

QUARTERLY RETURN 116 • SUMMER 2020

NEW ERA SHOWS TRUE SPIRIT OF FAIR TRADE

ROYAL SEAL OF APPROVAL

We are delighted to share the news that we have been awarded The Queen's Award for Enterprise for the third time.

COMMUNITIES UNITE

Inspirational stories from our regions as the world faces new challenges.

VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

We appreciate what our volunteers do every single day, and want to take this opportunity to say an extra special thank you.

SHARED-INTEREST.COM



WELCOME

I HOPE THAT YOU ARE ALL KEEPING SAFE AND WELL DURING A PERIOD THAT IS BEGINNING TO BE KNOWN AS 'UNPRECEDENTED'.

Shared Interest continues its 30th year in a very different world to how it began and I am delighted to continue to share our inspirational stories from producers with you, in this summer edition of QR.

As this issue goes to print, sadly, it has been announced that the Department for International Development (DfID) will be merged with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). At a time when we need an urgent and informed response to the needs of the world's poorest communities, I am extremely disappointed to hear this news.

There are some positives to take from these testing times. The Shared Interest team has adapted seamlessly to remote working, and I truly believe that the heartening and moving messages received from both customers and supporters have helped enormously with the transition. It has been incredible to see many of you investing further, and a joy to welcome new investors on board during this time. On behalf of all of the communities we reach with our finance, I want to say a huge thank you.

Never before has your support been more important to producers, as we navigate a pandemic, which respects no borders and leaves no part of the world unscathed. However, out of worldwide restrictions and challenges, stories of survival and solidarity emerge as people and businesses unite and pool resources in the true spirit of fair trade. In this issue, we bring you the latest news from our customers in Africa, Latin America, and the Northern Hemisphere, and we hear the varying experiences of daily life from our team on the ground in these regions.

Amidst all of this, it is even more poignant, that Shared Interest achieved our third Queen's Award for Enterprise in the Sustainable Development category,

which as a colleague said 'shows our unwavering commitment to customers'. We are also proud to be named as a NatWest Impact Management Champion of 2020, and one of the top 100 social enterprises in the UK. This would not be possible without your continued support and we hope that we can celebrate this good news with you in future at one of our supporter events.

As you may already know, we had to postpone this year's plans to meet in Leeds, London, Bristol, and Glasgow due to the spread of coronavirus in the UK. We hope to reschedule these dates when it is safe to do so as these events are a highlight in our calendar. It is always a pleasure to see our members, customers, and guests together in one room, and we love to hear your thoughts and views. The good news is that this engagement does not have to stop because we cannot travel to you. Our Membership Team is here five days a week to answer any questions or queries you may have. Nearly half of you are already signed up to our secure online portal where members can manage their Share Account, view their latest statements, and even make investments and withdrawals. If you would like to register for this online service, please contact membership@shared-interest.com, or call 0191 233 9100.

Before I leave you to enjoy your newsletter in full, I want to draw your attention to a vacancy on our Board of Directors. We would love your help in finding a suitable candidate who fits this specific skillset. Please see the page opposite for further information, and how to apply.

Until next time,

Patricia

Patricia Alexander
Managing Director



FRONT COVER IMAGE: Ana Santiago and Pablo Hurtado, owners of Artesania Urpi in Cochabamba, Peru. Artesania Urpi specialises in the production of carved gourds.

POSTPONEMENT OF EVENTS

Our supporter events are an integral part of the Shared Interest calendar. We love meeting with you, and hearing from guest speakers, which always sparks lively debate. Feedback has shown that you also enjoy meeting other members, and hearing the latest news from our regional teams. Although we were obviously disappointed not to be able to join you in London, Leeds, Bristol, and Glasgow in May and June as planned, we will make every effort to reschedule these events, if this is possible.

In the meantime, you can get in touch with us in other ways to share thoughts and ideas. We now have a blog section on the Shared Interest website, where we publish the latest news and you can respond to articles by leaving a comment. For those of you on social media such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn, please come and find us on these platforms. Details on this can be found on the back cover. You can also speak to one of the Membership Team on 0191 233 9100, or email us at membership@shared-interest.com. Finally, did you know we have a secure online portal where you can manage your Share Account and get in touch using the chat function?

We hope that we can share further news on our supporter events in our Autumn edition of QR. Until then, keep an eye on our website for more information, at www.shared-interest.com

VACANCY ON OUR BOARD

Would you like to use your talents and experience to make a real difference?

