

QUARTERLY RETURN 122 • WINTER 2021

# COMMUNITY IS AT OUR HEART

## KEEPING CONNECTED

Join us online for our AGM on Friday 11 March

## FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

This year's campaign will shine a spotlight on the climate crisis

## STORIES OF SOLIDARITY

Inspiring highlights from our impact studies

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

## WELCOME

# WELCOME TO YOUR FIRST NEWSLETTER OF 2022.

As always, this Winter edition of QR is packed full of achievements from last year, as well as new things to come. We hope they find you well after a peaceful festive season, and that the stories enclosed leave you feeling inspired for the New Year ahead.

The response to our Christmas card has been extremely positive and we are delighted you enjoyed reading about coffee farmers Segundo and Belver from CECAFE co-operative in Peru. This father and son team also features on the front cover of our Social Accounts report. The full version is now available on our website and a shorter summary is included in this issue of QR.

There are also four stories dedicated to the tales of adversity and success that emerged from this year's longitudinal research, which examines the wider impact of our finance.

Peruvian cocoa co-operative Alto Huallaga has overcome a challenging period and is now working on developing derivative products such as cocoa butter and powder.

Kibinge coffee co-operative in Uganda has diversified into roasting as an additional source of income, finding a local market and winning an award in the process.

TradeAID Integrated has continued to see Ghanaian basket weaver groups thrive, despite straw shortages and the impact of Covid-19.

Meanwhile, Austrian buyer organisation Lemberona tells us how the Fairtrade Premium has helped bring a water supply to an Uzbekistan producer community for the first time in 15 years. You can read these inspiring stories on pages 8-11.

You will see that the middle section of QR contains a pullout version of our Annual Review, which gives a summary for both Society and Foundation. You can also find the full reports on our website at [shared-interest.com/publications](https://shared-interest.com/publications). Thanks to your loyal support, this year 200 organisations in 49 countries will continue to benefit from our finance.

It was encouraging to see so many of you join us to hear how producers are working to combat climate change at the virtual event held by our charitable arm in November, in line with the United Nation (UN) COP26 Summit. Shared Interest Foundation Manager Kodzo Korkortsi gave an update on projects involving climate resilience. TradeAID Integrated Co-Founder Nicholas Apokerah also joined us for this event named Farming for a Climate-Friendly Future. You can read an overview on page 3.

I would also like to take this opportunity to remind you to share in our AGM voting process, which is detailed in your enclosed letter. For those members receiving their mailings digitally, you can vote online within our secure Member Portal. Our AGM will take place virtually this year, and there is more information on our website about this process. Last year brought record attendance so we look forward to seeing many of you online in March. We do hope that we can make a gradual return to meeting in person at some point. However, the safety and the wellbeing of our supporters, customers and colleagues remains paramount. Thanks to technology, we can remain connected, and I have to say that the Shared Interest community has never felt stronger. Please remember that our Membership Team is available Monday to Friday to answer any questions or queries you may have on [0191 233 9102](tel:01912339102) or at: [membership@shared-interest.com](mailto:membership@shared-interest.com)

Until next time,



Patricia Alexander  
Managing Director



Front Cover: Ayinpoka Ariko, a member of Amongtaaba Basket Weavers Group (working with TradeAID), weaves a basket in Sumbrungu Zobiko Village, Bolgatanga District, Ghana.

## STRATEGIC REVIEW

As part of our Strategic Review process we are undertaking a range of research strands. As we start to shape our ideas we would like to invite you to participate in a workshop to discuss emerging themes and learn a little more about the challenges and opportunities facing the Society.

The one-hour workshops will take place on Monday 31 January 2022, at 10am and 2pm and will be held virtually. If you would like further details or would like to join a session please email [membership@shared-interest.com](mailto:membership@shared-interest.com).

## DATES FOR THE DIARY

### OUR ONLINE AGM & SUPPORTER EVENTS

Following the success of our first virtual AGM last year, our 2022 meeting will also take place online. We hope that you will be able to join us on Friday 11 March at 2pm.

The AGM agenda and resolutions are detailed in our AGM booklet. As in previous years, you have the choice to vote within the secure Member Portal or return the voting card. Once you vote and register to attend, we will send you joining instructions.

