



‘My wish is to promote coffee consumption among producers in rural Kenya’ - the story of a Green to Grow entrepreneur

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For 51-year-old Simon Gakinya, becoming a coffee entrepreneur and enthusiast was not by chance or mere coincidence. The interest grew from a tender age in the highlands of Kenya’s central region, Murang’a County. Simon’s parents were small scale farmers, and one of the crops they grew was coffee. During school holidays,

Simon would spend most of his time taking care of the coffee bushes, and during harvesting season, he would accompany his parents to the wet mill. This involvement ignited his love for agriculture. 'When I went to university, I opted for an agricultural course on farm output processing. Out of the available options, I specialized in coffee.' Says Mr. Simon, now the owner of a coffee processing firm called Mt. Kenya Specialty Tea and Coffee.

In 2019, three years after Simon and his wife established this company, he joined the Green to Grow project. He observes that this was an interesting opportunity for him to not only promote sustainable coffee farming and processing but also make this beverage available to both local and international consumers. 'Green to Grow has opened up my mind and exposed me significantly. I have 2,000 coffee bushes and have gained valuable knowledge on climate-smart agriculture. This is something I am practicing and disseminating to community members.' Says Simon, who is also a licensed coffee taster in Kenya.

The overall objective of the Green to Grow project is to contribute to reducing the environmental footprint of Kenya's Micro Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in agribusiness. The intervention is specifically planned to focus on mango, dairy, and coffee food value chains, including strengthening their ability to compete in local and international markets.

'To promote domestic coffee consumption, I roast coffee and take it to rural farmers for them to enjoy the drink in its highest possible quality. It is amazing that most families grow coffee but have never tasted it!' Says Simon. This strategy ensures that as a processor, Simon can demonstrate the quality of their output and build sustainability in the supply through this relationship management.

Alongside other agricultural commodities, coffee business has faced market challenges in the recent past. For Mt. Kenya Specialty Tea and Coffee, the most

pronounced has been the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic which has negatively affected his coffee enterprise production and sales. ‘The cessation of movement and physical distancing measures have affected us. Hotels have temporarily ceased operations and thus not buying any coffee from us. Kenyans are also spending carefully due to the uncertain economic times. Besides, the closure of airports means that we cannot export our coffee to other countries.’

On the flip side, Mr. Simon is using his days under the lockdown and recession to take care of his coffee bushes, to improve the quality and quantity of coffee to be harvested during the next season.

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