

QUARTERLY RETURN 117 • AUTUMN 2020

KINDNESS & SOLIDARITY HAVE NO RESTRICTIONS

EMPOWERING WOMEN COFFEE FARMERS IN RWANDA

COCAGI Femmes is a coffee initiative, set up to recognise the skill and precision used by women farmers.

CHOOSING FAIRTRADE HONEY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

A Mexican honey producer shares how honey adulteration is threatening the livelihoods of farmers.

STORIES OF HOPE FROM ACROSS THE GLOBE

Now over six months into the pandemic, restrictions are lifting and markets reopening, leaving producers and buyers facing new challenges.

[SHARED-INTEREST.COM](https://www.shared-interest.com)



WELCOME

AS WE ENTER THE AUTUMN PERIOD OF OUR 30TH YEAR, WE ARE CONTINUING TO OPERATE IN A WORLD WE COULD NOT HAVE IMAGINED THIS TIME LAST YEAR.

However, there are many positives to our new reality. Never has our community felt stronger, as our team works tirelessly across continents to ensure that your investment reaches producers at this crucial time. Our members and volunteers are a vital part of this community. Without your support, we would not be able to bring you stories of solidarity and hope from the corners of the globe.

Bukonzo Organic Farmers Co-operative Union Ltd staff to stand together in the company's storeroom. Left to right are Project Supervisor Matiya Bwambale, General Manager Josinta Kabugho, Accountant Namusisi Maureen, and Storekeeper Thembo Julius

Against an ever-changing landscape, the mission of Shared Interest remains strong and clear. Our customers have expressed how much it means to have a reliable source of finance, which has not faltered during the pandemic. On behalf of all of the communities we support, I want to give heartfelt thanks for making this possible.

Sadly, we were unable to share our gratitude in person as this year's plans to meet in Leeds, London, Bristol, and Glasgow were put on hold due to the spread of coronavirus in the UK. Instead, we encouraged you to stay in touch by telephone, email, or through our online member portal, to manage your Share Account. However, we remain keen to bring you the essence of our UK meetings, where we gather to share updates on our work, and invite questions for our Board of Directors. Subsequently, we have decided to launch our very first Online Supporter Event on November 17. More details can be found inside and we hope that many of you will be able to join us. In the meantime, remember that our Membership Engagement Team is here for you five days a week for any general queries you may have, and you can contact them by [calling 0191 233 9132](tel:01912339132), or emailing membership@shared-interest.com.

Many of you have continued to send positive messages of support, which we always share with the team. We have also received a number of messages to say how much you appreciated our update on how people in different regions are navigating the pandemic. We have brought you a similar feature in this edition, detailing the

new challenges that have emerged as certain restrictions ease in some parts of the world. It is inspiring to hear of producers adapting to new ways of working, and buyers continuing to seek out ways to help the people who grow or create their goods. We bring you news from Rwanda on one coffee co-operative's pledge to empower women farmers, along with a fascinating article about the growing threat of falsified honey with ideas on how consumers can help. There is also an update from Bukonzo Organic Farmers Co-operative Union (BOCU) in Uganda, who have become the first beneficiary of our Livelihood Security Fund, relaunched by our charity, Shared Interest Foundation in July.

Of course, behind all of these stories of hardworking farmers and artisans, there are families and communities that do not have the infrastructure or support in place that many of us have in the UK. That is why the work of Shared Interest is more relevant and vital than ever as we move towards the end of our 30th anniversary year. Thank you for staying with us on this journey, where your investment may not make you rich but it continues to enrich the lives of others.

Until next time,



Patricia Alexander
Managing Director



Front Cover Image: Ithungu Kezia is a small coffee farmer and member of BOCU in Kinoni village, Kasese District, Uganda

Please note: All photographs included in this newsletter were taken before the restrictions imposed due to Covid-19



Members at our Brighton member event in 2019

OUR EVENTS ARE GOING ONLINE

WE LOOK FORWARD TO OUR ANNUAL SUPPORTER DAYS, WHERE WE GATHER WITH MEMBERS AND GUESTS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE UK.

Sadly, this year, our plans to meet in Leeds, London, Bristol and Glasgow could not go ahead, and instead we encouraged you to keep in touch online using our member portal, as well as joining us on social media, or reading and commenting on our blog. Many of you have continued to contact us by telephone and email, and our Membership Team is here to respond to your queries Monday to Friday.

However, there is something really special about our supporters, guests and team all being together in one room. We wanted to create the lively engagement that always takes place as a result.

We are therefore delighted to announce that we will be holding **our very first Online Supporter Event, on Tuesday 17 November, and you are invited to join us from the comfort of your own home** where you will have an opportunity to ask questions via our live Q&A. Before the event, you can watch videos from our Managing Director, Finance Director and members of our Lending Team as they share updates on our impact, finances and regional issues. If you have a specific question please contact us in advance and we will ensure it is answered on the day.