We would also like to invite you to join our series of virtual events which will bring you updates from our regional offices. These 45-minute sessions will focus on the impact climate change has on our customers around the world. If you would like to join one or all the sessions please contact us by email: [membership@shared-interest.com](mailto:membership@shared-interest.com) or call on [0191 233 9102](tel:01912339102).

**February 21st:** Focus on Shared Interest Foundation's recent Climate Smart Agricultural projects

**24th February:** Focus on the impact of climate change on our East African customers

**3rd March:** Focus on the impact of climate change on our West African customers

**4th March:** Focus on the impact of climate change on our Central American customers

**7th March:** Focus on the impact of climate change on our South American customers

## FARMING FOR A CLIMATE-FRIENDLY FUTURE

This November, world leaders and representatives from 200 countries met in Glasgow for the 26th UN Climate Change Conference (COP26).

We held a virtual event on Wednesday 10 November to hear about the challenges facing communities as a result of climate change. Over 70 people joined us online as Shared Interest Foundation Manager Kodzo Korkortsi described the innovative climate resilience projects run by our charity in Ghana, Uganda, Ivory Coast, Rwanda, Burkina Faso, Peru and Nicaragua.

Attendees heard how our charity is supporting coffee growers, sesame farmers, beekeepers and basket weavers to build resilience and mitigate against climate change through smart agriculture, conservation, tree planting and organic farming.

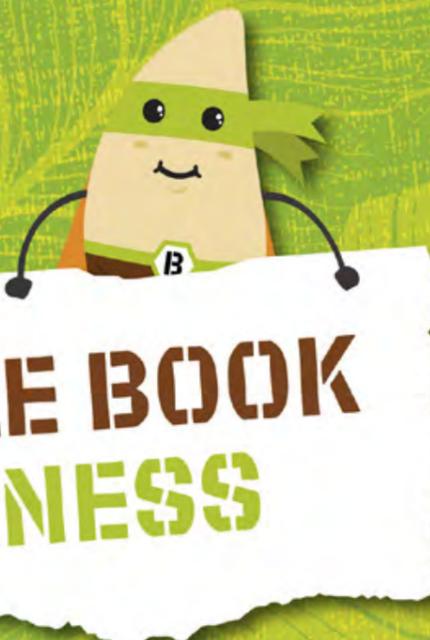
Image Above Right: Ornate straw baskets are woven by the women of Amongtaaba Basket Weavers Group in Ghana.

**SHARED INTEREST**  
**FOUNDATION**  
*Building a fairer world*



Nicholas Apokerah Co-Founder of TradeAID Integrated, a producer organisation based in Ghana, also joined us. He updated us on the progress of the Shared Interest Foundation project, which is supporting a group of 120 basket weavers to establish a vegetable farm using locally available products such as poultry manure and rice husks in place of soil.

You can hear more about this, and the other ground-breaking projects featured, by watching the event recording on our website at [shared-interest.com/events](https://shared-interest.com/events).



# THE LITTLE BOOK OF FAIRNESS

The Little Book of Fairness started out as a junior version of our Annual Review, and it has since evolved into a colourful set of activities for children and schools. Last year, it featured in the Green Parent Magazine as a useful home learning tool for families.

You can see this year's booklet and accompanying materials on our website, including an animation about climate change. All resources are creatively designed to help children understand fair trade and the role Shared Interest plays.

Shared Interest mascots Super Avo and Captain Cocoa will be joined this year by Bravo Brazil as he shares fun facts about where he grew up. As well as sending the Little Book of Fairness out to all our young investors, we will continue our work with local schools to complement learning on related topics. Under normal circumstances, this includes assembly visits, classroom presentations and interactive sessions and we will run these events again once it is safe to do so. In the meantime, we are carrying out these sessions online.

## CONTACT

If you know a family, school, nursery, or community group who might benefit from some copies of our Little Book of Fairness, please ask them to email us at [info@shared-interest.com](mailto:info@shared-interest.com) and we will send some copies free of charge. Alternatively download the booklet and activities directly from our website at: [www.shared-interest.com/little-book-of-fairness](http://www.shared-interest.com/little-book-of-fairness)



# FAIRTRADE FORTNIGHT

CHOOSE THE WORLD YOU WANT



Fairtrade Fortnight celebrates the farmers and workers who grow the food we eat, promotes the need for a living wage and raises awareness of challenges encountered by developing world communities. One of the most critical issues faced is climate change. To continue the message that urgent action is needed, Fairtrade Fortnight 2022 will shine a spotlight on the climate crisis.

