

## Menas Kombas, Longa

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There's been a great deal of improvement in our coffee production. When you hear that Mbinga coffee is high quality, it's because of this - we are our own experts and we do exactly what we have been taught, without being pushed around. My coffee used to be class 6, but now it's class 4<sup>1</sup>.

If you walk around my farm you will see both the old and the new. I have over two thousand of the traditional tall coffee trees, as well as over one hundred trees of TaCRI's new varieties. I'm also introducing the new hybrid varieties by stumping and grafting onto my old trees. But if you stump and graft all your trees at once you'll be poor for the next two years<sup>2</sup> so I'm not doing them all at the same time, and I'm planting the new cloned seedlings trees in between the rows of traditional trees.



A farmer also needs animals in order to get manure. I have two cows - a mother and a calf - five pigs and a goat. This is my manure factory! They all produce manure and I use very little artificial fertilizer; just when it's necessary.

I use environmentally friendly methods of pest and disease control. The bottles you can see tied to my coffee trees contain alcohol: this attracts the harmful insects and when they get into the bottle they die. The beneficial insects don't like the smell so they won't go in there. I also grow trees on the farm that are natural herbicides and insecticides, such as the small flowering tree we call utupa. We spray the leaves of the traditional coffee trees with a mixture of utupa leaves, soap and water as an insecticide. It's not an artificial chemical, and doesn't spoil the taste of the coffee and it's necessary as the traditional varieties are so vulnerable to disease.

I'm a member of the Muungano group of farmers, which has over two hundred members. As district chairman it's my role to teach my fellow farmers what I know about coffee production and animal husbandry, and it is a big responsibility. Before I can teach others I must first be a successful farmer myself: I can't pass on knowledge that I don't have. If

I am successful then people will see I am fit to be a leader. I work hard to be successful at farming: I go through all the farming literature and learn the latest methods. For example, I'm learning about irrigation because I think rainfall may not be adequate in the future because of the destruction of trees. I teach the canalling system of watering, which was the way my grandparents provided water for the home, and I've adapted it to irrigate the farm.

We also have to be willing to receive advice from experts. Before, when an expert came to the area, the farmers used to run away - they didn't want their mistakes pointed out to them. But now the farmers appreciate the education and training they receive and know that if they don't make good use of the advice, they'll be poor.

I was born here in Longa village, Mkumbi ward, in 1958. After finishing primary school I began training as a mechanic at the Roman Catholic mission trade school. Unfortunately I wasn't able to complete my training: after just three months, my father asked me to come home, and I started to work as a mechanic and carpenter. My father was a farmer and didn't understand the value of education, that's why he brought me back. Later I decided to become a farmer myself and the results are here for you to see.

My wife, Judith Kapinga, and I have four children - three boys and a girl. One of our sons helps on the farm here and the other two are farming elsewhere. Our daughter Assumpta is still at school, and hasn't decided what she'll do. When a child goes to school it's for their benefit and they can choose their own path. My wife is an expert on the farm. As chairman of the farmer's group I often have to travel, and when I'm not here she takes care of everything. We don't have any special agricultural equipment so we rely on our brains and hard work.

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<sup>1</sup> Coffee beans are differentiated by size into grades, and by quality into classes, which cross cut grades. Grade A and AA beans are larger and divided into class 1 (best) through 9 (worst), whereas smaller Grade B is divided into classes 3 through 11. Class 5 is fair average quality for Grade A and AA beans.

<sup>2</sup> When you graft the new variety onto the old, it takes a couple of years before the graft produces a crop.