We will be running two sessions, the first starting at 10am and the second starting at 2pm. To register your interest, **please email membership@shared-interest.com or call us on 0191 233 9102**. Further instructions on how to take part in the event will be provided once you register.



Raquel Zanabria, handcraft producer working with Lucuma in Peru

COUNCIL COMMENT

AS I WRITE THIS, I SHOULD HAVE BEEN PREPARING FOR AN IMPORTANT TRIP.

After attending a Fairtrade Foundation event I had decided I would definitely take a 'Meet the People' tour in 2020 so that I could meet fair trade producers and see firsthand the impact fair trade has on peoples' lives. I had decided on Peru, to combine some famous Andean sites with visits to farmers and artisans. I was in the process of booking with ethical tour operator, Saddle Skedaddle, when it became clear that 2020 had other plans in store for me and indeed the whole global community.

Instead I am at home, continuing my role as consultant neurologist at a busy London hospital. During April and May I was redeployed to the medical wards to look after Covid-19 patients. The UK death toll has been heartbreakingly high and my thoughts go out to those who have lost loved ones during this time. As things are settling here we are still hearing of the devastation the coronavirus is wreaking elsewhere. Even on my busiest days on the Covid wards, thoughts always drifted to other parts of the world, wondering how more fragile health systems and economies were ever going to cope.

You will all know that South America has been hit hard by Covid-19. Recent reports suggest that Peru may have the highest death rate in the world. On top of the direct health effects there is widespread hardship due to the economic effects of necessary lockdowns. As reported in the summer edition of QR, the handcraft producers of the Aymara community in the Peruvian Andes, have been left with little to no income opportunities. With their entire supply chain affected, the strict lockdown measures in place mean that any potential secondary income from farming is not possible as travel restrictions mean that they cannot transport their crops to the market.

A huge number of handcraft producers in the region rely heavily on the travel industry for their income. As this issue describes, restrictions are starting to lift in some countries but Peru has extended its state of emergency. It will be a while before tourists return, and we must find other ways to support artisans and their families.

It is encouraging to hear that fair trade buyers are doing all they can to help the people behind their products. In addition, I have read that the consumer desire to buy products with purpose has only increased during the pandemic. By continuing to promote the true value of fair trade, we can all do something to help, no matter how small that contribution may feel. After all, as we know from the Shared Interest model, it is when people come together with a shared goal, that positive change takes place.

Anjum Misbahuddin
Member of Council



CHOOSING FAIRTRADE HONEY IS MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER

There has been much debate about whether Albert Einstein actually made the famous statement: “If the bee disappeared off the face of the Earth, man would only have four years left to live.” However, despite uncertainty about the author, there is no doubt that bees are vital to our existence, and the honey they create has become a household favourite across the world.

Honey has been seen as a valued commodity for thousands of years, with early wall paintings suggesting it was used as a gift for the afterlife. Bees make honey to create energy, collecting nectar from flowers, and transforming it into honey inside the hive. As such, it is a totally natural product that should not be modified in any way. In fact, honey is sought after for its uncompromised state, which is even believed to have healing powers. As recently as June this year, the NHS carried out a review of the role of honey in wound treatment, recognising that it has been used in this way for thousands of years.

However, according to the Latin American and Caribbean Network of Fair Trade Small Producers and Workers (CLAC), some honey brands have begun mixing honey with other ingredients, including rice or artificial sweeteners.

"THIS CONSTITUTES A REAL AND CONCRETE THREAT THAT VIOLATES THE QUALITY AND GENUINENESS OF HONEY. THE CURRENT HONEY FRAUD PROBLEM HAS AN EXTENSIVE GLOBAL MAGNITUDE, AND AFFECTS BOTH THE PRICE OF HONEY AND THE VIABILITY OF MANY BEEKEEPING OPERATIONS."

"IT HAS CAUSED AN OVERSUPPLY AND A PRICE COLLAPSE FOR FAIR TRADE BEEKEEPERS. THE ADULTERATED HONEY CONSTITUTES UNFAIR COMPETITION FOR ALL GENUINE BEEKEEPERS, DIRECTLY THREATENING THEIR WORK."

"WE URGE THE PUBLIC, INCLUDING BEEKEEPERS, CONSUMERS AND THE HONEY INDUSTRY ALIKE, TO TAKE ACTION AND ADVOCATE FOR LONG-TERM, SUSTAINABLE HONEY PRODUCTION."

CLAC President, Miguel Angel Munguía

By continuing to buy Fairtrade honey, ethically driven consumers can be sure that their product proves to be as sweet as it tastes, but what else should we be doing to counteract this destructive trend?



Image Above: Honey is poured into containers for storage and export

The advice given by CLAC is: “Read packaging information carefully to find out the origin of the honey and if it is 100% natural. Ensuring the correct labelling and control of the products is fundamental to advance in the fight against adulteration, protecting beekeeping and consumers.” Miguel Angel Munguía is also Executive Director of honey co-operative, Educe, and works in partnership with the Honey Authenticity Project (HAP). According to HAP, a third of honey traded internationally is adulterated, or even 100% false. It states on their website that ‘the falsification of honey is a crime, it discourages beekeeping. Reduced pollination impacts food production.’