The Fairtrade Foundation website states: "Fairtrade farmers, and the communities they support, depend on the climate for their livelihoods but the climate emergency caused by centuries of exploitation of people and planet means those livelihoods are under serious and immediate threat. As Fairtrade farmers return home from the UN summit to continue their work, we need our politicians and business leaders to work harder.

"COP may be over, but we need to make sure climate justice remains a top priority. For politicians, for business leaders, and for all of us."

The Fairtrade Foundation online festival, Choose the World you Want, will return from **21 February to 6 March 2022**. This year, they plan to have a virtual 'Storytelling Tent' and a 'Foodie Tent'. Please see their website for further details: [www.fairtrade.org.uk](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk)

We will support the campaign by asking farmers to share their own climate resilience experiences. Look out for these stories on our website and across our social media channels, as well as on the front cover of the Big Issue magazine. Also, please share with us any events you are planning for Fairtrade Fortnight by emailing [info@shared-interest.com](mailto:info@shared-interest.com)

## COUNCIL COMMENT

**As I write this article, the COP26 Summit has not long ended but it will seem far in the past by the time you read this. Still, the decisions and actions agreed will have great impact on the future, though perhaps not as much as many people hoped.**

I was very impressed by the presentations given in Glasgow by Fairtrade farmers from around the world. In an open letter, 1.8 million Fairtrade farmers and workers called for urgent action, asking governments at COP26 to be fair with their climate promise. Their letter also outlined four key actions that will help protect global food supplies and limit further damage.

Farmers asked that the promised 100bn US Dollars in climate finance reaches them directly. I hope that this would enable the building of flood defenses where there is too much rain, local dams to store rainfall where there is not enough, and so many other projects. They also asked that carbon emission commitments include reducing those from imported goods. Farmers suggested that future trade deals should drive trade in fair and low-carbon produce, cutting high-carbon trade. The fourth factor was the wish to strengthen regulations, so that businesses are encouraged to invest in sustainable supply chains, pay fair prices to farmers and take ownership of the environmental issues in their supply chains.

I feel that our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, is already leading the way in climate mitigation techniques. To take just one example, teaching coffee farmers to plant trees instead of clearing the land has so many advantages. The trees provide shade for coffee bushes and lead to increased yields and better quality beans. Furthermore, they store carbon, soak up excess rainfall and stabilise the ground. Depending on the type of tree, they may also provide an additional food source. This year, Shared Interest Foundation projects saw the planting of 135,275 trees including 60,000 cocoa trees, 70,000 coffee trees, 4,275 crop trees and 1,000 Moringa trees.

In terms of Shared Interest Society, I have been encouraged by the numbers of new investors over last two years, despite the difficulties caused by the pandemic. We are supporting fair trade already through our investment, but with Fairtrade Fortnight approaching at the end of February, it provides a reminder that we can always do more. Every time we choose to buy fair trade products our action counts - a producer somewhere gets a fair price, and they know that we stand with them and support them.

Each individual purchase may seem a very small thing, but in the words of Helen Keller: 'The world is not moved only by the mighty shoves of the heroes, but also by the aggregate of the tiny pushes of each honest worker.'

**Shelagh Baird-Smith**  
Member of Council

# SOCIAL ACCOUNTS

Each year, we publish a set of Social Accounts, which report on our social, environmental and economic performance and impact. None of this work would be possible without the support of members, colleagues, donors, volunteers and partners.

As Shared Interest Chair Mary Coyle says: "This year's report is indicative of the extraordinary and challenging year we have experienced. No one could have predicted the ongoing disruption of Covid-19. However, it has been inspiring to see the unwavering resilience and commitment of everyone involved in Shared Interest throughout the past 12 months."

## OUR WORK

Our members remain at our heart and we closed the year with 10,456 Share Accounts. Investment increased by £4.6m, the highest amount recorded in our history and Share Capital totalled £50.7m at the end of the year.

Our charity, Shared Interest Foundation, is supported by donations from 1,049 donors, and grants from Trusts and Foundations. This money is used to implement projects aimed at building sustainable businesses and improving the livelihood of people living in poverty.

