flow from coffee. They pointed to farmers in Brazil and Colombia and they said we want to make money like those farmers.[17]

Note that in this story, the specialty coffee consumer is the primary driver of the process of consultation, and later funding for an intervention aimed at 'working aid out of business' through business. In her talk, McConnell also discussed how market-based approaches and private sector actors were welcome disruptors to the field of development (citation removed). She stated, "As an NGO, you should be working yourself out of a business of development aid. You should be approaching a social issue with a business model."[18] The justification for the business model was based on a narrow reading of development as an equality of opportunity problem, not a power imbalance. Further, she said, "Because the whole idea of development aid is to address the core of an issue, then why does this community not have economic opportunity?" Working aid out of business implies that global businesses like Starbucks will buy their products from farmers in the global South, hence aid will no longer be needed.[19] As a partner for business, ECI's stated advantage is linked to supporting and partnering with local development efforts on the ground, in contrast to other larger advocacy organizations focused on Africa. Compared to 'older' international development practices, and responding to critiques of aid dependency, Affleck and his organization specifically stress the notion of *partnership* – the ECI website even highlights specific Congolese organizations as 'project partners.' To 'work aid out of business,' the development vision promoted by the celebrity Ben Affleck thus relies on partnerships by a variety of actors along the coffee value chain, including USAID, corporations and philanthropists, in support of community-based organizations working with the Congolese. In the next section, we turn to the context of initiatives seeking to revitalize the coffee sector in Eastern Congo.

Revitalizing Coffee in Eastern Congo

Most Arabica coffee produced in the DRC comes from Eastern Congo – the highlands of the Kivus and the eastern part of Oriental Province. While 70% of total coffee production was carried out by estates at independence in 1960, by the mid-1980s this proportion had decreased to 14% and by the late 1990s to 2% with the rest accounted for by smallholder farmers.[20] Coffee production reached historical highs in the mid-1980s, when it amounted to 130,000 tons. In the first part of the 1990s, coffee exports accounted for 75% of all agricultural export value from the DRC.[21] With conflict ravaging the country from 1994 to 2003, coffee production experienced a major decline due to the difficulties of tending the crop in times of violence, instability and forced migration. By the early 2000s, these figures suggest production plummeting to just over 20,000 tons and remaining fairly constant ever since, at 15% of the former highs. Only approximately one-third of all coffee production is exported officially. With very little coffee consumed domestically, the rest is smuggled to neighbouring countries, especially Rwanda and Uganda.[22]

The domestic coffee authority (Office National du Café, ONC) has little regulatory power (the coffee market was liberalized back in the early 1980s) and limited resources,[23] with the exception of levying a high export tax on coffee.[24] ONC plays a very limited role in research, quality improvement and monitoring. Exports are currently undertaken by private companies.

An NGO officer involved in the sector told us that actual coffee production in Eastern Congo now is closer to 60,000 tons, three times what the official figures suggest.[25]

Part of the hype for marketing DRC coffee was also built through another initiative, the *Saveur du Kivu* (Taste of Kivu) – a coffee tasting competition and expo that seeks to raise awareness of fine coffees available in DRC. *Saveur du Kivu* has been organized annually since 2014 by Chris Treter of the Michigan-based roasting company Higher Grounds Coffee. In 2016 the competition included two experts brought in by ECI and Catholic Relief Services (CRS) to conduct a training for cuppers, half of whom were women. Invitees included DFID (which funds a parallel project, Elan, working in the same geographical area but with different cooperatives); representatives from the three USAID cooperatives; a participant from ONC; another government representative; and the head of USAID. Starbuck's CEO Craig Russell's personal letter (expressing Starbucks' commitment to buy *Kahawa Bora*'s coffee for the next five years) was presented in a frame to each of the three presidents of the coffee cooperatives at the *Saveur du Kivu*. A local coffee expert reflected on the *Saveur du Kivu*:

> That's an excellent innovation. If Ben Affleck had put his weight behind something like that, giving all comers an equal chance to shine, while Congo coffee and its producers benefited from his fame, it would have been a much better use of the fame than trying to implement a "development project" on the ground without any expertise.[26]

In the past few years, DRC coffee has been one of the most sought after 'new origin' coffees, a coffee that was 're-discovered' after a period of limited availability due to the level of political violence in the country. The possibility of pairing strategic sourcing for coffee roasters with a ‘good story’ of recovery from conflict and towards development was not lost on the coffee business world. But because of the limited availability of *high-quality* coffee in the country, new initiatives were needed to improve farming and processing methods. In value chain terminology, these initiatives seek to facilitate product and process upgrading in the coffee industry in Eastern Congo, so that farmers and their cooperatives can add value to their production.

As we highlighted earlier in the paper, VCDIs can be usefully categorised in two: those where a substantial role is played by ‘lead firms’; and those who are constructed more from the bottom up and tuned towards the needs of weaker players in the value chain – even though they may actually include lead firms and other powerful actors in them.[27] The argument for supporting the former is that lead firms can open up large markets for local producers, and can provide invaluable market information and open up access to technical knowledge and support, at least while they are interested in sourcing from specific areas. The argument for supporting the latter is that relying on lead firms (and especially on a specific one, instead of a basket of competitors) places the needs of producers in a secondary position. Also, power relations are less skewed against producers when more buyers (and smaller buyers) compete with each other, resulting in a lesser degree of influence in the design and organizational structure of the project. Because lead firms govern value chains also through their ‘development initiatives’ and increasingly in alliance with very visible celebrity-led organizations, they cannot be trusted to cater to the interest of farmers first and foremost.