Miguel said: “Adulterated honey has been a real problem for the beekeeping industry, causing price falls, deceiving the consumer and discouraging productive activity, but the most serious thing is that it affects thousands of families who live on beekeeping and fair prices.

“Today the volume of adulterated honey is so great that if the agricultural authorities, governments and especially consumers and producers do nothing, the consequences can be terrible for beekeeping. In addition to the richness of honey as food, we must recognise the role of bees in the pollination of more than 70% of food and in the conservation of biodiversity. Subsequently, Educe has partnered with HAP to fight this serious problem together.”

Shared Interest currently works with six Fairtrade honey organisations in Latin America and Africa. Educe is one of these co-operatives, and they use a Shared Interest finance facility to help pay beekeepers when they supply their honey. The co-operative is based in the Yucatán region of Mexico, and encourages young people in the community to learn organic methods of beekeeping.

As honey production depends largely on climatic conditions, the co-operative cannot always predict volume levels. In 2018, Educe experienced their highest honey quantity in many years due to favourable weather conditions. Sadly, this did not bring the financial reward that it should.

Miguel explained: “However, this did not necessarily represent extraordinary income for our associated beekeepers due to the drop in prices because of the oversupply of adulterated honey.”

Shared Interest only works with honey producers who follow Fairtrade Standards. The Standards ensure fairer terms of trade between farmers and buyers, they protect workers’ rights, and provide the framework for producers to build thriving farms and organisations. They also receive a Fairtrade Premium paid on top of the selling price, enabling farmers

or workers to invest in projects of their choice. Fairtrade Foundation is working to protect beekeepers in rural communities and say:

“COUNTERFEIT HONEY IS AN INCREASING PROBLEM: FAKE OR ADULTERATED GOODS OF LOW QUALITY ARE PASSED OFF AS PURE OR SINGLE-ORIGIN HONEY, DRIVING DOWN PRICES FOR HONEST PRODUCERS.

"FAIRTRADE OFFERS BEEKEEPERS A NUMBER OF WAYS TO CONFRONT THESE CHALLENGES AND GROW THEIR BUSINESSES. MANY FAIRTRADE BEEKEEPERS ARE ALSO FARMERS – THE BEES THEY KEEP HELP TO POLLINATE CROPS, WHICH THEY CAN SELL AND SUBSIST ON. FAIRTRADE WORKS WITH BEEKEEPERS TO ESTABLISH SURROUNDINGS IN WHICH BEES CAN FLOURISH, FOR EXAMPLE BY ADVISING THEM ON BEE-FRIENDLY CULTIVATION METHODS. MANY BEEKEEPERS HAVE ALSO USED THE FAIRTRADE PREMIUM TO SWITCH TO ORGANIC CULTIVATION.

“GIVEN THE CRITICAL ROLE OF BEES IN POLLINATING PLANTS, THEIR FUTURE WILL AFFECT HUMANITY’S PROSPECTS. WORKING WITH BEEKEEPERS TO MAINTAIN STABLE BEE POPULATIONS IS IN EVERYONE’S INTERESTS, AND CHOOSING FAIRTRADE HONEY IS ONE WAY YOU CAN CONTRIBUTE”

CLAC President, Miguel Angel Munguía



Image Above: Educe beekeepers review the hive prior to the honey harvest

COCAGI farmers select coffee at the washing station



EMPOWERING WOMEN COFFEE FARMERS IN RWANDA

Coopérative des Caféculteurs de Gishoma (COCAGI) is a coffee growers' co-operative located in the Rusizi district of western Rwanda. The group has recognised the skill and precision used by women within the co-operative and have subsequently established an initiative called COCAGI Femmes, whose members have created premium coffee brands, AGASARO and SUSURUKA.

COCAGI General Manager, Pastor Japhet HABIMANA - who many of you may recall was due to address members at our AGM in March - said: "This initiative was set up to promote women coffee-growers, and recognise the value of their work with a premium price.

"The co-operative has set traceability to separate this coffee during processing at the washing stations. We are able to market it but we have not yet got a special buyer.

"We have set aside four hectares of land where the AGASARO and SUSURUKA groups started planting last year. On that area, they will be able to grow ten thousand coffee trees."

Pastor Japhet HABIMANA went on to explain that, thanks to support from Shared Interest, COCAGI production levels

have increased, which in turn generated more sales, and the additional profit paid for the land. He said: "The money the co-operative used to buy land for women coffee farmers was from profit made using the Shared Interest facility in coffee season."