Due to the planned retirement of one of our current Non-Executives, we are seeking to recruit a new Board Member. It is an exciting period for Shared Interest as we celebrate our 30th year, and we are looking to recruit someone who will bring the following expertise and commitment:

- A qualified Accountant
- Knowledge of charity reporting
- Previous Board experience
- Commitment to the work of the organisation, our values and ethos

If you are interested, please email recruitment@shared-interest.com for more information and details of how to apply. The closing date for applications is: **Friday 14th August 2020**

Linda Velasquez is an artisan for Artesania Urpi (working for buyer Lucuma) in Cochabamba, Peru.



ROYAL SEAL OF APPROVAL

With the entire Shared Interest team working remotely, receiving the news that we had been awarded The Queen's Award for Enterprise in the Sustainable Development Category was particularly poignant. This prestigious accolade means that The Prime Minister has advised Her Majesty the Queen that Shared Interest's work is beneficial to society, the environment, and economy.

It is the third time Shared Interest has been awarded within this category, previously recognised in 2008 and 2013. It is a massive achievement and since winning the award for the second time in 2013, we have increased our UK investment total by over £15m. Furthermore, your investment made it possible for our financial services to impact almost 400,000 people last year alone.

Patricia Alexander, MD, said: "The award is a symbol of the hard work and dedication of every single person involved in the organisation. Being recognised in our 30th year makes this a very special privilege. What does it mean for us as a business and as a team? It is a badge of honour and symbol of pride that our organisation is achieving its mission, and fulfilling its role in meeting the Sustainable Development Goals."

Paul Sablich, Regional Manager for Latin America, said: "For me, this award represents how we are achieving our mission to reach those most in need. The fact that we have received it three times also means that we are doing it consistently despite the various challenges we have faced over time."

IMPACT CHAMPION

We are also delighted to share the news that we are a NatWest SE100 Impact Management Champion of 2020.

The NatWest SE100 celebrates the growth, impact and resilience of social ventures in the UK – by naming the most impressive 100 social enterprises of the year in a top 100 Index, and giving eight SE100 Social Business Awards for the most outstanding achievers.

Patricia Alexander, MD, said: "Being named as an Impact Management Champion is a fantastic achievement as it is acknowledgment of our commitment to providing much needed finance, and supporting communities in the world that need it most. We are delighted to receive this recognition at a time when our social impact is even more significant. Our members are incredibly loyal, and have continued to support us as the world enters an extremely challenging time, and we thank them for their commitment. It is vital that our investment continues to increase, so that we can continue to carry out our mission of reaching those smaller vulnerable groups who are otherwise unable to access finance."



"WINNING THE QUEEN'S AWARD AT THIS TIME SHOWS HOW VITAL OUR WORK IS, AND WE MUST CELEBRATE OUR SERVICES BEING RECOGNISED IN THIS WAY. NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE NEED TO OFFER PRODUCERS 'FINANCE WITH A HUMAN FACE'."

John Dossou, Lending Manager for West Africa

"IT IS FANTASTIC TO RECEIVE THE QUEEN'S AWARD; A GREAT RECOGNITION OF HOW WE ENABLE PEOPLE IN THE UK TO SHARE RISK WITH FARMER AND HANDCRAFT GROUPS IN THE DEVELOPING WORLD. THE PANDEMIC HAS FURTHER EMPHASISED THE DIFFERENCES IN THE GLOBAL SUPPLY CHAIN, MAKING OUR WORK IN REMOTE COMMUNITIES MORE VITAL THAN EVER."

Malcolm Curtis, Head of Lending

"AMIDST THESE COMPLICATED TIMES, THIS AWARD CONFIRMS THE NEED TO CONTINUE OUR SOLIDARITY EFFORTS TOWARDS THOSE IN NEED AROUND THE WORLD."

Marco Garcia, Lending Manager for Central America



"CONGRATULATIONS TO ALL THE SOCIAL ENTERPRISES WHO HAVE MADE IT ONTO THIS YEAR'S SE100 LIST. IN SUCH INCREDIBLY TOUGH TIMES, WHEN WE KNOW MANY WILL BE FACING SOME SIGNIFICANT CHALLENGES, IT'S IMPORTANT TO RECOGNISE THE INCREDIBLE DEDICATION AND EFFORT THAT THE UK'S SOCIAL ENTERPRISES HAVE SHOWN IN BUILDING BUSINESS SOLUTIONS TO DELIVER A POSITIVE FUTURE FOR SOME OF OUR MOST VULNERABLE AND DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES."

Megan Peat, CEO of NatWest Social & Community Capital

You can read more about the awards and other winners here: pioneerspost.com/se100index

Shared Interest volunteers at our supporter event in Brighton last year.