TABLE 1 HERE

To understand the effects of a Brand Aid form of VDCI, the next section provides an in-depth analysis of ECI's *Kahawa Bora* project, which operates in Kivu, followed by a rendition of the operations of a more bottom-up coffee value chain project by Rikolto, which is active in four areas in Eastern Congo, including in Kivu (see Table 1). Our understanding of the context is informed by additional research on two other projects as well, but as they are not directly comparable, we do not cover them in detail here.[28]

Kahawa Bora Ya Kivu

The ECI *Kahawa Bora* initiative is a project that ran from late 2012 to late 2016, funded by the Buffett Foundation and a matching grant from USAID. *Kahawa Bora* was developed within the framework of USAID's collaborations known as a 'Global Development Alliance'. Over the last 15 years, USAID has supported more than 1,800 of these partnerships around the world.[29] Thus, *Kahawa Bora* was not conceived as a 'traditional' development project, but instead as a business-oriented partnership that fit in an already well-established modality by the bilateral donor with over a decade and a half of experience. It also fit USAID's focus over the past two decades on VCDIs. What is new in *Kahawa Bora* in this context is that a celebrity-led development organization is at the core of its organizational structure, which enhanced its visibility and, ultimately, made it 'too important to fail' despite its shortcomings. Indeed, the Global Alliance with ECI did not actually involve meeting the same requirements as for other USAID grants, as ECI brought funding from Howard Buffett to USAID. But because ECI was inexperienced in rural development projects more generally, USAID required that Catholic Relief Services (CRS) act as the lead organization before they would commit aid funds. CRS has operated as a humanitarian organization since World War II and has projects in over 100 countries, including in DRC where it has worked since 1993.

One donor informant in Kinshasa shared that 'ECI needed to partner with a traditional NGO. . . I heard they [ECI] were disastrous. . . it was initiated out of Washington. . . It is hard to manage a project from so far away. . . so USAID was tasked with fixing it, to take a more active role. . . ECI and CRS were forced into a collaboration, and they turned it around in the past two years.'[30] The arranged marriage between ECI and CRS as project implementors was a difficult one. A former collaborator with ECI described concern over their lack of internal controls and compliance mechanisms.[31]

FIGURE 2 HERE

Because neither ECI nor CRS actually had sufficient experience in the coffee sector, World Coffee Research (WCR), a private research institute funded by the US coffee industry, was also asked to become involved in *Kahawa Bora* and provide technical support. According to an industry leader, ECI had previously been involved in a cocoa project in Eastern Congo with Theo Chocolate, but it was Howard Buffett who expressed interest in ECI having a coffee project and asked WCR to provide intelligence on what was going on at the local level.[32] Buffett has been active through his foundation since 1999 in agricultural resource development and management for smallholder farmers in the global South.[33] In DRC, he is known particularly for his work around Virunga National Park and coffee in South Kivu and for his deep political connections in both DRC and the US.

The *Kahawa Bora* project was characterised by internal tension from the beginning. One of the biggest challenges, according to an informant inside the project, was working with ONC, which levies a high export tax.[34] According to an informant from the coffee sector, the project did not please the Congolese government because instead of allocating them the funding for extension work, USAID allocated it to CRS.[35]

Another challenge arose when implementing the project with an inexperienced celebrity-led organization. A global coffee institutional leader explained: ‘ECI was useful in the beginning. They had some really sharp individuals working with them but had no coffee expertise and very little rural development expertise.’[36] CRS was mandated with training the cooperatives in good agricultural practices and processing, while ECI was responsible for the marketing side. However, not much happened in the first two years of operation.[37] The washing stations had been only partially built by that point and were of sub-standard material according to multiple informants. The example of constructing washing stations of mud bricks that were literally ‘sliding down the slope into the lake’[38] illustrates the amateurish approach initially taken by *Kahawa Bora*. Multiple informants who had worked on the project at that time pointed to the poor governance with stark language such as ‘the NGOs were stealing money,’ and ‘the beneficiaries of the project were NGOs, not farmers.’[39] A private sector informant explained to us that USAID wanted to close the project down, but was determined to try to save it because, despite the small budget, it was ‘politically very sensitive.’[40] An implementor from South Kivu reported similarly that USAID wanted to close the project but Howard Buffet himself refused, so USAID gave it a ‘last chance.’[41] The depiction of a failing project that was ‘saved’ by the restructuring led by its main donor was linked directly to the important visibility that the celebrity-led organization brought through Affleck’s media appearances and through its network with political and industry elites (citation removed). One diplomatic level informant in Kinshasa stated: ‘Celebritization—this may be another cash cow. If you can put on a good show, you may accomplish some good if you are able to partner with the US government, with a good track record. . . partner on Congo coffee' (citation removed).

The *Kahawa Bora* project had a top-down structure, lacked a proper management plan, and was characterised by high levels of tension between ECI and CRS. After a turnaround of at least five different chief-of-party positions in the first years of operation, it was actually ONC that facilitated the recruitment of another one in 2015, who then stayed on to the end of the project. The project then proceeded to completely re-build the washing stations and arranged credit through Rwandan Trading Company, an outfit with strong links (they have the same CEO) to Westrock – an Arkansas-based capital asset management firm.[42] Westrock arranged a loan for the cooperatives (now fully repaid), backed up by Starbucks' commitment to buy up to 50 containers of their coffee scoring 82 and above for a period of three years – at the set price of about $6/kg. Any excess production could be sold by the cooperatives to other buyers. Exports were arranged locally through a coffee processor and exporter (Coffee Lac, based in Goma but with headquarters in Uganda), which operates in close partnership with a specialty trader based in the UK (Falcon Coffee) (see Figure 2). This arrangement provided the cooperatives a protected and forgiving market for the duration of the contract and allowed them to pay a better price to farmers than in the past. However, if Starbucks does not renew its commitment in 2021, the cooperatives will be under severe threat, as they will be exposed without any preparation to much harder commercial realities, unless the cooperatives use this financial advantage to build a capital reserve and to look for other markets and other providers of working capital.

