

Coffee Chain Game

The life of a Fair Trade coffee farmer

Interview with Rosie Lembusi, a Fair Trade coffee farmer in Uganda



Helen Harrison, a Fair Trade advisor, visited Uganda with Christian Aid in October 2004. She met Rosie Lembusi, a coffee farmer who sells most of her coffee to CaféDirect, a Fair Trade coffee company. She spoke to Rosie and her daughter Irene about their lives.

Credit: Helen Harrison
Uganda: Rosie Lembusi, a Fair Trade farmer.

Rosie Lembusi is 50 years old and has six children. She has 100 coffee trees and like all the farmers in the area she grows the high-quality Arabica coffee. It takes her two days to cover all her trees, harvesting the beans that have turned from green to bright red. Rosie does this every three weeks until all the beans have been picked, and she usually gets around one kilogram of coffee per tree per year. As an organic farmer Rosie will get a top price for her coffee, but she had to work hard for three years before being certified organic. She gets a good price for her coffee.

Benefits of Fair Trade

Rosie said that since she has been part of the Gumutindo Fair Trade co-operative her financial position has improved, as she receives 500 shillings per kilo more than before. The co-operative guarantees its farmers 200 shillings above the market price and, the Fairtrade community premium from CaféDirect is 200 shillings per kilo, which goes towards community benefits as decided by the co-operative once the running costs of the co-operative have been met. CaféDirect gives its payment to the farmers in two parts, one payment on delivery and the second later in the year; this assists the farmers in organising their finances across the year.

Before Rosie joined the co-operative, she said she was getting too little money for her crop. It took a long time to be paid and sometimes the buyers cheated her. She decided to join the co-operative when she saw the benefits they were receiving. She was then given training in how to improve the quality of her coffee by using organic farming methods. 'Now I receive cash on delivery and I get a second payment later on too.' Rosie explained.

Rosie's improved income has meant she can pay for the school uniform and school books for Irene and Matrit who are among the 1,168 children at nearby Gumutindo Primary School. Primary schooling is free in Uganda since it received debt relief, but secondary schooling still has to be paid for. Rosie says she can also afford a few extra things for her home and family, but she still like to earn more to give her children a better education. She said would like a nicer house too.

Consumers of the world can help

Rosie is not happy that some of her friends are not able to be part of the cooperative. 'It is hard for them when the coffee price drops' she said. 'The government should give them loans.' However, this is not allowed under international trading rules. She hopes that a larger market for Fair Trade coffee will develop so that they can join.

Rosie thanked Christian Aid for working to get a better deal for all farmers, 'You are doing a wonderful job', she said. 'Farmers cannot reach the consumers of the world to ask them to help.'

Interview with Irene Lembusi, daughter of Fair Trade farmer, Rosie Lembusi



Helen Harrison interviewed Irene Lembusi, aged eight. Irene's mother, Rosie Lembusi sells her coffee to the Fair Trade company, CaféDirect.

Credit: Helen Harrison
Uganda: Irene Lembusi, daughter of a Fair Trade farmer.

Helen: Do you go to school?

Irene: Yes, I go to Gumutindo Primary School, and I am in P3.

Helen: Do you like going to school?

Irene: Yes, my favourite subject is maths.

Helen: Are there any chores that you have to do each day?

Irene: Yes, I have to get water from the borehole, and fetch firewood for cooking.

Helen: And what is your favourite game?

Irene: I enjoy skipping with my friends.

Helen: What does your mother do to earn money?

Irene: She grows coffee, and when it is dried she sells it to get money.

Helen: Do you know who she sells it to?

Irene: Yes, she sells it to a company that work with Fair Trade, and as a result she gets paid more money than she used to.

Helen: Wow, that must be good. What does your mother do with the extra money?

Irene: She is able to buy us school uniform, and school books. Also, when I am old enough, hopefully she will be able to afford to let me go to secondary school.

Helen: Would you have been able to go to secondary school if your mother wasn't getting paid by CaféDirect?

Irene: No, before my mother didn't earn very much money, so we were often hungry and I didn't have school uniform. My older brothers couldn't go to secondary school, but now they can.

Helen: Is there anything else that is good about your mother being involved with Fair Trade?

Irene: If we get sick, she is able to buy medicine for us to make us better, and also she has been shown a way to grow better coffee beans that sell for a better price if the Fair Trade people can't take them.

