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Syanyonja Artisan Miners' Alliance (SAMA)

Fair trade gold from Uganda

In eastern Uganda, in the remote Busia district, more than 600 farmers try to complement their meagre incomes with the exploitation of gold. Their hard work in open mining does not make them rich because of the untrustworthy middlemen they have to deal with. In addition, their activity is very polluting.

That was why Fairtrade Africa and the Ugandan NGO, **Environmental Women in Action for Development (EWAD)**, launched a project in the area in 2012. The goal was to bring together miners and to help them develop environmentally sound practices. Important steps in that process are reducing the use of mercury and terminating child labour practices. In addition, EWAD successfully lobbied with the Ugandan government to legalise small-scale mining activities.

A second specific result was achieved at the end of 2016: one of the miners' organisations, the **Syanyonja Artisan Miners' Alliance (SAMA)**, was

proud to announce it was Africa's first Fairtrade certified gold producer. Only three years earlier a few miners had created the organisation, determined to bring gold on the market in accordance with Fairtrade standards.

Looking for buyers

Currently, in Busia a middleman goes from village to village with scales on his bicycle to purchase gold. Through various other middlemen the gold eventually ends up with a buyer in Kampala, who can set the prices as he pleases. There is no better example to show that certification is not an end point, but only the beginning.

The people of EWAD, who have supported SAMA from the beginning, understand this very well. That is why they submitted a project request with BTC's Trade for Development Centre.

The goal of the project is threefold: better administration and management within the SAMA miners' organisation, sustainable production techniques (without mercury) and access to the international Fairtrade gold market.

The reasoning is clear. Only when SAMA succeeds in entering new markets and improves the living conditions in the mining communities thanks to the

Project in numbers

Duration: 12 months (as from end of 2016)

Total budget: € 97.664

TDC contribution: € 72.786

SAMA members: 10 women and 31 men
(reaching approximately 400 family members)

Fairtrade premiums can it be a catalyst for other artisanal and small-scale mining organisations (ASMOs) in the region and neighbouring countries.

Mercury-free gold

The project started at the end of 2016. To strengthen SAMA as an organisation, further efforts will be made in **training in financial and management skills**. A committee of five SAMA members will be assigned to follow up the project and ensure that local communities participate.

In view of **developing sustainable production techniques** the project invests in extra machines. The 'Gold Katcha' is already operational. It separates gold powder by using water. Also, mercury is avoided altogether. And so is firewood, which is a plus for the local fight against deforestation.

In the long run, solar energy will replace the oil used for the generators. Mercury-free production in particular is a huge step forward for the environment. In addition, this raises technology productivity and production costs remain low.



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Not only SAMA will benefit from the Gold Katcha, other ASMOs will also manage and use the machines.

Marketing coaching

A first hurdle in entering international markets has been taken, more specifically to obtain certification. Now, SAMA can contact buyers and jewellers in the fair trade circuit directly. To do so efficiently, the organisation must attract more marketing knowledge. The necessary **marketing coaching** will be provided for this. Field visits, knowledge sharing, seminars and campaigns must bring together producer groups from Uganda and Kenya on the one hand and on the other hand intensify the relations with the fair trade circuit.

Coaching has begun: the TDC coach developed a marketing strategy with the producers and the development of promotional materials is scheduled. A laptop, internet and related IT courses must enable SAMA to engage in digital marketing.

A bright future?

EWAD is committed in a national working group to implement the international Minamata Convention on Mercury and reduce mercury pollution in Uganda.

The NGO hopes that SAMA can be an example for the more than 600 artisanal miners from the region, both from an ecologic perspective – with the introduction of mercury-free production – and from a social perspective – once the first Fairtrade premiums are invested in the communities.

Lobby work with the Ugandan government has already led to legislation that officially recognises small-scale mining, which means the artisanal miners are not operating illegally anymore. The beginning of a bright future?

More info

The difficult search for fair trade gold (2015), published on www.befair.be.

Fairtrade International: <http://www.fairgold.org> <https://www.fairtrade.net/products/gold.html>, .

EWAD Uganda : <http://www.ewadmission.org/extending-fairtrade-gold-to-africa.html>.



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