In 2016, the first crop amounting to nine containers (189 tons of green coffee) was exported to Starbucks. However, in 2017, only six containers (126 tons) were sold by the cooperatives because of greater competition in procuring coffee cherries at the farm-level from other buyers. The project's yearly exports constitute less than 1% of total DRC exports, according to official export figures, and probably one third of that figure if we account for smuggled coffee in our tally of the country's total exports. Yet, the media and marketing visibility of *Kahawa Bora*, through its celebrity-based partnership, pulls far more than its actual weight.

But was *Kahawa Bora* really about revitalizing coffee in DRC and helping farmers to improve their livelihoods? According to one source, actually 'Starbucks became involved in *Kahawa Bora* because it is always looking for new origins.'[43] There are also important revolving-door dynamics in the elite leadership between Starbucks and *Kahawa Bora*. Dave Olsen, a member of the original team that set up Starbucks in 1987 and a long-time, now retired, operation and sourcing manager in the company, sits on the Board of ECI. In April 2016, Harper McConnell left her position as Senior Director at ECI for a position as Senior Manager Global Coffee and Tea with Starbucks, where she was then promoted to Director of Starbucks Global Coffee and Tea. Coffee sourcing plays a central role in the branding of Starbucks as socially responsible and sustainable.[44]

Kahawa Bora project's final report paints quite a different picture than the one our research gathered on the ground.[45] It claims that the project facilitated a marginal decrease in the prevalence of poverty and of moderate or severe hunger between 2012 and 2016, although at a much lower rate than expected (it should also be noted that no control group analysis was conducted). Other positive results include improved agronomic practices, new coffee trees planted, better coffee quality, improved operations of the cooperatives involved and strengthened relations with specialty coffee buyers.[46]

However, when *Kahawa Bora* ended in 2016, a new project (started in 2017 and funded by USAID, but not the Buffett Foundation this time) began a second phase that picked up where the ECI project left. This project does not involve either ECI or CRS, neither of which was involved in the winning bid. The bid was won by another consortium, headed by a large USAID contractor (Tetra-Tech), with Technoserve as the local implementing agency. The only continuing partner in the second phase is WCR. The same cooperatives that were supported in the first phase are still involved. The new phase does not involve installing new washing stations, although it seeks to help other cooperatives to get access to them.[47] The initial improvements in coffee quality which would justify the washing station investments seem not to have been sustained.[48] Despite the end of the ECI project and an apparent drop in quality, Starbucks has verbally committed to continue buying Kaha Bora coffee until 2021.[49] It is unclear what will happen thereafter.

The Rikolto Coffee Project

In 2012, the International Coffee Organization (ICO) and the Common Fund for Commodities (CFC) funded a project to support smallholder coffee producers in three provinces of DRC particularly affected by war (Orientale, North Kivu and South Kivu).[50] The Belgian development organization Vredeseilanden (now called Rikolto) was tasked to implement the project through its Congolese representative Rikolto RDC. This VCDI aims at improving farmers' capacity to produce high quality coffee and at promoting access to international markets, but it is *not* tied to one particular lead firm. The Rikolto project distributes seedlings of coffee varieties that are adapted to the region and promotes the instalment of *micro*-washing stations managed by farmer groups.[51] These stations allow farmers to produce wet-processed coffee instead of dry-processed, in theory receiving better market prices than selling fresh coffee cherries to traders. The small size of the washing stations used in this project allows farmers to process coffee closer to them, and in smaller groups, thus facilitating a sense of common purpose and ownership. Central cooperatives oversee the washing stations and organize repayments, and Rikolto brokers relationships with a variety of international coffee buyers.[52]

Like *Kahawa Bora*, this project also involves large organizations (CFC, Rikolto) and powerful firms (Colryt, a major Belgian retailer, and a number of coffee buyers), but its design places more emphasis on the needs and role of the cooperatives involved in DRC.[53] Rikolto cooperatives can sell to a number of buyers, giving them more power in relative terms than in the case of *Kahawa Bora*, which is built on an exclusive supply agreement between cooperatives and a coffee buyer working on Starbucks's behalf. The Rikolto project uses marketing discourses around revitalizing DRC coffee and helping farmers to sell high-end quality coffee that are similar to Kahawa Bora's. Yet, it lacks the political traction and global visibility that a celebrity such as Ben Affleck and his elite networks can impart.

FIGURE 3 HERE

Four coffee cooperatives are currently involved in the Rikolto project: Kawa Kabuya, Kawa Kanzururu, Kawa Maber and CPNCK (we researched CPNCK because it is the one operating in South Kivu; see how its value chain is organized in Figure 3). They are attracting attention from international traders because one of their cooperatives (Kawa Kabuya) has directly concluded business deals with the Belgian group Colruyt and now also with … Starbucks.[54] Seventy-five washing stations were operational at the time of fieldwork in 2017, with farmers who supply them receiving prices roughly double of those who sell fresh coffee cherries to traders. As a result, the cooperatives claim that the average income for participating farmers has increased from USD 300/year in 2014 to USD 600/year in 2016.[55] While not taking these figures for granted (as they come from a report for the donors, and no control group was used for comparison), one should notice that this happened even as international coffee prices decreased on average by 18% between these two years.[56] In 2016, Colruyt committed to purchasing over 28 tonnes of green coffee beans per year (about 20 per cent of total production) at $0.50/lb premium over the market price for a period of three years, but was not the only buyer involved. What is particularly advantageous for the cooperatives is that 60 percent of this coffee is paid in advance of the harvest – a major perk in view of ensuring that farmers deliver enough coffee and get paid immediately.[57]