Here, Chairperson of COCAGI Femmes, DUHIRWE Anne Marie, tells her story in her own words:

"I AM A WIDOW WITH SIX CHILDREN, THREE BOYS AND ONE GIRL. I HAVE TWO ORPHANS WHO LIVE WITH ME DUE TO HIV OF MY YOUNG SISTER. AFTER THE DEATH OF MY HUSBAND IN 1995, I WAS ENCOURAGED TO JOIN COCAGI COFFEE CO-OPERATIVE. I HAD A PLANTATION OF 50 COFFEE TREES BUT I HAVE EXTENDED UP TO 350 COFFEE TREES. RESPECTING AGRICULTURE PRACTICES, I CAN HARVEST 1,050KG OF CHERRIES PER SEASON."

DUHIRWE Anne Marie
Chairperson of COCAGI Femmes



Image Above: Coffee berries shortly after being picked

COCAGI coffee farmer, Mukarutabana Dative

"I was able to pay school fees for my children and two adopted children, I was able to build a house to live in, I am able to pay health insurance and feed my family. I managed to implement small project income generating especially in subsistence crop like beans, cassava, maize and banana.

"As a women's representative in COCAGI, I was the one to mobilise women to join the co-operative and work together to be independent. Referring to the Rwanda Government on gender equity, we were able to set a local saving and credit initiative between 298 women using 2800 US Dollars. This started with COCAGI's financial support from their Fairtrade Premium. My current role is the Chairperson of COCAGI Femmes. As leader, I implement women's decision in coffee farming, fruits farming, sunflowers farming and strengthen our saving and credit initiative. I have been in this role since 2014.

"For the future, COCAGI Femmes has a vision of becoming a big coffee producer starting by the project of bio coffee farming we are implementing currently. We want to see our women's coffee AGASARO and SUSURUKA sold internationally to increase revenues. We want women in COCAGI to prepare and manage small projects, which are income generating. Thanks to this initiative, I have managed to be good farmer and increased production per tree, which is reason why I was able to help my family."

HAS COCAGI BEEN AFFECTED BY COVID-19?

Pastor Japhet told us that although the co-operative is still strong, sadly: "Sixty-one of our seasonal workers lost their jobs because of social distancing in the washing station. Our members have diversified into beans, banana, sweet potatoes and fruits but during the lockdown their subsistence produce goes rotten as Burundi and Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) borders are closed, and over 62% of subsistence produce is sold here, in our neighbouring countries. One of our loyal buyers did not buy this season - this affected COCAGI negatively by preventing us accessing enough money from lenders as planned and the overall market was impacted."

"Two contracts were cancelled by one buyer because of Covid-19. We still have a stock we are looking to market, we managed to sell our low grade locally so members are paid. I am currently negotiating with an international buyer on the stock available and sending samples to other people to see what will happen by October."





KINDNESS & SOLIDARITY HAVE NO RESTRICTIONS

As we reported in July, the Shared Interest team continues to work remotely. Despite the social distancing guidelines in place across all regions we remain in close contact with colleagues, producers and buyers, as well as our UK members and volunteers. It has brought us much comfort to know we are all united together, despite being in very different parts of the world.

In our Summer issue of QR, we brought you inspiring stories of hope and survival, with co-operatives using their Fairtrade Premium to provide food and hygiene products to local communities, and buyers finding new ways to help producers protect their livelihoods.

Now over six months into the global pandemic, some trade restrictions are lifting and markets reopening, leaving producers and buyers facing new challenges. Supply chains and export requirements are vastly different, as neighbouring regions aim to prevent cross border transmission of the virus.

We have gathered information from our representatives in Africa, Latin America, North America and Europe to bring you a glimpse of life in each region. As we all live and work in an environment of constant flux, please bear in mind that situations may have changed since this article was written but all facts are correct as we go to print.

Shared Interest Lending Manager for East Africa, Immaculate Ochieno said:

"SOME REGIONS ARE STILL UNDER LOCKDOWN, AND A CURFEW IS STILL MAINTAINED IN ALL COUNTRIES EXCEPT TANZANIA, WHICH HAS BEEN DECLARED 'COVID-FREE' BY PRESIDENT MAGUFULI, AND ALL RESTRICTIONS HAVE BEEN REMOVED."

Immaculate Ochieno
Shared Interest Lending Manager
East Africa

Kopakama is a Fairtrade coffee co-operative based in the Rutsiro district, Western Province of Rwanda.

Founded in 1998, the co-operative has approximately 700 members, and over 200 of these farmers are women who jointly own a farm and operate under the name of Ejo Heza, Kinyarwanda for 'a beautiful tomorrow'. Some of the women involved are widows, following the 1994 Rwandan genocide, and the group is dedicated to promote unity through their coffee farming. Together, they purchased a one-hectare community and grew 3,000 coffee trees on this communal plot.

Kopakama's Executive Director, Gervais Kayitare described how the group has recently faced difficulties, along with the rest of the co-operative, due to the impact of the pandemic. He said: "Lack of access to the materials required in processing, limited means of transportation for workers, and delay in reporting because of limited communication, are among the challenges facing our co-operative due to Covid-19.

"The uncertainty of the coffee market is a challenge our producers are faced with, as well as limited access to other income generating activities."