## OUR PEOPLE

Retaining positive and engaged people is significant in our continued growth and success. We have a team of 36 working across five locations: Costa Rica, Ghana, Kenya, Peru and the UK, speaking 16 languages in total. Paul Sablich became Head of Lending last year; a role he will carry out from our Peru office, where he has worked for over a decade. He said: "I want to work for Shared Interest as I see fair trade as a tool to generate equity in the world. To do this, I think we need to work with wisdom and compassion."

We have been supported by 96 volunteers this year, who were each active in one or more of six overall volunteer roles. With the impact of the pandemic still being felt, especially in relation to events usually attended by Ambassadors and Community Supporters, volunteers turned their hands to different activities where opportunities arose.

**"I WANT TO WORK FOR SHARED INTEREST AS I SEE FAIR TRADE AS A TOOL TO GENERATE EQUITY IN THE WORLD. TO DO THIS, I THINK WE NEED TO WORK WITH WISDOM AND COMPASSION."**

Paul Sablich, Head of Lending

## WORKING SUSTAINABLY

We consider stewardship in all aspects of our work and embed a culture of good environmental practice throughout Shared Interest, doing the best we possibly can with the resources entrusted to us. Our Environmental Team raises awareness of topical issues and encourages eco-friendly initiatives.

The team is also responsible for awarding our Carbon Offset fund. In line with SDG 13 (Climate Action), Shared Interest Foundation has implemented a range of initiatives to increase producer resilience to the impact of climate change. These activities included planting 135,275 trees, training 515 farmers in climate smart agriculture and a further 405 farmers in organic fertiliser production.

## OVERCOMING CHALLENGES

We know that our producers and buyers have been affected at different stages of the pandemic. Covid-19 has seriously disrupted trade in agriculture and handcrafts. Lockdowns have reduced the movement of both people and goods domestically and internationally. This has been compounded by disruption of transport networks, shortage of containers worldwide and changing consumer patterns.

Despite the challenges faced during the last 12 months, Shared Interest has continued to empower smallholder farmers and artisans to grow their businesses sustainably, increase trade, and create employment opportunities by providing a reliable source of finance during otherwise uncertain times.



Image Left: Segundo Garcia (L) and Belver Garcia (R), coffee producers from the CECAFE co-operative in Lonya Grande, Peru.

## SUPPORTING BUSINESSES

In total, we have 200 customers, consisting of 175 producer groups and 25 buyers. We are one of the few social lenders to provide credit facilities to buyer organisations in the Northern Hemisphere. This provides support to marginalised producers who cannot access funds from other social lenders. Of the producer groups in our lending portfolio, 90 are based in Africa and 83 are based in Latin America. This year, payments made totalled £59.2m, an increase of 22% on the previous year.

The producer groups we finance support 374,249 farmers and artisans. From this year's overall figure, 33% are women and 8,262 are permanent employees. We estimate, based on annual review data, that collectively, these businesses earned £887.9m.

## TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

In terms of lending products, coffee remains our largest focus, mainly due to the scale of Fairtrade coffee production, with more than half of all Fairtrade certified producers growing this commodity. Our main aim remains to support people in remote and disadvantaged communities to trade and earn a living. However, our work is not just about providing finance on fair terms. The fair trade producers we support tell us that we have helped transform their communities.

The full Social Accounts report is available on our website at: [www.shared-interest.com/social-accounts](http://www.shared-interest.com/social-accounts)

# STORIES OF SOLIDARITY AND SUCCESS

As part of our monitoring and evaluation process, we carry out research to examine the longer-term outcomes of our support. We select businesses we have worked with for five years or more and explore the direct impact Shared Interest finance has on the business in question and the indirect effect it may also have on the wider community.

In Autumn QR, we introduced you to the businesses behind this year's four studies. We have now completed our research and the full case studies are available as appendix items in our Social Accounts Report 2021. You can download these on our website at [shared-interest.com/social-accounts](https://shared-interest.com/social-accounts). In the meantime, here are some highlights:



Cocoa pods at a plantation in Peru.

## ALTO HUALLAGA

According to statistics provided by the International Cocoa Organization (ICCO), smallholder farmers produce approximately 95% of the world's cocoa. The average size of a cocoa farm is three hectares and production in most of these is low.

Alto Huallaga is a cocoa producing co-operative located in the Huánuco region of central Peru. The co-operative was formed in 2009 and its membership covers a wide area and varied altitudes, which increases the sustainability of production.

Since becoming a Shared Interest customer in 2013, Alto Huallaga has doubled its number of employees, and now works with over 500 farmers, over a third of which are women.