Rikolto cooperatives have not resorted to constructing large-scale washing stations. They have used a different model, with groups of between 50 and 200 farmers sharing a micro-station that provides the basic production unit of the cooperative (see Figure 3). These micro-stations have been only partially funded by the project and have been entirely constructed by farmers following an evolving design provided by a consultant and adjusted with them. Funding has come from the project through a seed-capital grant provided to the cooperative, which has lent it to its micro-station groups. This loan was repaid in the form of an allocation of profits to the cooperative capital reserve and then revolved to build more micro-stations.

CPNCK has constructed nine micro-stations to date and grown its coffee volume each year, doubling it between 2016 and 2017. The production cost per weight of parchment at CPNCK was the lowest of the cooperatives studied, signalling an efficient processing system. Efficiency, however, did not seem to have come at the cost of quality. While internal documentation of the project may be biased towards showing success, a more independent and reliable indicator comes from the quality scoring of the *Saveur du Kivu* competitions. Coffee from the CPNCK micro-stations came second in the *Saveur du Kivu* competition in 2017. In 2018, coffee from Rikolto cooperatives took the top three positions. Dry processing has been done by private processors, but differently from the situation in the *Kahawa Bora* project, processors have not taken possession of the coffee, which remains in full ownership and control of the cooperatives. In 2017, CPNCK constructed its own small dry mill in Idjwi Nord and now controls its coffee from micro-station to export. The Rikolto cooperatives employ their own agronomists and have exported (sometimes with significant delays) their own coffee from the first season onwards.

The Rikolto project made links with a wide variety of buyers since the first marketing season in 2015. Particularly interestingly for our study is that these buyers now include Starbucks (through Falcon Coffees). However, the Rikolto project also struggled in the first years of operation, as there was little consistency in the identity of buyers for this coffee. Many buyers only bought once. The Rikolto cooperatives are now beginning to establish stronger relationships with buyers, some of which are now providing pre-financing directly. But because of the relative lack of repeat buyers, it has been a hard struggle each year for the cooperative to raise working capital ahead of the season, as there have been no advance contracts for lenders to use as security.

Discussion

Comparing the two VCDI's described above can prove fruitful for understanding the relative strengths and weaknesses of different forms of development partnership. The *Kahawa Bora* and Rikolto projects in some ways are very similar (see Table 2): they are both VCDIs focused on coffee, operate in Eastern Congo and revolve around several cooperatives. In other ways, however, they could not be more different: *Kahawa Bora* is a Brand Aid form of VCDI built around a celebrity-led organization and one specific lead firm (Starbucks), which impart it with a high political profile and global visibility. This mainly results from Ben Affleck's three-way involvement: 1) through ECI as an implementing NGO on the ground in Eastern Congo; 2) as a political lobbyist in the United States; and 3) and as a marketing promoter through celebrity appearances in the global public. Additionally, it is also high profile because Starbucks is the sole buyer of this specialty coffee.

TABLE 2 HERE

In more specific terms (see Table 3 below), *Kahawa Bora* cooperatives showed important progress between 2015 and 2017 in terms of total green coffee offered for sale and in terms of outturn (a measure of processing quality), with a relatively constant ratio of exports over total production (an indicator of overall coffee quality). The Rikolto cooperative started from a lower base (in terms of volume of exports) but showed much faster improvement. Its outturn and proportion of exported production is higher than for *Kahawa Bora* cooperatives, although it decreased between 2016 and 2017.

TABLE 3 HERE

Rikolto seems to be more attuned to the needs of farmers and their cooperatives because it is not driven by one specific lead firm, and receives the limited attention that 'normal' (noncelebrity) projects attract.[58] Even though powerful firms and organizations are involved in the project, power relations along the Rikolto project value chain are not further skewed in favor of coffee roasters and international traders and their immediate needs are not the main factor shaping the design of the project. Cooperatives in the Rikolto project can supply to a number of alternative buyers, and thus are not hemmed into one specific supply agreement. This provides them more flexibility and thus the possibility of catering more effectively to the interests of their members.

Kahawa Bora was marred by major problems in the first years, which would have killed a less visible project like Rikolto's. *Kahawa Bora* is run essentially in a top-down manner and involved coffee traders and exporters that are part of an American/European network built around a celebrity and connected elites. While this may increase consumer trust levels linked to the global brand association (as suggested by Minten, Dereje, Engida, & Tamru, 2018), it is not clear whether this trust is experienced by farmers. *Kahawa Bora* is also fully dependent on Starbucks as the sole 'lead firm' buyer to succeed. Rikolto's key decisions are taken much closer to the ground, with cooperatives that have learned how to be charge of coffee preparation for export (a form of functional upgrading in GVC lingo), and with a broader portfolio of buyers that can more likely ensure the long-term feasibility of operations.