Coffee Chain Game: The life of an open-market coffee farmer

Interview with Lawrence Seguya - trying to make a living from coffee



Geoff Sayer from Oxfam went to Uganda to visit coffee farmers and find out about their situation. He met Lawrence Seguya, a farmer who has to sell his coffee on the open market. He and his family have been hit hard by the fall in coffee prices.

Credit: Geoff Sayer/Oxfam Coffee in Mpigi: Lawrence Seguya gesturing at the coffee bushes on his smallholding.

Geoff writes: We found Lawrence Seguya sitting on a bench with two neighbours outside his house in Migamba village, Kituntu subcounty. Behind Lawrence was his farm, the coffee bushes overgrown with weeds. The bushes were unpruned and the blackening cherries unpicked. Lawrence, like many of his neighbours, has given up tending his crop, defeated by the continuing fall in the price paid for coffee. All he has left to sell – and drink – is ‘pombe’ (banana beer).

Lawrence says, ‘We are redundant. This is the busy time, January, and we have nothing to do. This is the month when we should be busy. January and June should be our busiest months. I have three acres of coffee with bananas. About one in eight of the bushes is affected by wilt, but it’s the price that has brought us down. I can’t maintain the farm. I’ve abandoned it. I just pick the little that’s left, but even that’s not worth doing. I can’t employ any labour because there’s no money from the coffee. Everyone is abandoning their coffee. For cash I take the bananas (a variety only used for brewing), make beer and sell it.

‘It’s appalling. We can’t afford anything. We have no cash. There are no school fees. We can’t send children to hospital. We can’t buy sugar, salt, rice, oil, soap, paraffin. We can only eat the food we grow, maize, beans, cassava, sweet potatoes. Two of our girls have dropped out of secondary school. We can’t afford to take them back.

‘I blame the President ... and the open market. Everyone is free to set their price except me. Buyers can just set the price they want. Millers can just set the price they want. Exporters can just set the price they want. I’d like you tell people in your place that the drink they are enjoying is now the cause of all our problems. We buy the crop with our sweat and sell it for nothing. Six hundred, even 500 shillings would be enough for us. I could return my children to school. I could replace old bushes. If the price rose to 500 shillings today, I would pick these few berries. I would take on people to clear the weeds, because they would work for credit if they knew there would be a crop and a price of 500 shillings. If the price was there the young people would work in the coffee. Right now they just grow food, not coffee.’

Interview with Bruno Selugo – missing out on his education



Geoff Sayer from Oxfam spoke to Bruno Selugo, grandson of a coffee farmer, and found that he really wanted to go to school. Secondary schooling is not free in Uganda.

Bruno Selugo is the grandson of coffee farmer Peter Kafeluzi. The whole family has been hit hard by falling coffee prices.

Credit: Geoff Sayer/Oxfam

Coffee in Mpigi: Bruno Selugo, 17, opening up land among the coffee bushes on his family’s farm near Kituntu.

Though he was the fifth-born, Bruno Selugo (17) is the oldest survivor of 9 children. Bruno and brother Michael (15) have dropped out of secondary school because the family can no longer pay the fees.

The school, 3 km from their home in Kituntu subcounty, Uganda, has seen enrolment fall from 500 students in 1997 to 54 at the end of 2001. Almost all of the families in Kituntu depend on selling their coffee for an income. With world prices falling to record lows, many have abandoned the crop. Bruno keeps himself busy on his mother's farm, opening up land among the coffee bushes so that the family can sow vegetables. But he would rather be at school.

'If I can go to school, I want to study to go into business. I'd like to buy and sell, perhaps have a shop. But I can't be successful, I can't have a better future if I don't go to school. I will just be left here, growing a little food.

'I was sent home again and again from secondary school. They don't care, they just send you away if you don't have fees. When you arrive the teachers just tell you to go back home. They need the money for their salaries. For a while my mother would try to find some money, a few shillings at a time, and send me back with it after a week or so. This is the main coffee season. Everyone used to go to back school with the money from coffee. But now the money is not there. The price is so low people are not even picking the coffee.

'The last time there were about 30 of us sent home together, and since then I haven't been able to go back. Even that few shillings is not there. A lot of my friends have dropped out too. The number of students at the school is falling. We still owe money and that's why I can't go back. We would first have to pay the money we owe, and then find money for the next term.

'I wish the people who use our coffee could give us a better market. We can't survive like this. All I want is to go to school.'