VOLUNTEERS' WEEK

At Shared Interest, we really appreciate what our volunteers do every single day, and always take the opportunity to say an extra special thank you during Volunteers' Week (1-7 June) each year. As volunteering looks a bit different at the moment, we feel it is more important than ever that our volunteers know just how incredibly valued they are.

We know from feedback given by volunteers, that they consider Shared Interest to be 'something they value and feel proud to be part of'. Together, we have been able to engage and inspire people here in the UK, to get involved in Shared Interest, and ultimately help more producers around the world.

Everything volunteers have done, are currently able to do, and will do in the future, makes a big difference!

Here is a little insight into just how much our volunteers have achieved:

- Supported our lending team with vital research, which helped us reach more organisations in need of finance
- Translated nearly 18,000 words for our website, project reports and surveys into French and Spanish, which is crucial in making our materials accessible for our customers
- Represented Shared Interest by giving a number of talks to groups including U3A, Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and local Fairtrade Towns, and running 23 stalls across the country
- Helped identify new events for Shared Interest to attend when it is safe to do so, such as Bristol's Global Aware Conference
- Processed information from Shared Interest Foundation's Donor Survey, which gives us a valued understanding of our charitable givers

30TH ANNIVERSARY FILM

To mark our anniversary year, we created a film, which is dedicated to our founder, Mark Hayes. We want to thank everyone who agreed to feature in this special insight into the Shared Interest story. Since taking part, Ed Mayo, has moved on from his position as Secretary General of Co-operatives UK and we wish him the very best for the future.



INTERNATIONAL RESPONSE SHOWS THE TRUE SPIRIT OF FAIR TRADE

Shared Interest is marking 30 years of existence in a new era. Like most of the UK population, we have been working remotely, and the team has adapted seamlessly, continuing to maintain close contact with colleagues here and overseas. We have enjoyed responding to members, and have kept in touch with customers despite the challenges faced. We now want to share with you their inspirational stories; how businesses are adapting, and communities are protecting themselves against Covid-19. It is clear that the co-operatives are proving extremely resourceful, providing vital support to their wider communities and together; we are embracing new challenges, supporting producers in greater need than ever before.

We spoke to our regional representatives in Ghana, Kenya, Costa Rica, Peru, and Europe, where lockdown measures affect daily life, travel restrictions affect the supply chain, but people are united in finding ways to overcome this global crisis.

Please bear in mind as you are reading, that circumstances will have developed further since this article was written, but all facts are correct as QR goes to print.



"THE GOVERNMENT RESPONSE HAS BEEN COMMENDABLE IN GHANA. LOCKDOWN RESTRICTIONS HAVE EASED BUT MEASURES REMAIN IN PLACE TO PROTECT THE MOST VULNERABLE, INCLUDING FREE DISTRIBUTION OF HOT FOOD. THERE HAS ALSO BEEN A WELCOMED INCREASE IN HEALTH WORKERS' SALARIES.

"WE ARE SEEING PRODUCERS ADAPTING THEIR BUSINESS OPERATIONS, BY IMPLEMENTING MEASURES SUCH AS PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT, ADDITIONAL HYGIENE MEASURES, AND ROTA WORKING. BOTH GHANA AND CÔTE D'IVOIRE ARE MAKING SERIOUS EFFORTS TO REDUCE THE IMPACT ON OUR COCOA SECTOR, WHICH IS AN ECONOMIC LIFELINE."

John Dossou, Lending Manager, West Africa

According to the Fairtrade Foundation, Ghana's cocoa revenue is expected to suffer a shortfall of a billion US Dollars, which will affect the entire sector. However, John shared some positive news from the producers: "Cocoa harvesting for the minor season between April and June is going ahead. Many of our producers have reported very good quality beans due to favourable climatic conditions. According to some farmers, they have not experienced such a good harvest for the minor season in the past three years.

"As with other regions, the issues we face on a trade level are around transit and export of our commodities. However, there are obvious concerns also with the health of farmers, especially if they do not have adequate access to healthcare, or balanced nutrition."

However, many producers are finding strength in adversity, and one example is Ghanaian cocoa co-operative Asunafo, who have been praised for their response to the coronavirus crisis. The group recognised the needs of their local community and donated items to help with sanitisation, along with funds provided by ethical chocolate brand, Tony's Chocolonely and Mondelez's Cocoa Life.

John continued: "Fortunately, Asunafo's cocoa production has increased significantly since they became a Shared Interest customer two years ago, and the majority of this season's cocoa had already been harvested. The challenge now lies around shipping."