In general, the dynamic picture emerging from this comparison is a relatively better one for the Rikolto project than for *Kahawa Bora*, despite the latter having been portrayed as an 'innovative partnership' and having benefited from superior network effects due to the involvement of Starbucks and Affleck's ECI. While in 2015 and 2016, the *Kahawa Bora* cooperatives scored relatively well in the *Saveur du Kivu* competition, they have since disappeared from the top ranks, now outperformed by Rikolto (and other) cooperatives. But perhaps the most significant observation regarding the long-term impact of *Kahawa Bora* is that both Starbucks and Affleck have recently been celebrating a different cooperative than their own. This other cooperative, Kawa Kabuya (which is part of the Rikolto initiative) won the *Saveur de Kivu* competition in both 2018 and 2019. Starbucks has also started carrying Kawa Kabuya coffee (procured by Falcon Coffees) in its Starbucks Reserve Roastery in Seattle, along with its other Eastern Congo coffees.[59] Ben Affleck himself highlighted Kawa Kabuya in an opinion piece in the *New York Times*.[60] Had the *Kahawa Bora* initiative been successful, we would have expected ongoing commitments to buy and promote their coffee. Instead, we see that both the lead firm and the celebrity of this Brand Aid form of VCDI jumped from one project to another opportunistically, suggesting a lack of confidence in the sustainability of the results of their own *Kahawa Bora* project.

As argued by Budabin (2019), 'ineffective strategies and poor results do not threaten a celebrity humanitarian's ability to continue 'do-gooding': their ability to mobilize political and financial capital secures their platform for testing interventions' (Budabin, 2019, p. 11). Thus, even though Brand Aid interventions are likely to have less impact on their beneficiaries than comparable VCDIs, they are serving the interests of their celebrities, businesses and even their collaborating development partners like USAID.

Brand Aid has a discursive power that can filter assumptions about 'ethical' and 'good' corporations while it raises awareness of the Eastern Congo and its coffee. Yet, the pitfalls of a Brand Aid form of VCDI are most significant in the imaginaries that are sold with the products themselves. In Fairtrade, consumers expect that coffee farmers are paid a better price and thus have better livelihood outcomes when Fairtrade products are selected over 'normal' ones. However, like other forms of Brand Aid, *Kahawa Bora* coffee is sold as providing a 'cup of hope' for farmers in Eastern Congo – just because it is grown in post-conflict communities that (we are led to assume) would otherwise have no economic alternatives. However, as we have shown, there are other alternatives beyond the *Kahawa Bora* project for coffee farmers who want to sell their beans at a good price. *Kahawa Bora* is indeed 'better coffee' for Starbucks. Whether it is 'better coffee' for Congolese farmers is much less clear.[61]

Conclusion

In this paper, we have sought to address two research gaps to improve our understanding of partnerships for development – as called for in this special issue's introduction (reference to be inserted). First, we examined second generation Brand Aid forms of intervention (which include business, celebrities and development partners) and what impact they have on the long-term sustainability of value chain participation by local communities and cooperatives. This is new, as much of the existing literature on Brand Aid partnerships is focused on the role of celebrities in engaging business and consumers in the global North. Second, we have highlighted that lead firms can govern a value chain also through alliances with celebrities and their 'development projects'. This is also new, as the GVC literature has been struggling to broaden its coverage of actors (including celebrities), their interactions and their governance functions.

In our empirical analysis, we highlighted how the celebrity-fueled political and marketing process that accompanied *Kahawa Bora* portrayed it as 'restoring' the former glory of coffee production in DRC – after the many years of devastation due to conflict. Yet, the project was marred by serious internal conflict, almost closed down, and only reached a relatively small group of farmers. Also, it is not clear whether Starbucks will remain engaged in buying its coffee beyond the first five year commitment. If it leaves, farmers will be poorly prepared to compete in the market. The *Kahawa Bora* project has attracted much attention with relatively little coffee supply, while technically similar projects in Eastern Congo, including the Rikolto project examined in this article, have gone relatively unnoticed (Kolk and Lenfant, 2015).

Celebrities as 'oligarchs in the attention economy' (Richey and Brockington 2019, 11) are effective in drawing attention to a cause. The importance of the brand communication for USAID, Affleck and Starbucks in this Brand Aid form of value chain development initiative was in its power with US consumers who are also citizens. USAID is funded by the US Congressional allocation. Combining the channels of celebrity and elite power and the incentive structures of a lead firm in the coffee value chain makes the on-the-ground impacts a question of media optics. Brand Aid initiatives are increasingly popular and consumer-oriented tools that seek to address problems in Africa through the easy mechanism of 'shopping for good' (Richey and Ponte, 2011). But, as we show in this article, below the smooth surface of fixing crises with new actors and 'innovative' approaches lay a labyrinth of interests, political economies of affect, corporate strategies and the marketing of development causes to consumers in the global North.

It is important to make sense of these interests to understand whom *Kahawa Bora* is good for. Starbucks, with Howard Buffett as co-investor, is developing a new business model – piloting a network of cafés-cum-micro roasteries to move into the high-end coffee market.[62] Because large and consistent supplies of the same beans are not needed in this model, buyers for these elite micro-roasteries are not bound to a particular place or group of producers. JAB, a Luxembourg-based holding company that owns several successful café chains (such as

Caribou Coffee, Peet's and Baresso) and has a majority stake in Jacobs Douwe Egberts (a large roasting company), is developing a similar model. Nestlé recently acquired Bluebottle, a small café-cum-micro roastery chain, which participated in the *Saveur du Kivu* cupping competition in 2015. Given these recent trends in high-end coffee markets, 'helping farmers' in the Eastern Congo through the ECI project comes handy for Starbucks in its quest to keep up with changing and increasingly diversified consumption experiences. At the same time, this small-batch model works to weaken the relatively more powerful position of high-quality coffee suppliers because Starbucks can more easily switch origins and locations, thus creating the new 'experiences' that the high-end coffee market requires without locking-in with any supplier in the long-term.