The women from Ejo Heza rely on this additional income to cover household costs such as school uniform and mattresses to sleep on. The women hold two of the five board member positions at Kopakama, and can access loans through the co-operative, but these are usually for business development reasons, such as to increase their coffee production, or to diversify into other products.

Gervais continued: "There is uncertainty on the global markets; since businesses have been closed, there were either no orders or reduced orders, and because of the lockdown some buyers are still holding stock they have been unable to sell.

"We are mitigating these challenges by providing farmers with adequate protective equipment to enable them to continue their work. Going forward we have plans to complete the extension system of Kopakama and the dry mill building works. This will allow us to increase production and support more coffee farmers in our region."





In Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, lockdown restrictions came into place after recording their first case of Covid-19 in March, when a resident returned from Italy. This included suspension of flights and closure of schools and universities, as well as theatres and cinemas. Gatherings were restricted to not more than 50 people. The National Security Council extended the state of emergency and border closure until the end of August. However, as entertainment venues in cities reopened at the end of July, it was clear that farmers in more rural communities needed further support in protecting themselves against the virus.

In response, a cocoa co-operative based in Côte d'Ivoire, has helped drive forward an awareness campaign on how to prevent the spread of the virus. Enterprise Cooperative des Agriculteurs de Meagui (ECAM) has also created prevention kits to distribute to the local community. Each kit contains soap, hand sanitiser, gloves, face masks and leaflets on how to use them.

Shared Interest Lending Manager in West Africa, John Dossu said: "ECAM created the kits in response to issues faced by farmers and their families. They felt that people needed clear guidelines on how to protect themselves against Covid-19, as well as the equipment itself."

"THEY HAVE BEEN USING THE TRUCKS PURCHASED WITH SHARED INTEREST FINANCE TO HELP DISTRIBUTE THE PACKS"

John Dossu

Shared Interest Lending Manager, West Africa

John continued: "Due to the closure of schools, children continue to be at home with their families. This has meant that some have lost the subsidised meal provided during the school day."

To help alleviate this additional pressure on families, ECAM now plans to set up a food kit distribution program consisting of rice, oil, milk, and sugar. They are also supporting farmers with general maintenance of their farms by providing items such as seeds and fertilisers.

ECAM is one of the few woman-led cocoa co-operatives in Côte d'Ivoire. Doumbia Assata also sits on the Côte d'Ivoire National Fairtrade Network (RICE). In 2017, she won the prestigious title of Best Female Co-operative Manager in the country.

John continued: "The co-operative is well known locally for its strong governance and good management, so it is not a surprise that they have been so forthcoming with their support to the community, which has been very well received."

The handcraft sector has also been affected by travel restrictions and a lack of sales opportunities, as for many, the tourism industry plays a large part in their survival. In our summer QR, we reported how many organisations were suffering before the pandemic due to declining sales. Regional Manager for Northern Hemisphere and Pacific Rim, France Villeneuve said: "Handcraft producers continue to face significant challenges even though lockdown restrictions in some parts of the world are beginning to lift. The sector in general is facing a decline in sales, and the pandemic has caused a huge blow to businesses in our region. In many cases, buyers have been able to help support producers during this time of great need, either by organising relief funding or community initiatives."

Founded over two decades ago in Oregon by Leslie Mittelberg, Swahili Imports – trading as Swahili African Modern – partners with African artisans to sell their fair trade goods in stores around the world. Creating lasting partnerships with artisans across Africa, the Swahili team believes that long term work opportunities give people the means to build sustainable prosperity. We caught up with Founder, Leslie Mittelberg on how they have continued this ethos during such challenging times.

Leslie began: "In March, when the Covid-19 pandemic brought everything to a screeching halt, we agonised over a few of the darker facets of global shut-down. Without consistent work, African artisans who were already fighting their way out of poverty could lose their footing. Families would soon be facing hunger and homelessness. While American companies and workers have options during times of unemployment, Africa's informal artisan sector has no such relief."

The Swahili team had to act quickly to ensure their artisans had a means of income during the crisis, to enable them to support themselves and their families.

She continued: "Thankfully, many of our customers creatively adapted their sales strategies. Even though sales wilted, we still received enough business to keep our doors open. Baskets from Ghana, Senegal and Kenya continue to sell well,

so we have been able to keep weavers working on orders throughout the pandemic. Travel within regions has been limited to slow the spread of the virus, but production has continued where materials are available and weaving from home is customary.

"With our main production centres sustained by orders, we turned our attention to creating a relief fund for at-risk artisans who we are unable to support with work at this time. To launch the initiative, we donated funds to order 1,000 African cloth face masks from Ghana.

"The masks sold so quickly that we were able to place a second order for 1,200 masks from Ghana, and order an additional 1,300 cloth masks from textile artisans in Zambia. Since May, we have raised nearly 7,000 US Dollars from mask sales and private donations.

"250 OF THE MASKS PRODUCED ARE GOING TO A RURAL COMMUNITY IN GHANA THAT HAS NO ACCESS TO PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT."