General Manager Jorge Simon said: "The finance in 2013, this is when we started to improve working conditions bit by bit. Before there were no desks or tables or floor (just earth) or internet, then we moved from desk computers to laptops, now we have fibre optic there are so many things that have improved for the workers."

Jorge also commented on the impact of finance from Shared Interest on the producers; "The support gave us stability, the interest rate is good, we have good cash flow, and it has generated confidence in the farmers and the workers. When I started, the co-operative owed money to all workers and now it doesn't owe anything."

**"WITH COVID, THE CO-OPERATIVE IS ALWAYS IN CONSTANT COMMUNICATION WITH US, YOU KNOW, ABOUT WHAT DO WE NEED? WHAT PROBLEMS DO WE HAVE?"**

**THEY ARE ALWAYS IN COMMUNICATION WITH US."**

Jorge Simon, **Alto Huallaga General Manager**

As the impact of climate change makes farming more difficult in Peru, technical assistance and financing has become even more crucial for many small farmer co-operatives. The past two years have been particularly challenging for Alto Huallaga, as pests and disease damaged their cocoa trees.



Image Above:  
A worker removes cacao beans from a pod at a farm in Peru. The beans are collected in buckets before they are placed in sacks and sent to a warehouse for processing.

However, last year, the co-operative increased the amount of cocoa sold to the international market and began new commercial relationships. They are now working on developing derivative products such as cocoa butter and powder: the profitability of these items can be up to five times higher than cocoa beans. To enable the co-operative to produce these additional products, they are building a production plant, which will be completed in 2023.

The increase in sales and the Fairtrade Premium has also enabled Alto Huallaga to establish a number of initiatives to support farmers. The co-operative provides financial support to workers who require healthcare, and they offer financial support to bereaved workers' families, as well as mental health workshops. Carlos Enrique Gómez Bernal has been a member of Alto Huallaga since 2012 where he also served as president for seven years. Carlos' farm is three hectares, and he received the land as inheritance from his parents who were also cocoa farmers.

He said: "With Covid, the co-operative is always in constant communication with us, you know, about what do we need? What problems do we have? They are always in communication with us.

"If any of the members were sick, the co-operative was providing support immediately, medicines, they taught us how to make disinfectant foot bath when entering the house, how to manage the entrance of each person when they come to visit you."

Freshly picked coffee berries on a farm in Uganda.



**“SHARED INTEREST BELIEVED IN US. WE WERE ABLE TO EXPORT OUR FIRST CONTAINER USING SHARED INTEREST FUNDING. WE APPRECIATE SHARED INTEREST FOR BELIEVING IN US WHEN NO ONE WANTED TO ASSIST US.”**

David Lukwata, **Kibinge General Manager**

## KIBINGE

**Kibinge Coffee Farmers' Co-operative Society Limited is named after the region in which it is located in Central Uganda, about 150 kilometres from the capital, Kampala. The region is renowned for its high-quality Robusta coffee.**

Founded by four coffee farmers in 1995, Kibinge was registered as a coffee farmers' co-operative in 2009. Two years later, they obtained Fairtrade certification and in September 2012, Shared Interest supported Kibinge in pre-financing 13 contracts with international Fairtrade buyers.

Kibinge General Manager David Lukwata said: “Shared Interest believed in us. We were able to export our first container using Shared Interest funding. We appreciate Shared Interest for believing in us when no one wanted to assist us.”

As their profit increased, the co-operative purchased land to set up an office space and a processing facility as well as a truck to transport coffee to the processing plant.

Unfortunately, fluctuating coffee prices meant that producers continued to struggle to predict their income for the coming season and plan for the needs of their farms. To reduce their vulnerability, in 2018, Kibinge diversified into coffee roasting as an additional source of income, which they refer to as ‘value addition.’

**“WE TRAINED AND KEEP ON TRAINING BY WAY OF PROMOTING DOMESTIC CONSUMPTION OF COFFEE. AND THAT IS HOW WE STARTED, SLOWLY BY SELLING THE COFFEE TO LOCALS. GRADUALLY, WE EVOLVED AND STARTED SELLING EVERYWHERE IN UGANDA.”**

David Lukwata, **Kibinge General Manager**

David continued: “We ventured into value addition as a means of ensuring that we were everywhere in the entire coffee value chain, from what you would call seed stage to cup stage. Ugandans do not drink coffee so finding a market for coffee was not very easy.