In other words, Starbucks leverages a value chain development intervention run by traditional aid implementors and a celebrity-led organization to achieve strategic sourcing goals.[63] These partnerships are ironically marketed by development NGOs as a way of 'working aid out of business.' As described by ECI's former director, 'Businesses should be able to heavily rely on and support NGOs to improve their social and environmental responsibility strategies. And NGOs should stop chasing the dollar and ask ourselves instead, what are our core competencies and then market those services to those who need them to improve their sustainability strategies'.[64] Yet, in the case of *Kahawa Bora*, the business model of competent NGOs and sustainable business relied heavily on support from both traditional aid donors (USAID) and implementers (CRS). While this relationship has been extremely complicated as a development partnership, it has been quite successful as a new business model so far.

Many other corporations have developed variations of the VCDIs we observe in the DRC coffee sector, with or without the celebrity part. During the commodity boom of the 2000s, attempts to ensure the sourcing of scarce but strategic goods, such as high-quality cocoa from Ghana, led to a veritable scramble of value chain projects in agriculture that variously involved donors, NGOs and corporations (Mitchell & Coles, 2011; Neilson, 2014; Taglioni & Winkler, 2016; Thorpe, 2018). These projects are portrayed as seeking to help farmers to beneficially integrate into global markets, improve farming practices and enhance product quality. They often come together with exclusive supply contracts or at least serve to build relationships that facilitate a steady flow of supply. The commodity boom is now over, but these mechanisms remain in place, especially when they fit with the sourcing strategies of lead firms. This second generation of Brand Aid partnerships – value chain development initiatives fuelled by celebrity support – live on as instruments of competitive sourcing, with Congolese farmers as sidekicks in the show.

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Endnotes

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[1] *International Development: Value Added Through Private Sector Engagement*: Hearing before the Committee on Foreign Relations United States Senate, 150th Cong. (2017) Full text and video available online at: https://www.foreign.senate.gov/hearings/international-development-value-added-through-private-sector-engagement-050417r ; last accessed 20 June 2020.
[2] There are over 31,000 Starbucks stores globally, of which 15,000 in the US. https://www.statista.com/statistics/218366/number-of-international-and-us-starbucks-stores/ ; last accessed 7 September 2020.
[3] Email promotional for a video featured in the ECI newsletter sent on October 30, 2017, available online at: http://www.easterncongo.org/about-drc/newsletters/detail/37 ; last accessed 15 August 2019. For direct link to video. https://indi.com/98v9t , last accessed 3 June 2020.
[4] https://1912pike.com/perseverance-community-commitment-produce-elegant-coffee/, last accessed 10 January 2019.
[5] The project is called 'Speciality coffee from Kivu and Ituri, DRC', but we refer to it in short as 'Rikolto' hereafter. See https://www.rikolto.org/en/project/speciality-coffee-kivu-and-ituri-drc ; last accessed 9 September 2020.
[6] While in their original contribution Richey and Ponte (2011) referred to Brand Aid as a development financing instrument, in subsequent work they have expanded it to also cover development interventions and projects on the ground (see Richey and Ponte 2014).
[7] Sales of (STARBUCKS)RED coffee during Product RED campaign periods have led to donations of over $14 million to the Global Fund to help finance HIV/AIDS prevention, education and treatment programs in Africa (see https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/starbucks-red, last accessed 10 January 2019 for earlier work on RED see Magubane 2008 and Youde 2009). Similarly, another Starbucks company, Ethos Water,[7] links the purchase of bottled water with the water crisis in developing countries, supported by celebrity humanitarians like Matt Damon (for critical examinations of the Ethos Water campaign, see Hawkins 2015 and Harris, J, 'Ethics in a Bottle: How Peter Thum broke the Rules to Build a Charitable – and Profitable – Company'. November 5 2007, http://money.cnn.com/2007/10/31/smbusiness/Ethos.fsb/index.htm?postversion=2007110109 last accessed 24 July 2018).
[8] We had to assure all of these respondents full anonymity. We have extensive experience in interviewing elites in the political and business realms, so we are aware that the views of those directly involved in *Kahawa Bora* and other initiatives reflect their own involvement in the sector. However, we interviewed a wide range of individuals whose perspectives, needs, types of involvement and historical trajectories in the projects we understood. Thus we are confident that the triangulation of these different forms of data provides sufficient foundation for our analysis. Also, and somewhat surprisingly, some of the most critical insights have actually emerged from individuals that were key players within the various organizations that were directly involved. Additional contextual work during this time was also drawn from collaboration by one of the authors with (names withdrawn; references withdrawn) and from a previous research project by the other author on East African coffee value chains (references withdrawn).
[9] This research collaborator has an ongoing career in the area and asked to be thanked anonymously. This part of the fieldwork concentrated on the southern part of Lake Kivu, including the mainland Northwest of Bukavu as far as Kalehe and Idjwi Islands in the lake, both north and south.
[10] The data collected included nine key informant interviews with personnel that are or were involved in these projects at all levels and included representation from government, business, donor and cooperative sectors. Interviews were conducted with the management teams of the selected cooperatives; 10 separate focus groups were held with men and women coffee farmers in each location; and participant observation was conducted at six coffee washing stations. Tense local relationships restrict our ability to name or use details that would allow our informants to be identified. However, as much as possible we try to describe their functions and the level at which they participated in the initiatives compared.
[11] Not all these actors and partnerships are strictly 'new', as they may have taken new configurations or are operating in new ways. Also, the interaction between these new actors and the development field is multidirectional, as they are just as likely to conform to the norms and practices of the field as they are to change it (Fejerskov et al., 2016).
[12] Some observers actually argue that in places like the World Bank and USAID, the GVC approach has often been applied as a substitute for the 'market' mantra of the 1980s and 1990s (Pietrobelli & Staritz, 2013). Indeed, the case studies in this paper provide examples of how the term 'GVC' has been delinked from critical approaches explaining power dynamics along a value chain (Ponte, 2019) and has been instead used as a label for a particular type of VCDI that is jointly for-profit and non-profit.

