

We're nuts about Fairtrade

Why? Because Fairtrade has now reached nut producers in some of the poorest areas of Mozambique.*

Moises Raposo has a quiet and gentle nature; yet talking to him you immediately get a sense of the dignity and determination which has driven him on the long journey out of poverty for himself and thousands of his fellow nut farmers in Mozambique.

The journey began in 2003 when he came to London, on the advice of an American charity, to investigate Fairtrade. Moises says, "The main issue was linkage between farmer's associations and international markets."

He was put in touch with Twin Trading, the people behind Cafédirect and Divine chocolate.

In the intervening years TWIN has brought together other small scale nut farmers, like Moises and his colleagues in Mozambique, from Malawi, Bolivia, Nicaragua, Brazil, Peru, Kerala and El Salvador who lacked market information and technical expertise to export their own crops. They had limited infrastructure, limited inputs and poor access to capital to buy nuts from small holder farmers.

By forming an International Nut Producer Co-operative (INC) Twin has facilitated a dramatic shift in the influence of farmer co-operatives and associations with the launch of a new Fairtrade nut company called LIBERATION FOODS CIC (Community Interest Company – a business for the benefit of a community interest; in this case the INC) in which the nut producers through the INC have a 42% shareholding.

The company in Mozambique is called IKURU and has its headquarters in Nampula. Moises explained that 21 farmer's associations, created the company and represent 44 farmer's unions which, in turn, represent 8,500 individual farmers. These farmers are located in 3 main areas in Niassa, Nampula and North Zambezia. Moises glows with pride and satisfaction as he tells me that they are the only farmers' association company certified as Fairtrade and organic producers in Mozambique – and his, the only company exporting groundnuts (peanuts) from Mozambique to the UK. IKURU has also started to export Fairtrade cashews.

Explaining his original strategy for seeking out Fairtrade, Moises says, "It was for the benefit of the premiums to develop social programmes such as schools, hospitals and infrastructure." Excitedly he tells me that the stake holders are now full of hope with many plans for the future.

One of the first things they will do with the premium is to build warehouses so that they can increase volume and diversify products. It also gives them the opportunity to store and negotiate better prices. For the future IKURU will be investing in processing facilities in order to achieve the EU market standard. They will also consolidate their ICS (internal control system) for Fairtrade and Organic certification in three commodities; cashew nuts, sesame seed and peanuts.

Speaking of their plans to build schools Moises points out that these will be for the adults too, as they want to share in the education process so that they can better understand the running of the company.

The farmers have also identified water as a priority, and they want to bring in new technologies and promote organic techniques and products.

And when I asked, “What will Fairtrade mean to you personally, Moises?” Almost surprised that I should ask, he replied simply, “Better prices – and a more normal life for my family.”

Fran Chandler interviewed Moises Raposo in London, September 2007

* The Diocese of London is linked with Mozambique through the Angola London Mozambique Association.
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