“We trained and keep on training by way of promoting domestic consumption of coffee. And that is how we started, slowly by selling the coffee to locals. Gradually, we evolved and started selling everywhere in Uganda.”

Their efforts were recognised this year when they won a Fairtrade Africa Impact Recognition (FAIR) Ngoma Award for Best Value Addition to Products.



Image Right: Aisha Najuma, a Kibinge coffee producer, holding freshly picked coffee berries on a farm in Uganda.

Kibinge has encountered challenges due to the impact of the pandemic, along with other coffee producers in Uganda. In April 2020 they ran into difficulties in shipping their product from the port in Mombasa, Kenya, when the impact of Covid-19 was growing in East Africa.

At that time, there was a shortage of shipping containers, which resulted in stock remaining at the port in Mombasa for longer and an increase in charges for the buyer. Overall, production has been maintained as Ugandan coffee continues to be in high demand.

In 2018, Kibinge launched a project called ‘Women in Coffee’, which supports female farmers to manage their own coffee trees. The women are currently selling small amounts to the speciality Fairtrade market. They hope to grow the brand, which they have named ‘Grown by Women.’

### PRICE RISES

In the past 12 months, the C price – the benchmark price for commodity-grade Arabica coffee on the New York International Commodity Exchange and the world benchmark for coffee futures contracts – has risen from £0.80 per pound (454g) to around £2.61 and actually hit £2.78 in July. Nearly all contracts for coffee delivery are benchmarked against this C price, with the result that prices for green Arabica (unroasted beans) have risen by over 80% during the past year. Those for Robusta coffee – a cheaper alternative – have risen by over 30%.

The principal reason for these rises is due to environmental events in Brazil. Brazil accounts for around 35% of the global harvest and they are forecasting lower yields due to a combination of a severe drought and recent intense frosts. As a result, the Brazilian authorities are projecting the lowest Arabica harvest for 12 years.



## LEMBERONA

Founded by Elmira Bertagnoli, Lemberona was established as a family-owned business based in Austria, which distributes a wide range of high quality organic and Fairtrade dried fruits, herbs, and nuts. The company started out in 2010 with the export of organic Fairtrade fruit from Uzbekistan to Austria. The following year, they added further products, from both Uzbekistan and other origin countries.

Elmira is originally from Samarkand in Uzbekistan and has been living in Austria for over a decade. She has a special relationship with the Uzbek producer groups as she helped many of them in their formation and growth. This relationship inspired the Lemberona brand 'Pearls of Samarkand, Treasures of the Silk Road.'

Elmira said: "As I am originally from Uzbekistan, I know how to overcome many of the obstacles faced by farmers. On the other side, I also know what customers want and can directly translate this for our Uzbek suppliers. Due to their location, some of these groups have little or no access to finance."

**"SHARED INTEREST IMMEDIATELY UNDERSTOOD OUR NEED TO MAKE ADVANCE PAYMENTS TO FARMERS, WHICH IN THE PAST WAS DIFFICULT TO DO."**

Elmira Bertagnoli, **Lemberona Founder**

**"THANKS TO SHARED INTEREST, LEMBERONA CAN HELP THE SMALL FARMERS TO MAKE AN HONEST LIVING WITH THEIR OWN HANDS AND HAVE PROUD FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES."**

Elmira Bertagnoli, **Lemberona Founder**



Image Above:  
Turob Bobo member Nizomova Salima at a mixed plantation.

Lemberona met Shared Interest at Biofach fair in Nuremburg in 2014. At the time, they were experiencing difficulties finding suitable financing for crops in countries like Uzbekistan, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, or Colombia.

"Shared Interest immediately understood our need to make advance payments to farmers, which in the past was difficult to do."

A buyer credit facility was provided in 2014, which enabled Lemberona to purchase stock strategically as they had sufficient working capital to pay producers in advance if necessary. Elmira said: "Most farmers start their production in May and harvest begins in September. Consequently, bringing the products to market can take between three and nine months."

In 2016, Lemberona started purchasing herbs from Egypt and dried fruits from Sri Lanka. An increase in their facility allowed them to purchase higher volumes from their farmers and meet demand, whilst continuing to build up their stock.

Although many organisations recorded lower sales in 2020 due to the pandemic, Lemberona was able to maintain similar levels to 2019. This was mainly due to an increase in their online sales as consumers looked for healthy, high quality food products.