[13] Specialty coffee has been growing healthily in the past few decades with the multiplication and increasing market value of single-origin, 'direct-trade', high quality, 'unique' coffees and of coffees bearing various kinds of 'sustainability' standards, certifications (Fairtrade, Utz, Rainforest Alliance, organic, 'bird-friendly, 'shade-grown', 4C) (Levy, Reinecke, & Manning, 2016; MacGregor, Ramasar, & Nicholas, 2017; Manning, Boons, von Hagen, & Reinecke, 2012) and addressing a variety of 'just causes' through the involvement of celebrities (Budabin, 2019). Coffee consumers can now choose from (and pay dearly for) hundreds of combinations of coffee variety, origin, roasting, brewing and grinding methods, flavouring, packaging, sustainability content, ethical profile and ambience of consumption. This involves constantly 'discovering' and bringing formerly unknown coffee origins to the consumer, and/or selling the physical property of these coffees with a 'just cause', preferably with the involvement of a celebrity (citation removed).
[14] Interview 18, 16 October 2017.
[15] Interview 18, 16 October 2017. See also Ponte and Grabs (2019) and https://stories.starbucks.com/press/2019/starbucks-reserve-roasteries-around-the-world/
[16] https://news.starbucks.com/news/actor-ben-affleck-acknowledges-starbucks-for-transforming-lives-in-congo 30 March 2015. U.S. Senate Subcommittee of the Committee on Appropriations, 2015, Hearing "State, Foreign Operations, And Related Programs Appropriations for Fiscal Year 2016, March 26. Full text available at: https://archive.org/stream/gov.gpo.fdsys.CHRG-114shrg59104631/CHRG-114shrg59104631_djvu.txt last accessed 3 June 2020.
[17] Harper McConnell, TedX talk entitled, 'Can Aid Work Itself Out of Business' posted on December 2, 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ayuyledgnJw, accessed 25 Sept. 2019.
[18] Ibid.

[19] ECI also ran another Brand Aid-type marketing campaigns – involving chocolate made with DRC cocoa. This involved the company Theo Chocolate, which since 2013 has been selling two 'Congo Bars' ('Pili Pili Chili' and 'Vanilla Nib'), made in Seattle with 100 percent DRC cocoa. According to the Theo web site, 'A portion of proceeds are donated to ECI, with the potential to positively impact more than 20,000 people living in Eastern Congo' (Richey & Budabin, 2016, p. 38). As with most initiatives of this kind, the actual details on how much funding is generated through the cause-related marketing of these products is vague and typically relates to a donation determined after profit is made (Richey & Budabin, 2016; Richey & Ponte, 2011).
[20] http://www.ico.org/projects/countryprofiles/countryprofileDEMREPofCONGOe.pdf, p.3
[21] Ibid., p. 5.
[22] http://www.ico.org/new_historical.asp?section=Statistics
[23] A reduction in the official tax on coffee exports had been negotiated, but was not yet enforced at the local level at the time of fieldwork. See also http://www.ico.org/projects/countryprofiles/countryprofileDEMREPofCONGOe.pdf
[24] Interview 19, 17 October 2017.
[25] Interview 19, 17 October 2017.
[26] Email correspondence with the authors, 23 October 2019.
[27] *Kahawa Bora* is a lead-firm oriented partnership linking a traditional VCDI with the branding and marketing contributions of a celebrity. However, there have been several other VCDIs in Eastern Congo, which are much less dependent on lead firms (or on celebrity humanitarianism). All of these projects involve a dedicated but relatively minor coffee buyer, an NGO/ cooperative that provides training and technical support, a cooperative that handles farmer groups and processing, and an external donor that provides support. Conspicuously absent are a celebrity and a global lead firm. The existing literature documents three other coffee projects operating in the Kivus as of the mid-2010s (Kolk & Lenfant, 2015): (1) in Butembo (North Kivu), which included Soprocopiv (a cooperative), Solidaridad (an NGO), Schluter (a small coffee buyer), and DGIS (Dutch development agency); (2) in Minova (near the border between North and South Kivu), which involved Sainsbury (a large UK supermarket chain, which is however not a major coffee buyer per se), Sopacdi (a cooperative), Twin (an NGO that also owns a trading company, 'Twin Trading'), and DFID (UK development agency); and (3) in Lemera, Bikokoboko, and Mutamabala (South Kivu), which involved Twin and Twin Trading, UGEAFI (a cooperative), and Oxfam Novib (an NGO). Kolk and Lenfant (2015) report that prices paid to farmers involved in these initiatives (even when adjusted to changes in international prices) increased dramatically between 2007/09 and 2011. Thus, we can see that when Starbucks entered the scene with its Brand Aid form of VCDI, the coffee sector in Eastern Congo was already under revitalization by a variety of more traditionally- organized development partnerships.
[28] These two projects are not as directly comparable to *Kahawa Bora* and the Rikolto project; therefore, we do not cover them in detail here. We researched an initiative called Women Rise for Development, run by a group of farmers who have recently formed a new cooperative in Kabare on the mainland. This cooperative has not yet been supported by a project, and has not yet constructed any infrastructure. Its members have been selling café ordinaire (semi-washed coffee), which provides a comparative element on prices vis a vis the washing stations, and on the way the regular coffee trade interacts with farmers. We also researched a project run by Rebuild

Women Hope, a Bukavu-based umbrella body for three cooperatives, two of which are on Idjwi island. RWH has been working on Idjwi since 2013, where two washing station were constructed. Its first coffee was produced and exported in 2016.