Leslie Mittelberg

Swahili Imports Founder

"Since we are unable to travel to Africa ourselves, we enlisted the help of our in-country team to identify artisans in need. Their responses show the widespread impact of halted trade, the humbling desire for ongoing orders, and overwhelming gratitude for the extension of kindness and solidarity.

"In recent weeks, we have used relief funds to buy mobile handwashing stations for artisans who have been able to resume work.

"Our relief initiative is small by most standards, but creative recipients are putting every penny to work, covering their expenses, feeding their families, securing supplies for future orders, and helping others in their communities.

"We are encouraged every day by the gracious generosity of so many of our artisan partners across Africa. They are teaching us to thrive, to celebrate our freedom, to stick together even when separated by oceans, and to always be grateful for the opportunity to work."

With the majority of sales made to the wholesale market, Swahili also sells directly to consumers from their retail website. According to France, several buyers are relying more heavily on online sales as small retail stores remain closed, and trade shows have been cancelled. She said: “Many organisations have recognised the importance of improving their online presence. With more traditional sales routes on hold, some of our customers have made great efforts to improve the eCommerce side of their business, and are starting to reap the rewards.”

Austrian buyer, Lemberona, has seen such an increase, and their online sales have compensated for the lack of opportunity within the wholesale market. Lemberona is a family-run business, which works with small producer organisations in Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, India and Peru. Although some restrictions have been lifted, Lemberona is experiencing delays in supplies and shipments meaning they are unsure if they will have enough stock to supply customer demand. Lemberona Director, Elmira Bertagnoli remains in close contact with producers and describes the impact on these groups as ‘disastrous, as the farmers have been left without a market for their goods and the means for making money.’

At the end of May, Austria reopened its hospitality industry, with additional precautions, and Elmira hopes that Lemberona will soon be supplying their organic oils, nut butters, beans, seeds and pulses once again. However, she feels that the true impact of Covid-19 is yet to be realised. She continued:

“THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY HAS SUFFERED TERRIBLY DUE TO LACK OF TOURISTS. HOWEVER, THE BIGGEST THREAT COMES IN OUR SUPPLY CHAIN AS THE PRODUCERS WE PURCHASE FROM MAY NOT BE ABLE TO MANAGE WITH A PROLONGED SHUTDOWN.”

Elmira Bertagnoli
Lemberona Director

Many of the countries where Lemberona purchase their goods have had their borders closed for several weeks. Uzbekistan is the main supplier of a variety of organic and fair trade products such as cherries and melon. Lemberona describes the remote mountain region around Samarkand as a place

with ‘hot summer months and harsh, cold winters. High up in the mountains, the natural world dominates. Farming life is closely related to nature, and a content, yet very simple lifestyle. There are electricity blackouts, limited fresh water supplies and journeys to the nearest towns are quite arduous.’

Elmira said: “The producers are suffering very much, no market, no money from family members, and no government help. They go back to being subsistence farmers for most of the time. It is important that we offer a future to the producers despite all problems and issues. Lemberona does not close the door but sticks to and supports the producers as much as possible.”

Meanwhile, in Central America our team has reported that all countries, with the exception of Nicaragua, have continued with specific guidelines to reduce the spread of coronavirus.

Karolina Jimenez, Customer Representative for Central America said: “Governments across the region have been gradually reactivating economic activities following pressure from different sectors to introduce measures that facilitate trade.

“Our customers have reacted promptly, implementing measures to reduce the spread of the virus and to keep businesses running while ensuring the wellbeing of producers and employees.”

“In Honduras, the government continues to implement weekly extensions of the lockdown, along with movement restrictions. This has caused customers to work at a minimum level in a rotating scheme, limiting the presence of team members while developing the production processes.”

Claudia Oliva, Administrator from Cafel, a coffee producer group from Honduras, said: “The organisation has delivered food and groceries to 300 producers in the community through the initiative Cafel Solidarity Campaign. This campaign was launched in response to restrictions that affected coffee deliveries and hence, reduced producers’ income.”

Karolina added: “It is important to remember that all the co-ops in Honduras also need to keep temporary special working permits updated. These have been extended to include agricultural organisations and involve monthly inspections of their premises by the health authorities.”

Although the government has not imposed any restrictions in relation to the pandemic, our customers in Nicaragua have been affected by the overall impact of coronavirus.

Karolina added: “Despite the country’s approach against the pandemic; all of our customers from Nicaragua have implemented voluntary protocols in their premises and producer communities, to reduce the spread of coronavirus.”

Meraris Jarquin, staff member from Procafé, a coffee producer in Nicaragua, said: “Our main challenge has been the new way of working, the export processes are slower and because of the fact that our buyers are working remotely, we have experienced some delayed payments.”