Elmira continued: "Thanks to Shared Interest, Lemberona can help the small farmers to make an honest living with their own hands and have proud families and communities."

"Producers can maximise production, which results in more Fairtrade Premium, which in turn impacts the lives of thousands of people in rural Uzbekistan. This equals repaired water systems, heating in the winter, children with a positive outlook and less hunger, and better life goals through improved education. For example, Uzbekistan producer organisation Turob Bobo used their Fairtrade Premium to repair the water system, create a deep well, and subsequently have access to water again for the first time in 15 years."

Lemberona is now entering a new phase following the recruitment of a new Managing Director and Financial Director. This restructuring allows Elmira to focus on growing areas such as product innovation, farmer support and Fairtrade liaison.

Lemberona Co-founder Elmira Bertagnoli with Rustam Rahimov, president of smallholder producer organisation Torob Bobo.

Photographer: Isrofilov Bahtijor.

Ornate straw baskets are woven by the women of Asungtaaba Basket Weavers Group (working with TradeAID) in Ghana.

## TRADEAID

Established at the turn of the millennium, TradeAID Integrated is a not-for-profit organisation working with 65 basket weaver groups in the Bolgatanga area of the Upper East Region of Ghana. Due to the hot and dry climate, the land is difficult to farm and so the majority of the population relies on handcrafts to make a living.

Furthermore, the impact of climate change has caused straw to be low quality and at times difficult to source. As this is the predominant raw material of the basket industry, it can cause major problems.

Nicholas Apokerah founded the organisation after researching the role of basket weavers in Ghana whilst at university and discovering that they were earning 20% less than the final retail price of their baskets. They began working with 255 weavers, formalising them into 17 groups and providing training to become internationally competitive.

In 2014, Shared Interest provided TradeAID with finance to buy a truck. The following year, the region was affected by erratic rainfall, which led to reduced availability of straw for basket making. TradeAID established a straw farm (known as the 'Straw Bank') to mitigate this situation. Nicholas explained: "It made straw readily available to weavers and much of it is still in operation at the weavers' level."

In 2017, basket weavers were facing challenges meeting orders and further finance from Shared Interest was used to purchase new production tools and equipment, which made a huge difference to productivity.

Akumbosco Modesta has been a basket weaver for the past ten years. She describes herself as 'the bridge between TradeAID and the communities they work in.'

She said: "TradeAID came into the community to buy the baskets directly from the weavers at a good price and the weavers have their money straight away."

Supporting 1,625 producer artisans (90% women) the organisation has helped the weavers form co-operatives, which has led to developing partnerships with international companies such as SERV International (also a Shared Interest customer) who order up to 5,000 baskets each year.

The impact of Covid-19 has meant that sales reduced by approximately 30% between 2019 and 2020, caused by a reduction in orders from some of their larger buyers. Nevertheless, TradeAID launched a community initiative to supply sanitiser and facemasks. They also extended their support to 199 new producers within the basket weaving community, helping them increase production volumes and



Image Above: Amah Akologo, a member of Amongtaaba Basket Weavers Group (working with TradeAID), weaves baskets in Sumbrungu Zobiko Village, Bolgatanga District, Ghana.

engage in soilless farming so that they are not solely reliant on basket production.

This latest project sees them working with our charitable arm Shared Interest Foundation. Our in-country partners will support 120 basket weavers to establish a vegetable farm without the use of soil, using readily available local resources including sawdust and rice husks. These materials have the ability to retain water from a sustainable source and release nutrients for the plants' growth.

Nicholas said: "Shared Interest is key to the survival of producers, and UK investors should see their investment as a vital contribution to people's livelihoods."

**"SHARED INTEREST IS KEY TO THE SURVIVAL OF PRODUCERS, AND UK INVESTORS SHOULD SEE THEIR INVESTMENT AS A VITAL CONTRIBUTION TO PEOPLE'S LIVELIHOODS."**

Nicholas Apokerah, TradeAID Director

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.

## HELP RAISE OUR PROFILE

Please follow us on social media and keep up to date with our activities and share our posts with friends.

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Shared Interest Society Ltd is registered with the Registrar of Mutual Societies, number 27093R. The Directors decide on what the interest rate payable to members will be. The interest rate since 1<sup>st</sup> October 2021 has been 0.1%

**BECAUSE WE CARE:**