The co-operative had also recently introduced several wellbeing initiatives, which are now proving vital. These include a dispensary for the health needs of workers, and facilities for those who had diversified into soap making. Asunafo had trained 25 farmers in liquid and solid soap making before the pandemic began, using the leftover cocoa elements and shea butter. Previously sold at the local market the liquid soap is now donated to the community, using funds from Asunafo's Fairtrade Premium.

John told us: "Asunafo members have also formed a women's group, to sew face masks with local fabrics for free distribution. This is a crucial initiative, as the wearing of masks is becoming mandatory in Ghana."

The co-operative also supports a local radio talk show with over 25,000 listeners, which was originally set up to help farmers share agricultural best practice. The subject area has now been adapted in light of the pandemic, to help farmers learn how to protect themselves from Covid-19, improving communication and providing accurate advice.

Asunafo President, Daniel Amponsah Gyinayeh, said: "As a farmer co-operative, we are very concerned about our members and their welfare. We are also in our own way joining forces with local health authorities to create more public awareness and education. We are grateful to all our partners and supporters who have made it possible for us to reach out to communities as part of our contribution to helping prevent the spread of the disease."

Meanwhile, in East Africa, Uganda imposed a lockdown before the other countries in the region and was the first to ban public transportation. In response to these movement restrictions, the government set up a task force to oversee the distribution of relief food. In the true spirit of fair trade, local farmers have

donated supplies to support families struggling to meet their basic needs.

Lending Manager, Immaculate Ochieno said: "Uganda has the most severe restrictions with public transportation completely shut down. However, we remain in good communication with customers. We are finding that customers need to get documentation from offices, which is challenging due to the movement restrictions. To be authorised to travel, you must apply for a permit from the local authority."

In Uganda, over 20% of the population lives in poverty, and the nationwide transport ban is not just affecting trade but also having an impact on emergency healthcare. Ambulances have permits but are in high demand, and anyone found driving without permission is arrested, and their vehicle impounded. The Fairtrade Foundation website states: "The restriction of movement leaves millions of Ugandan nationals unable to meet their daily nutritional needs. This is especially the case for groups of people dependent on daily earnings."

Bukonzo Organic Farmers Co-operative Union (BOCU) was one of the producer groups to supplement government supplies using their Fairtrade Premium. Based in Uganda, and one of the few coffee co-operatives in Africa to be managed by women, Bukonzo is keen to support community initiatives, and when we last featured them in QR, they were installing a roasting plant so they could start selling coffee locally.

In response to the pandemic, they have donated sugar, maize flour, cooking oil, beans and soap to the local government taskforce.

"WE WANT TO BE PART OF THE PEOPLE SUPPORTING THOSE IN NEED."

Josinta Kabugho, Bukonzo General Manager



According to the Fairtrade Foundation’s website, Gelkha Buitrago, Fairtrade International’s Director of Standards and Pricing said: “Many farmers and agricultural workers in the global south are already beginning to feel the economic effects of Covid-19, although in many cases the health impacts are still to be seen.

“The new guidance we have just approved makes it possible for Fairtrade certified producer organisations to make decisions and act quickly on things that will keep farmers and workers safe, or provide needed extra income during this uncertain time.”

Tragically, since hearing of Bukonzo’s efforts in helping the local community, we received news that they were facing life-threatening weather conditions due to heavy rainfall, which has caused severe flooding to the Kasese District.

Josinta told us: “Following heavy rains from the Rwenzori Mountains, five rivers simultaneously burst their banks at around 2am on 7th May. We believe that 1,200 Bukonzo farmers have been affected in Kisinga, Kyondo, Kyarumba, and Maliba.

“The situation of the displaced in these areas is serious, many homes are concentrated villages which are in the low lands and along the river basins - they are now completely flooded. The Kasese District Disaster Team is reported to have registered over 35,000 displaced families, with some sleeping in the open air.

“Families reported that the floods were seen at night, which was very threatening to them and most of the properties were swept away. They had nowhere to run, since they could not tell the direction of the water.

“The piped water to some communities is blocked and now people do not have access to drinking water so they are made to move long distances to search for clean water.

“The farmers lost coffee and also food crop fields, therefore, food packs will be a high need and materials for shelter.”

As this edition of QR goes to print, we are hoping to support Bukonzo with the items they need through the Shared Interest Foundation Livelihood Security Fund.

You can read more about the fund here: shared-interest.com/livelihood-security-fund

In Central America, our Lending Manager, Marco Garcia, said: “It seems that we may be over the first wave of the Covid-19 outbreak, and now we face an equal or more complex challenge to reactivate the economy. We have scheduled weekly calls with our customers to monitor any changes due to the protocols that each country establishes against the virus.”