Elmira discussing quality parameters of organic Fairtrade broccoli with Turob Bobo long-term president Rustam Rahimov and other members of Lemberona

Top: Elmira and Lemberona producer member Nizomova Salima at a mixed plantation

Bottom: Lemberona products displayed by a staff member at their store

Similarly, Costa Rica has not experienced an enforced lockdown during the pandemic. However, the government has imposed measures to counteract a second wave of coronavirus that has affected areas close to the capital, San José.

Our customers are reporting that they can continue to trade despite restrictions. Christian Mora, General Manager from the coffee producer La Alianza, said: “We are able to export due to an increase in demand from several buyers who achieved positive results in terms of online sales because of the top quality coffee that we offered.”

In Mexico, the central region of the country has been hardest hit by the pandemic but rural areas have also been affected, where coffee and honey are produced. Manel Modelo, General Manager from the coffee producer Impacto Transformador, said: “Our main challenge was to gather all the coffee in advance because of the general fear amongst producers that the situation will worsen, and they won’t be able to sell their produce. Therefore, assuring a prompt payment to our producers was one of our priorities in order to support them during the crisis.”

Marco García, Lending Manager for Central America, said: “While the coffee export season in Mexico is almost over, some of our honey producers are facing challenges to complete their exports since the ports are saturated due to the recent reactivation of the economy promoted by the Mexican Government. However, we believe this will be a short, temporary phase, which will be back to normal soon.

“Considering the Central American region as a whole, for the coming 2020/21 harvest, we believe that the organisations, staff, and farmers - especially in coffee - will be better prepared to manage all the pandemic restrictions and prevention practices in place. Special prevention plans for coffee farms and processing plants have been set at national level, and our customers are already accustomed to them.

“In some countries, the main challenge will be the lack of temporary workers available during the peak harvest months. Hence, some customers have proposed involving producers’ wives in their communities. To date, several buyers have signed contracts in advance for the coming season, confirming their interest to keep supporting our producers with the trade of coffee, honey, cocoa, sesame and peanuts.”

Meanwhile far up in the Andean highlands of South America, income from small-scale farming is little and unpredictable. Many communities rely on growing and selling potatoes as one of their few sources of income.

As we have reported in previous editions of QR, Shared Interest customer, Inka Moss, has been working closely with communities for several years, to create a more stable livelihood from collecting wild moss. The moss is harvested in those months when communities are not able to earn money from growing and selling potatoes in a very competitive local market.

Sphagnum moss is protected under Peruvian state regulations, and Inka Moss has a management plan approved by SENFOR (Forest and Wild Fauna Service), a state institution that monitors and controls the handling of flora and fauna in Peru.

Usually, before each community starts harvesting, their individual management plan for that specific area is approved. This plan details the amount of moss that can be harvested during a given period, based on the amount of time required for the moss to naturally grow back to the correct length. Once harvesting starts, periodic reports are sent to SENFOR, detailing the moss that is being harvested from the area to ensure that the approved amount is not exceeded. Inka Moss also provides training to communities to emphasise the importance of respecting the natural growth cycle, to ensure that the natural flora and fauna of the harvesting areas are preserved.

We asked our Regional Manager for Latin America, Paul Sablich, how Inka Moss has managed this detailed process during the strict lockdown period imposed due to Covid-19. Paul said: “When the quarantine started in Peru, Inka Moss suspended operations completely. Once they received authorisation from the Ministry of Production, and subsequently received their transit permit, they began working closely with local communities to co-ordinate safe collection of moss. They carried out extensive research and consultation into how to manage this intricate process in a way that is Covid-secure. So far, Inka Moss has invested almost 3,000 US Dollars, into preventative measures, which include personal protective equipment for communities.

“Out of the 22 communities Inka Moss supports, six have entry protocols in place and five more are working on them. Community patrols monitor entry of people and vehicles into these areas. Some communities have, however, preferred to wait a little longer as there is fear of spreading the virus. Inka Moss remains in close contact with them, and has assured harvesters that once protocols are in place, they will be able to collect the moss.

“It has been a challenging time for Inka Moss, as their priorities remain in protecting the growth of the moss, as well as ensuring the safety of harvesters during the pandemic. When lockdown started, they have just enough moss to keep production running. In the meantime, the government issued specific regulations for the prevention and control of Covid-19 in remote communities.”

As Inka Moss’ Internal Consultant Juanjo Ladines Moya explains: “Understandably, harvesters are very concerned about their income. The winter frost season has started and is causing havoc in their potato plantations. Inka Moss is looking for ways to support them with this.”

Inka Moss General Manager, Marco Piñatelli added:

“AS INKA MOSS HAS UNDERGONE A DIFFICULT ROAD TO ARRIVE HERE, WE ARE CONFIDENT WE WILL BE ABLE TO OVERCOME THE COVID-19 CHALLENGES. WE ARE CONCERNED THAT THE COMMUNITIES WE WORK WITH HAVE HAD THEIR OTHER SOURCES OF INCOME AFFECTED. WE AIM TO SUPPORT THEM BY ENSURING THE COLLECTION OF MOSS DESPITE THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES”

Marco Piñatelli
Inka Moss General Manager



PART OF THE PEOPLE SUPPORTING THOSE IN NEED

Like many other international development organisations, our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, has faced challenges over recent months due to the coronavirus pandemic. Fortunately, we have been able to continue working with most in-country partners to deliver our support and training to farmers, producers, and businesses in Ghana and Burkina Faso. Shared Interest Foundation also relaunched its Livelihood Security Fund, to help producers struggling with the direct impact of Covid-19, alongside ongoing issues like extreme weather conditions, due to climate change.

