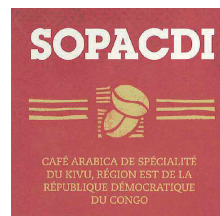


SOPACDI / OXFAM WERELDWINKELS

FAIR TRADE COFFEE FROM SOUTH-KIVU



The Democratic Republic of Congo has not witnessed the same expansion of fair trade as neighbouring countries such as South Africa, Kenya, Tanzania or Uganda have. This is mainly due to the violence that has thrown the country in a state of unrest. Yet, Congolese farmers are in a dire need of the advantages offered by fair trade certification systems.

Ethnic tensions, failing infrastructure, archaic equipment... smallholders experience huge problems supporting themselves and their communities. Such difficulties are especially noticeable in the coffee sector, which the nation's authorities recognize as a strategic one. In South Kivu, near the Rwanda and Uganda border, insecurity is such that farmers are sometimes forced to flee and abandon their plantations as they are ransacked by looters and militias. Every year, hundreds of coffee growers are drowning as they try to cross Lake Kivu to get to Rwanda where they hope to find buyers for their crops¹.

Thus, while fair trade initiatives are booming in neighbouring countries, fair trade actors (and in particular the certification agencies) consider DRC, one of the largest countries on the continent, too dangerous.

TODAY, THE ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT RUNS THROUGH KIVU

Things are changing now. In the province of South Kivu, a coffee co-operative, SOPACDI (*Solidarité Paysanne pour la Promotion des Actions Café et Développement Intégral*), has been involved for many years in an economic and social development process that is based on values of solidarity and sharing. It was founded in 2003 on the initiative of Joachim Munganga and with the support of COOPAC, a Rwandan cooperative that is Fairtrade certified since 2003². SOPACDI was created to stop the vicious spiral in which the region's smallholders were caught up.

Between the recurrent deterioration of their property, the inter-ethnic violence, the dramatic volatility of coffee prices and the blackmailing from the few traders who risk entering this area, the farmers of South Kivu were often forced to abandon their plantations and swelled the ranks of refugees or looters. To outsmart

such fate, SOPACDI established as a cooperative and started buying the crops of its 3000 some members to resell them at a better price and to set up collective development projects, with the ultimate goal of improving the living conditions of these thousands of poor families.

A NEW DEAL

Thanks to the partnerships concluded with COOPAC and Twin Trading, a British NGO, and COMEQUI, a Belgian not-for-profit organisation, the Congolese cooperative succeeded in establishing far more lucrative trade relations and significantly boosted the revenue of its members. Moreover, the organisation has invested in providing washing stations, warehouses and equipment for its coffee growers. The people in charge at SOPACDI have perfectly understood the need to work on the quality of the coffee beans and they have set up training programmes for coffee growers to promote the best techniques to do so.



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“The Fairtrade certification and the commitment of our partners are an enormous advantage. Thanks to them, we have been able to pay for agricultural services, to establish schools and dispensaries and to work at protecting soils and reforesting the coffee fields”.

Joachim MUNGANGA,
President of SOPACDI

1 | Source: Sarah IRVING, “Trying To Be Fair” - www.developments.org.uk/articles/trying-to-be-fair

2 | Source: “Fair and sustainable trade in Rwanda”. A brochure of the Trade for Development Centre of BTC – Available on www.befair.be.

AND NOW CERTIFICATION

Inspired by the example of COOPAC, the team of SOPACDI (and especially its president, Joachim Munganga) soon got interested in fair trade certification, a logical step in the global project of the cooperative. For many years, in spite of the contacts made with sector organisations, this ambition was stymied by the realities of South Kivu. When asked, certification agencies said that the security of their representatives could not be ensured. But also in this respect, things change. International players recognize the impact of the work done by SOPACDI, they see there is a (relative) drop in violence, and they assess the stakes of these initiatives in one of the most fragile regions of the world.

Now, new organisations gather on the sides of the Congolese cooperative. Thanks in particular to the commercial and financial support of Oxfam-Wereldwinkels and of Alterfin from Belgium, SOPACDI has been on track for fair trade certification since 2009. There have been many pitfalls though, but after a last series of improvements were brought in spring, on 21 July 2011 a significant part of SOPACDI's production was Fairtrade certified by FLO-Cert. The first containers of this coffee, which stands for solidarity and development, were delivered to Oxfam Wereldwinkels, which has distributed the coffee since September 2011 under the Lake Kivu brand name.



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CONTRIBUTION OF THE TRADE FOR DEVELOPMENT CENTRE OF BTC

This Fairtrade certification rewards the courage of the people in charge at SOPACDI who succeeded in turning a vision into reality. Yet many obstacles remain. Whereas membership continuously grows, the cooperative must also deal with threats such as the general aging of the coffee plantations, which go back to colonial times, and the deforestation-based deterioration of soils, which is at the basis of a continuous drop in productivity

At the request of Oxfam-Wereldwinkels, since the beginning of 2011, the Trade for Development Centre of BTC, the Belgian development agency, has focused on helping SOPACDI to deal with the situation. After a field study, BTC engaged 150,000 euros

through a large project that aims at improving the agricultural production system of the cooperative, consolidating the organisation and developing its commercial strength. Main actions are to renew the plantations, train the producers in sustainable management of the exploitations, strengthen the decision-making bodies, enhance the role of women, represent the cooperative and its products at trade shows and trade fairs. That way, progress is being achieved in many respects.

Find out more:
www.oxfamwereldwinkels.be
www.fairtrade.org.uk

IN A FEW YEARS, SOPACDI HAS OVERCOME MANY PROBLEMS AND PUT THOUSANDS OF VERY POOR FAMILIES ON THE TRACK OF DEVELOPMENT AND ACCESS TO THE WORLD.

KEY FIGURES

BTC contribution : 150,000 euros
 (75 % of the budget)

Beneficiaries : 1,500 smallholder producers



BTC TRADE FOR DEVELOPMENT WWW.BEFAIR.BE

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