



# Better market access for producers

A common goal through four Trade for Development Centre projects

*Bolivian farmers after receiving their organic certification © AOPEB*

What do Palestinian cooperatives, Peruvian loggers, Bolivian organic farmers and Congolese coffee growers have in common? They all look for a way out of poverty and conflict by strengthening their organisation and searching for markets for their improved products. To achieve that dream each of them received a real boost of the Trade for Development Centre.

## Commitment and potentiel

Agricultural cooperatives and producer groups in the South often have much in common: a genuine commitment and great potential, but also a clear lack of resources and market insights which obstruct the development of opportunities.

This is exactly where the Trade for Development Centre (TDC), a programme of the Belgian Development Cooperation, wants to make a difference and provide financial support. The TDC sees fair and sustainable trade as a powerful weapon in the fight against poverty and for sustainable development. Its project support is concentrated in three areas of the 18 Belgian Development Cooperation partner countries: strengthening the organisational power of small and medium-sized producer groups, improving the quality of their products and enhancing their knowledge of the local, regional or international market.

## Action !

Examples of specific actions within TDC projects:

- Training of managers to strengthen management competencies;
- Consultancy on the development and quality improvement of products;
- Participation in national and international trade fairs to present products and establish commercial relations;
- Support to fair trade or organic certification;
- Advice on opportunities such as the carbon credit market.

## Palestinians farmers

We zoom in on four organisations that we have supported over the past few years. Let us start with Palestine's West Bank. In 2006, the Fair Trade Development Centre (FTDC) was established with European support at Bethlehem University. The first actions of this centre focused on fair trade certification of Palestinian olive oil and access to the European fair trade market. Today, it mainly focuses on the many farmer cooperatives and small enterprises that form the backbone of the Palestinian economy but often lack the business skills and networks to make the most of their potential.

The TDC started to work with the FTDC in 2009 and extended its cooperation in 2014. "In a fragile context the FTDC has succeeded in helping often very vulnerable farmers cooperatives in several respects," says Steven De Craen, the TDC's Financial Support Officer. "The story of these cooperatives is one of the transition that needs to be made towards a more business-minded approach. When such approach generates stable and increased revenue, social aspects can also be strengthened."

## Step by step

The strategy is the same for each project: in view of them becoming role models for others, the FTDC selects certain cooperatives and coaches them through a series of stages. Training is key: at the University managers obtain a degree in 'cooperative management' and staff members are trained in accounting, stock management or marketing. Money is also made available for micro projects within each cooperative, for instance for the purchase of a fruit press or of a small cooling unit to preserve vegetables.

Earlier, participation to fair trade fairs and festivals showed that most Palestinian cooperatives are not yet ready to export their products. Elementary matters such as quality, presentation and packaging or the making of promotion materials have to be addressed first. Also, research showed that the inhabitants of Palestinian cities often have doubts about the quality and hygiene of local products. That is why it is essential to develop quality control procedures and to have products certified under the quality label of the Palestinian Authority.

Results are achieved step by step: Six supermarkets in Bethlehem now offer products of local cooperatives. For the next project there are plans to approach hotels and



Cooperations products in supermarket © FTDC

restaurants in the city's tourism district and to establish contacts with Palestinian wholesalers. Many other cooperatives have shown great interest, so it seems the approach can be rolled out further.

## Peruvian loggers

From Palestine we move to Peru, in particular to the Shipibo Conibo communities in the Amazon region. They traditionally live off the forest and from logging but middlemen pay very little for their timber. In 2005, with the help of the Peruvian NGO AIDER (Asociación para la Investigación y el Desarrollo Integral), they were the first indigenous communities to become FSC certified and there was hope this would bring economic improvement. But that did not work out. They were organisationally weak and unable to deliver the required quality and quantities. The potential was present, but the necessary basis was lacking.



Shipibo Conibo— loggers at work © Sebastien Bouhon/Bos+

At the request of BOS+, a Flemish NGO that promotes sustainable forestry, the TDC started funding a three-year project in 2010.

It started with a series of training session for community members in administration, accounting, strategic planning and marketing. Technical workshops were held in the field. But the most important action was doubtlessly the construction – with funds of the TDC and other donors – of a storage centre. Not only is timber gathered there, but it is also cured, sawn and processed, to keep the added value in the region.

Handicrafts and other forest or timber products from the communities can also be stored at the centre. To manage the centre as well as the sales, the five communities involved, with the help of AIDER, launched the first 'indigenous' business in Peru's Amazon region: Citeindigena (Centro De Transformación e Innovación Tecnológica Indígena).

## Unique asset

The first results are encouraging. The project created jobs, boosted awareness about sustainable forest management and provided communities with higher revenue. 10% of the revenue is invested in a community infrastructure fund to build schools and power lines. But there is still a long commercial way to go, partially because many Peruvian buyers are not willing to pay higher prices for certified timber and partially because the products do not sufficiently meet market demand as a result of which exports are a pipe dream.