In our summer edition of QR, we reported on how Bukonzo Organic Farmers Co-operative Union (BOCU) in Uganda had been providing their local community with food supplies in the wake of coronavirus. Sadly, just weeks later, the Kasese District experienced life threatening floods due to heavy rains from the Rwenzori Mountains as five rivers simultaneously burst their banks.

Here, Shared Interest Foundation Programme Manager, Kodzo Korkortsi, based in Ghana, shares with us his thoughts on Bukonzo becoming the first beneficiary of the Livelihood Security Fund.

Kodzo said: “The pandemic has brought huge difficulties for farmers across the world. However, for disadvantaged communities in rural parts of Africa and Latin America, the impact can hit even harder as there is no support infrastructure in place.

“We heard from Bukonzo in March as news arrived that they were helping people in the Kasese region of Uganda, to cope with the impact of pandemic.

“As a large coffee co-operative, Bukonzo supports the livelihoods of over 3,000 farmers, and they decided to distribute food supplies to supplement those delivered by the Ugandan government. Not long after we received this news, Bukonzo contacted us once again but this time, they needed urgent aid due to the severe flooding. Over 35,000 people were displaced including Bukonzo members and their families.

“The Fund is in place to help sustain businesses and support income levels, but in the first instance we must respond to basic needs. In the case of Bukonzo, this meant providing food and shelter for farmers, and additional support for pregnant women and children. Some have lost everything in the floods and are sleeping in schools and churches.

“Before Bukonzo members can begin to rebuild their farms, general wellbeing is of utmost importance as they not only fight the current threat of Covid-19, but also the water-related diseases that follow this type of flooding.

“We are pleased to have received news of Bukonzo successfully distributing the food supplies and shelter materials provided by the Fund. We will remain in close contact with them over coming weeks.

“Once Bukonzo overcomes the immediate difficulties faced, they will need to deal with ongoing issues caused by the pandemic. We know from our work with farmers and artisans that many are continuing to feel the effects of disrupted services due to lockdown restrictions.

“The co-operative provides income for thousands of farmers, and its survival is vital to the future of the community. Thank you to everyone who has donated to the Livelihood Security Fund so far, and helped Bukonzo on their journey to recovery. We know from speaking to the General Manager of the co-operative that they will want to return to its role of improving the lives of farmers. As she said when we asked about their relief efforts: ‘We want to be part of the people supporting those in need.’”

Bukonzo General Manager, Kabugho Josinta said:

“ON MAY 6TH AND 7TH, THE RIVERS IN BOCU AREAS OF OPERATION BURST THEIR BANKS AND CAUSED FLOODS AND THIS AFFECTED 1,200 FARMERS; THEY LOST COFFEE, VANILLA, COCOA, TOILETS AND FOOD CROPS AMONG OTHERS.”

Kabugho Josinta
Bukonzo General Manager

“The farmers moved away from their homes and went to camps and the major challenge has been the lack of food since their food crops were washed away. Farmers were not able to continue taking three meals a day because they were minimising the little food they had; they had opted to have one, usually supper.

“BOCU provided a little support for relief food and this was from the Premium funds. However, it was not enough for the 1,200 farmers affected.

“Support from Shared Interest was approved for maize flour, beans, sugar, soya bean for pregnant mothers and children below five years, salt and cooking oil among others.

“As an institution during floods we had some learning points - It is important to establish a fund at BOCU for any disasters that may happen, to continue sensitising the farmers on how they can manage the river banks when they are doing the agricultural activities and also to consider issues of climate change.

“The farmers are very grateful to Shared Interest for the support during the difficult period.”

If you would like to read more about the Livelihood Security Fund, and find out how you can help, please visit:

[SHARED-INTEREST.COM/LIVELIHOOD-SECURITY-FUND](https://shared-interest.com/livelihood-security-fund)



Top Image: Bukonzo Organic Farmers Cooperative Union Ltd staff

Middle Image: Entrance to Bukonzo Organic Farmers Cooperative Union Ltd (BOCU) farms

Bottom Image: Mary Kalyatha, a BOCU farmer



Quarterly Return is the newsletter of Shared Interest Society. Shared Interest Society Ltd is a fair trade lending organisation, which is a member of Co-operatives UK. It uses the pooled investments of its members in the UK to make real and lasting improvements to people's lives in the developing world.

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Longstanding employee of Traidcraft, **Joe Osman** has written a book about the history of the organisation, in which **Shared Interest** is mentioned.

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BECAUSE WE CARE:

