

Producer Profile: Kuapa Kokoo Cocoa Farmers Union

When internal marketing of cocoa was liberalized in Ghana in 1993, a group of farmers led by Nana Frimpong Abrebrese established Kuapa Kokoo as a farmer's cooperative to work at improving the social, economic and political well-being of 35,000+ farmers and their families.

Cocoa is the mainstay of the Ghanaian economy. The market is highly regulated and there are only 27 licensed cocoa buying companies in the country, including Kuapa Kokoo. In the face of competition from mega-international corporations, the cooperative seeks to develop itself into a formidable farmer-based organization capable of mobilizing quality cocoa products, improving the livelihood of members, and satisfying customers.

They have invested in corn mills and palm oil extractors, training in soap making, batik and more to provide alternative means of livelihood for farmers during the off-season. Women are at the center of their program, since they believe that "an empowered woman means an empowered family."



Credit: Phil Groot

Credit: Fair Trade Federation

Rwandan Cooperative Helps Business, Environment & Women's Employment

Founded in 2000, The Dukunde Kawa Cooperative (Musasa) cultivates its high quality coffee near a mountain gorilla habitat in central Rwanda. The coop produces high-end coffee for the international market and employs a predominantly female workforce.

In 2003, the cooperative built a washing station with funds provided by the Rwandan Ministry of Defense. In exchange for this support, Dukunde Kawa now donates 10 percent of its net profits annually to fund the construction of other washing stations throughout Rwanda.

Fair Trade has enabled the Dukunde Kawa Cooperative to establish various social and productive programs including a tree rehabilitation initiative, long-term credit programs for coop members, new homes, and bicycles to ease the transportation of coffee cherries to the central station.

Credit: Kaare Niemose



The complex world of Fair Trade can be clarified further with some illustrative producer stories and business numbers.

Fair Trade Resource Network

FTRN's mission: the Fair Trade Resource Network (FTRN) seeks to improve people's lives through Fair Trade alternatives by providing information, leadership, and inspiration. FTRN gathers, develops, and disseminates educational resources to people and organizations interested in the movement to build a more just and sustainable world through Fair Trade.

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Credit: Global Mamas



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Credit: MacroSun International

Fair Trade Helps Children Find Love

One particular artisan family in Nepal, Nanda and her husband Ganesh, have used Fair Trade to uplift themselves as well as many disadvantaged children. The couple makes traditional Nepali drums and other instruments that MacroSun International has sold both retail and wholesale for years. Nanda had herself come from an extraordinarily painful childhood, and had always had the vision to help children who faced challenges like she faced as a child - without parents or educational opportunity. She shared this vision with friends working with MacroSun in the U.S. This vision ultimately led to the creation of "Mitrata-Nepal" ("mitrata" means "friendship" in Nepali). Mitrata has, for nearly ten years, provided food, shelter, education, and perhaps most importantly, a loving home for nearly 100 children in and around the Kathmandu Valley. Fair Trade helped transform Nanda's vision into reality.

Producer Stories

Women Improve Their Status by Acquiring Skills

Sharda creates cosmetic and sling bags with intricate bead work, key chains made of tiny beads, pot holders with tiny bead decorations, and other home decor items at a cooperative called Sahaj, in the Dahod district of Gujarat, India. This cooperative started some years ago by volunteers who first got to the area trying to look for a solution to water/irrigation problems. They realized they could do so much more for the people if they empowered them to make and sell crafts.

Sahaj's mission is: "socio-economic empowerment of the woman through art and craft based activities to secure her position in society where she can think independently, become a role model for future generations, and above all not have to prove herself because of her gender." To achieve this goal, this organization trains and empowers tribal women groups with vocational education, helping them create functional products and make a living. The group has grown to include more than 2,700 tribal artisans from 52 different villages of the area.

Income for the women in this cooperative increased from an average of 500-1000 rupees per month to 3000-4000 rupees per month. Women have also gained social status within their family, community, and various government and banking institutions. Thanks to the success of the program, men started joining and now make up 10% of the group.



Photo courtesy of Handmade Expressions

Credit: Handmade Expressions

Cocoa Cooperative with 9000 Members in the Dominican Republic Builds Capacity for Sustainable Business

Many of the Dominican Republic's small farmers still struggle to survive. Founded in 1988 and a participant in the Fair Trade system since 1995, the Conacado cooperative aims to generate work and income for disadvantaged groups. Conacado has about 9,000 members that receive a majority of their income from cacao. Fair Trade provides added support for farming methods that are safe for the environment and public health.

Fair Trade also ensures a higher minimum price, long-term contracts and access to credit. Most farmers do not have savings and face extreme difficulty securing loans, while the government has very limited means for aiding these farmers.

With the higher price from Fair Trade, sales have provided the cooperative with enough income to meet basic expenses and invest in the future. In the wake of the massive destruction of Hurricane George in 1998, the importance of Fair Trade revenues was clear, as the communities were able to rebuild.

Fair Trade has helped the cooperative to organize workshops to teach farmers how to improve fermentation techniques, expand sustainable growing methods, increase productivity, and participate more actively in the cooperative.



Credit: Global Exchange

Visually Impaired Woman in India Finds Lifeline in Fair Trade

For artisans of Blue Mango, a Fair Trade workshop based in Chennai in south India, their work is often a lifeline. One artisan, Bothumani, has been visually impaired since birth. Suffering from poverty & hunger, she found an opportunity to empower herself at Blue Mango, which focuses on employment for marginalized women: widows, the abused, abandoned or physically or mentally disabled, and those affected by HIV/AIDS. Blue Mango facilitates training, employee ownership and empowerment, and produces silk and cotton bags, pillows, jewelry and ornaments. Bothumani found her niche, and became another example of a motivated woman lifting herself up through Fair Trade.

Credit: Ten Thousand Villages

Fair Trade Certified Tea in India Shows Substantial Benefits Over 15 Years

The Chamraj tea estate in Tamil Nadu, south India, had some of its tea certified in 1994 as some of the first Fair Trade Certified tea in the world. In 2009, the business produced 40,000 kg of green leaf and 10,000 kg of black leaf each day, nearly 8% of which were Fair Trade. Over 15 years the Fair Trade premium has bought a new school block with computers and laboratories, several school buses and a doubling of children in schools. Workers on tea estates are automatically housed, but when they retire they often become homeless. The premium has paid for an enhanced pension that enables former workers to build a new home. It has also paid for a doctor at the local hospital and for modern medical equipment, which is used by people from miles around. The conventional tea growers in the surrounding area are reported to be much worse off.



Credit: TransFair USA

Credit: TransFair USA

Market Access Brings Livelihood for Artisans in India

Ramlal Khatri was a very talented artisan from India, who followed environmentally friendly processes and only used natural dyes. But like many artisans, his lack of knowledge and access to a market made earning an income a struggle.

Meanwhile, Manish Gupta lived a very successful life in Austin, Texas, but felt unfulfilled. Following a trip to his homeland to see how he could help artisans, Manish decided to start a Fair Trade organization now known as Handmade Expressions.



Credit: Handmade Expressions

Manish partnered with several NGOs and artisan cooperatives to help them create high quality, hand-crafted goods. For Ramlal and his community, Handmade Expressions adapted their age-old techniques to develop modern, functional products. The company researched information on what products were selling in international markets, relayed this information back to the artisans, and designed a re-usable shopping bag and a laptop bag.

Credit: Fair Trade Federation

Marginalized Workers Gain Dignity at Winery in South Africa

Marie is the woman in charge at Stellar Winery, but life hasn't always been so sweet for her. Growing up in apartheid South Africa, Marie had to drop out of high school to help her family make ends meet. When her mother passed away unexpectedly, she was forced to take care of her younger siblings as well as four other orphans she raised as her own. To support these children she took a job as a domestic servant and eventually made her way over to the grape growing industry.

In the legacy of apartheid, many vineyard workers were paid less than \$2 a day, a wage with which they could not afford to support themselves or their families. Some farms even paid their workers in wine, with disastrous effects on the livelihoods and health of the community.

At Stellar Organics, north of Cape Town, people like Marie are demonstrating a new way to do business. Marie is the Farm Manager at an award-winning, organic vineyard that produces certified Fair Trade wine. Like the other workers here, she has a stable income, electricity and sanitary systems. Not only does Stellar comply with Fair Trade standards for workers wages and rights, but the organization also follows special programs put in place to combat post-apartheid inequality in South Africa. These programs mandate that workers own shares in the company, providing land and business ownership opportunities to disadvantaged farm workers.

Marie now owns a part of the successful company that she manages. Stellar has invested a portion of their proceeds into a worker-owned grape farm that supports a local elementary school and computer center for workers and their children. By investing in her community, Marie can help the outcome of children like these in ways she didn't have growing up.

Marie was even named the Sanlam National Farm Worker of the Year. The Sanlam National Farm Worker Award is very prestigious and seeks to recognize farm workers for their specialized knowledge and excellent work.



Credit: TransFair USA