

Juslin Tatu Jonas, Kitambuka

In 2006 I planted coffee for the first time. I'd wanted to plant coffee before, but I was waiting for my husband to come home and help because all the spraying and mulching and pruning is hard work for women.

My husband's name was Jonas Mamba. He farmed cassava, beans and bananas, but had not planted coffee. We married in 1981. That year, I finished primary school, but I didn't get into secondary school, so I went back home. If I had gone to secondary school, I wanted to become a nurse, but instead I got married. I met Jonas here in the village coming from the market; it took a few days for us to get to know each other, and then I said, "Let's go!" This was before my parents even knew about him.



Over the next twelve years we had five children. Sadly two died, but Juma, Flora, and Onesta survived. In 1995, when our youngest was only two, my husband left to find work on the sisal plantations in Tanga¹. He never sent me a letter or news of any sort, and I didn't hear anything about him until nine years later when news came that he had died in Tanga.

When I heard my husband had died and I realised I was alone, I knew I couldn't do anything without coffee. It's all very difficult, and my coffee is not yet producing very well but I am just about managing. I have 137 coffee trees, and last year I harvested around fifty kilograms of coffee cherries.

Coffee is good, because in difficult times, I can ask my neighbours for help and use coffee as some sort of collateral. Before I planted coffee, I would have to go to Burundi² to work as a day labourer in the cassava fields to get money.



I think that having coffee and bananas are the best things in my life, but my real happiness lies in seeing my children alive, and knowing that two of my children have gone to school and can read. These are the best things.

¹ Tanga is a town on the coast over one thousand kilometres from Kitambuka

² The border with Burundi is less than twenty kilometres from the village.