To remedy this, Citeindigena, AIDER and BOS+ have plans for a bilingual website, a larger catalogue and, particularly, an in-depth national and international search for potential customers. "We have approved this follow-up project," says Steven De Craen, "because we want to give Citeindigena the opportunity to capitalise on their unique asset: certified timber of an indigenous business, which is unique to Peru where illegal logging is the rule rather than the exception."

## Bolivian Organic farmers

From Peru's Amazon region we go to Bolivia's altiplano, which is not only literally but also figuratively a step up. After all, Asociación de Organizaciones de Productores Ecológicos (AOPEB) is an organisation with a greater track record than the two previous ones.

It was established in 1991 and groups more than 60 producer groups from 9 departments. Its years of lobbying have borne fruit. In 1996 BOLICERT was established, which made organic certification for exports cheaper. In 2006 organic farming was recognised by law and in 2012 a first legal framework was created for a Participatory Guarantee System (PGS), a form of organic certification in which farmers within a producer group are controlled by their peers.



Organic products showcased © AOPEB

Local members of the organisation are trained to become 'evaluators' to carry out control and document all data, and in addition there are annual inspections by an independent inspectorate. This system opens the door for a domestic market of certified organic products of smallholders.

## Follow-up project

Recently, the TDC supported the start-up of a PGS in five communities in the country. The result is that at the onset of 2014 there were 108 evaluators on the road and 942 families were certified. Steven De Craen comments: "The PGS story in Bolivia is unique, but certification is only a first step. Now, the fight for a spot on the market can start. However, this has appeared to be very hard to achieve. That is why we decided to give more opportunities to this important process through a follow-up project.

AOPEB is fully focused on a short value chain, especially via local organic markets. Another opportunity is provided by school breakfasts. Bolivia's government wants children to have a healthy meal at school and producer groups are negotiating with local authorities about which products they can offer for this.

## Congolese coffee growers

For our last example we move to the heart of Africa, to the hills along Lake Kivu. The SOPACDI (Solidarité Paysanne pour la Promotion des Actions Café et Développement Intégral) cooperative recently won the sustainability prize of the Specialty Coffee Association of America for its leading role in the 'Congo coffee revival'. "Who would have ever thought so?" Joachim Munganga, the president of SOPACDI, cried out when delivering his acceptance speech.

Unbelievable indeed: SOPACDI operates in East Congo, a region that has been marked by war and violence for the past twenty years. The insecurity is such that farmers are sometimes forced to flee and abandon their coffee farms. When they do manage to harvest their crops, they are subject to blackmail by the few middlemen who venture into the region. Hundreds of farmers have drowned in the lake in attempts to sell their coffee crops in Rwanda.



Farmers are proud of their coffee and their cooperative © SOPACDI

## Fair trade

It was the Rwandan cooperative COOPAC that put SOPACDI in touch with NGOs and fair trade organisations. "Since then, the cooperative has made an impressive journey," confirms Steven De Craen, "thanks to the drive of people who fight for a future and with the help of their Arabica coffee, which really is of extraordinary quality."

In 2008, a first container was shipped to the English fair trade organisation Twin and hard work led to organic certification on top of fair trade certification. In 2011, Oxfam-Wereldwinkels introduced Lake Kivu coffee on the Belgian market and today the coffee is part of the fair trade circuit, from America to New Zealand.

The TDC also supported the organisation with a project that focuses mainly on boosting productivity. Since most coffee trees are from long before the civil war, investments were made in nurseries for young coffee shoots and shade trees.

Even though a new shoot only bears fruit after three years, productivity is already on the rise again thanks to training sessions on sustainable cultivation, which reached 3,000 members of the cooperative.

Because of price fluctuations on the global market it remains difficult for the cooperative to gain and retain the trust of its members. Considering the circumstances in the region – the years of warfare, the total absence of the Congolese government and the almost endemic poverty – the results are impressive: there are more and more members – some 5,600 right now – and with increasing numbers of containers sold the farmers' incomes are clearly on the rise. The significant fair trade premiums are partially invested in major washing installation and drying tables, and partially paid out to farmers.

"The export of coffee has undeniably created employment and generated revenue, and consequently brought hope. The best evidence is that former soldiers and rebels hand in their guns in exchange for coffee trees," concludes Steven De Craen.

**Palestinian farmers who see their products on the shelves of local supermarkets, Peruvian loggers who create the first 'indigenous' enterprise of the Amazon region, Bolivian organic farmers who regularly organise organic markets and Congolese coffee growers who ship their first containers of high-quality coffee: each of these stories shows how motivated people in the South are given opportunities to build a future via fair and sustainable trade with the help of the Trade for Development Centre.**



*With their sustainable wood production through the peruvian amazonian forest © Sebastien Bouhon/Bos+*

R.E: Carl Michiels, BTC Hoogstraat 147, 1000 Brussels



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