

RAEK / OXFAM SOLIDARITY

FAIR TRADE COFFEE FROM SOUTH-KIVU



The Province of South Kivu in the Democratic Republic of Congo borders Rwanda and Burundi. It is three times the size of Belgium and is a hazardous region. South Kivu is one of the provinces that has most suffered from the successive wars that hit this region, where the law of the strongest still prevails and violence rules.

For a long time, the level of insecurity was such in this region that there was no possibility of development and that international efforts focused merely on emergency relief.

Today, even though these threats linger, initiatives are set up to support productive activities, especially in agriculture.

HOPE AND DANGERS

The development of the coffee sector, which the nation's authorities consider a strategic one, also is part of this evolution. But for many years, insecurity made life difficult for small-holder producers in the province, especially during the worst episodes of violence when they were forced to abandon their plantations that were ransacked by looters and militias. Over the last few years, hundreds of farmers of the region died from drowning as they tried to cross Lake Kivu to get to Rwanda hoping to find buyers for their coffee willing to pay a better price.

A STRONG HOLD ON THE FUTURE

The story of RAEK (*Regroupement des Agriculteurs et Eleveurs de Kabare*) is exemplary and highlights the perspectives that fair trade can bring for these populations. Since it was established in 1992, RAEK has defended the interests of smallholders in the Kabare territory and has supported their value chain activities (production, harvesting, processing and commercialisation). The organisation, which is very attached to soli-

darity between members, gained fame for its social commitment and especially its efforts in schooling children, improved housing and the fight against violence against women. The people in charge at RAEK support the development of a quality coffee culture, allowing for investments in new equipment, washing station for coffee beans, etc. thanks to which the organisation can increase the value of its production. Accessing these new resources however is a real challenge by itself. It took RAEK many years just to gather the necessary rolling funds to buy a significant share of the crops of its members and resell it at the right time at a good price.

OPEN DOORS TO THE WORLD

In the spring of 2010 the story of RAEK takes a major turn during a work visit of the Oxfam Solidarity team to Kabare. The team of the Belgian NGO was impressed with the efforts made by the Congolese organisation to improve the living conditions of its members. And they saw the productive potential of RAEK and the remarkable quality of its coffee beans.



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“RAEK is a small organisation but its commitment for the communities is remarkable. Despite its limited resources, RAEK has supported the schooling of hundreds of children in the region”.

Caroline CELIS,
mission officer for Oxfam
Solidarity Belgium

These first contacts were especially interesting as the people in charge at RAEK clearly affirmed their desire to “develop a more sustainable production and to obtain fair trade certification for exportation, thus benefitting from the development premiums to strengthen the social development of the local community.”¹

WITH THE SUPPORT OF THE TRADE FOR DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

A strong partnership ensued and Oxfam Wereldwinkels and Oxfam Solidarity from Belgium made a first assessment of the coffee sector. Aging plantations, which go back to colonial times, archaic production techniques, poor soils... With this state of affairs priority actions were highlighted to make most of the production of RAEK farmers.

A global development project was then set up to “improve the revenue and the living conditions of the producers of the Kabare territory through the ecological and sustainable production of Arabica premium coffee and better access to the fair trade markets”.² First, this programme aims at strengthening the production capacities of the organisation by implementing sustainable crop management techniques with the objectives of regenerating the soil, developing natural manure production and reducing the usage of chemical fertilisers and pesticides. Second, the processing procedures are reviewed: existing practices are improved both at central level as at the level of individual producers. Third, a series of actions is dedicated to the quality of the production with the implementation of a quality control system, which is a preliminary condition for future (fair, sustainable and/or organic) certifications. The two last goals of this project are to strengthen the organisational, administrative and commercial structure of RAEK, by training the farmers and by involving them in national and international coffee growers networks.

The project, called “Café du Kivu: Improved revenue and living conditions for farmers and their families through better market access” is being coordinated by Oxfam Solidarity since 2011 and benefits from financial support of the Trade for Development Centre of BTC, the Belgian development agency. This contribution of the Belgian government allows for the recruitment of technical staff, for the organisation of training workshops and for the construction of a first series of seed trays for more than 300,000 seedlings of various varieties.

As a pioneer of sustainable agricultural development in South Kivu, RAEK is only starting with having its production certified. In the long run, obtaining fair and/or organic certifications, along with improved quality coffee and a stronger relation with social importers will enable the sustainable involvement of the farmers’ organisation on the road to development.

Find out more:

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**THANKS TO RAEK AND ITS PARTNERS,
THE HORIZON IS FINALLY CLEARING FOR THOUSANDS
OF FARMERS IN SOUTH KIVU.**

KEY FIGURES

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

Beneficiaries : 585 smallholder
producers (2,100 at the end of
the project)

¹ | Source: Interview of Caroline Celis, Oxfam Solidarity Belgium, conducted on 2 October 2011.

² | Source: Idem.



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