29 U.S. Agency for International Development, Global Development Alliance (GDA), Annual Program Statement (Aps), APS No: APS-OAA-16-000001, p. 30.

30 Interview 1, 8 June 2016.

31 Interview 5, 9 June 2016.

32 WCR is a spin-off of an academic research institute at Texas A&M, where Edwin Price (a co-founder of WCR) holds the Howard Buffett Chair of Development Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

33 The Howard G. Buffett Foundation Annual Report 2016, p.1 accessed online at http://www.thehowardgbuffettfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/2016-HGBF-AR-for-Web.pdf

34 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

35 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

36 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

37 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

38 Notes from fieldwork for the EC Coffee Study, page 3, 12 December 2017.

39 Follow-up skype conversation on key informant interviews 2,9 from fieldwork in South Kivu, 25, January 2018.

40 Interview 20, 9 November 2017.

41 Notes from fieldwork for the EC Coffee Study, page 2, 12 December 2017.

42 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

43 Interview 18, 16 October 2017.

44 https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/sourcing/coffee. Starbucks is also investing in washing stations and the Starbucks Global Farmer Fund that provides loans to farmers in 13 countries including DRC (see https://www.starbucks.com/responsibility/community/farmer-support/social-development-investments)

45 Catholic Relief Services (DRC), Kivu Specialty Coffee "*Kahawa Bora* Ya Kivu". Final Report submitted to USAID DRC Mission.

46 Catholic Relief Services (DRC), Kivu Specialty Coffee "*Kahawa Bora* Ya Kivu". Final Report submitted to USAID DRC Mission.

47 The new phase of the project also involves efforts to make it logistically easier to handle the coffee – instead of exporting green coffee from Goma, they are attempting to convince the government to let them process parchment coffee into green coffee at a curing plant in Rwanda, which is located close to the DRC-Rwanda border and thus easily accessible from Bukavu. Interview 20, 9 November 2017.

48 While in 2015 and 2016 cooperatives in the *Kahawa Bora* project had won the *Saveur du Kivu* competition, in 2017 and 2018 they were not placed, suggesting that their coffee was below 82 in score. This is surprising, as fully washed coffee from the shores of Lake Kivu would normally be expected to score 84 and above, up to around 90. Sources: http://www.saveurdukivu.org and https://www.facebook.com/AFCACOFFEE/posts/2216529021738318?comment_tracking=%7B%22tn%22%3A%22O%22%7D

49 Catholic Relief Services (DRC), Kivu Specialty Coffee "*Kahawa Bora* Ya Kivu". Final Report submitted to USAID DRC Mission.

50 The CFC contributed USD 1.4 million. USD 700,000 of this contribution was provided by the OPEC Fund for International Development (OFID). Co-financing was also provided by Belgium's Directorate General for Development Cooperation (DGD) and Dutch NGO Cordaid.

51 The smallholder coffee development model based on micro-washing stations was the approach promoted by a coffee consultant to Rikolto, Andy Carlton.

52 https://icocoffeeorg.tumblr.com/post/91849401860/reviving-the-coffee-sector-in-the-democratic

53 See https://www.rikolto.org/en/project/speciality-coffee-kivu-and-ituri-drc#tab-investors for an overview.

54 https://vredeseilanden-wieni.netdna-ssl.com/sites/default/files/paragraph/attachments/ve_annualreport_2016_def2.pdf

55 Annual Report Common Fund for Commodities 2016 https://issuu.com/symsign/docs/cfc_ar_2016

56 http://www.ico.org/new_historical.asp, Jan-Dec averages for 'Other Milds'

57 https://www.colruytgroup.com/nl/nieuws/colruyt-group-prefinanciert-oogst-van-2200-koffieboeren-uit-noord-kivu-waardoor-de-export-van

58 We cannot yet assess the effects of the new attention brought to one of its cooperatives, Kawa Kabuya, by Ben Affleck.

59 Source: https://www.facebook.com/EasternCongoInitiative/posts/another-big-win-for-congolese-coffee-farmers-thank-you-starbucks-falcon-coffees-/1466555253383969/

60 Source: https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/05/opinion/affleck-eastern-congo-initiative.html

[61] Similar inequalities in managing the extraction of value in 'Third Wave' coffee markets has been documented in Guatemala (Fischer, 2019), where smallholder farmers lack the social and cultural capital to benefit from consumers' desire for 'artisanal coffee,' as these brand attributes are developed by roasters, marketers and baristas for their own benefit.
[62] Interview 18, 16 October 2017. In November 2019, Starbucks opened its sixth Reserve Roastery in Chicago (joining those in Seattle, Shanghai, Milan, New York and Tokyo). https://stories.starbucks.com/press/2019/starbucks-reserve-roasteries-around-the-world/
[63] Strategic sourcing has become so important for Starbucks, that it has recently set aside USD 20 million to support 8,000 farmers in four Latin American countries in view of the current (as of late 2019) coffee price crisis (see https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-03/starbucks-pays-farmers-20-million-more-as-coffee-crisis-deepens).
[64] 'ECI Senior Director Harper McConnell explores the impact non-profits can have in the business world through managing risks to create economic opportunity in emerging economies.' Harper McConnell TEDx talk: Can Aid Work Itself Out of Business? Posted: December 02, 2015.