"WHILE TRAVEL RESTRICTIONS AND A 'STAY AT HOME WHERE POSSIBLE' MESSAGE REMAIN IN PLACE, IN GENERAL OUR CUSTOMERS ARE ABLE TO KEEP WORKING ALMOST AS USUAL. HOWEVER, IN SOME CASES, SUCH AS HONDURAS, THERE HAVE BEEN EXPORT DELAYS DUE TO LOCKDOWN MEASURES, WHICH HAVE FORCED THEM TO WORK AT A MINIMUM LEVEL."

Karolina Jimenez, Customer Representative

Honduras is reported to have the highest number of Covid-19 cases in Central America. According to ReliefWeb (a humanitarian information service provided by the United Nations Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs), for a population of nine million people, there are only 20 ventilators in the country. An NGO working in the region has told ReliefWeb: “This is the stark reality for poor and vulnerable communities throughout Honduras facing the Covid-19 pandemic.”

Amidst all of this, Cafel, a coffee co-operative in Copan, in the west of Honduras, has transformed the way it works, and subsequently received approval for a working permit after a successful inspection of their premises.

Karolina continued: “Copan has been exceptionally fortunate to register very few confirmed cases of the high infection rate in Honduras. The local government does not always agree with the strict measures imposed by the national government, which can cause uncertainty. Our customers have therefore implemented special measures to adapt to curfew guidelines and permit measures.

“The permits themselves are temporary and only last for a week to a fortnight at most. The renewal process is not always immediate, which forces Cafel to close the production plant and office until the permit is revalidated.

“Another major restriction is around working patterns. There are strict rules that only allow individuals to work one day out of five, and this is controlled using National ID numbers for identification. Despite this, Cafel would not be defeated, and asked some members to work from home, while others visit the main facilities on a rota system. The outcome is that the plant cannot work to full capacity, as the entire production line cannot be there at the same time.

“It is the second half of the harvest cycle, which proves most difficult to manage. This involves collecting the last third of the coffee and exporting almost all the production. It has been a huge challenge for Cafel since their operation capacity has been halved.

“We believe that the co-operative has the support of its buyers, as despite the expected delays, shipments are likely to continue during the following months.”

Paul Sablich, our Regional Manager for Latin America, reported how his team have maintained high spirits and continued to support their customers throughout one of the strictest lockdowns in the world in Peru.



BOCU farmers Syambwira Joikim (l) and Bwambale Stephen (r) sit together at a coffee micro processing station in Kinoni village, Kasese District, Uganda.

Paul said: “You will be pleased to hear that our customers have obtained permits to continue running their businesses. International trade for agriculture is authorised, although there are limitations faced in light of the current transport system. Farmers have encountered challenges to deliver their produce to the co-ops, which slows down the normal processing activities.

“Coffee and cocoa harvests have not yet reached their peak, and this is expected around June. Unfortunately, handcraft producers have stopped their production activities completely. The government has indicated the majority of economic sectors will be reactivated in four monthly stages from May to August.”

Despite the huge challenges faced, we see many co-operatives reaching out to their wider communities. To help the people of Cusco, a city in the Peruvian Andes, coffee and cocoa co-operative, José Olaya, is supplying large baskets of essential items to their farmers.

"JOSÉ OLAYA HAS OVER 200 MEMBERS, AND ONCE THE NEW GUIDANCE WAS GIVEN ON USE OF THE FAIRTRADE PREMIUM, THEY WANTED TO USE THIS TO HELP FARMERS, ALONG WITH THEIR OWN FUNDS. TRANSPORT IS SEVERELY RESTRICTED SO THEY HAD TO GAIN PERMISSION TO USE THEIR TRUCKS FOR DELIVERIES OF FOOD AND CLEANING SUPPLIES. THEIR THINKING WAS THAT EVEN THOSE WHO COULD GROW THEIR OWN PRODUCTS WOULD BE IN NEED OF THINGS LIKE OIL, SALT, AND SOAP."

Brigite Narciso, Customer Representative

Many producers have welcomed the government announcement to reopen its economy. This will be a four-phase plan rolled out on a monthly basis, and as this newsletter goes to print, their mining, fishing and construction industries have already begun a measured restart of operations.

Brigite continued: “Right now the main issue for José Olaya is to make sure that members can get their coffee and cocoa to the co-operative as transit is restricted. The government allows the transport of goods for foreign trade activity, as they want to keep the supply chain operational. However, many smaller communities are restricting travel to stop the spread of Covid-19, which they have managed to do, unlike in urban areas.

“Fortunately these communities have agreed some concessions. In the case of Cusco, they are allowing travel to take place for collection of goods on a couple of days per week, with controls in place. Therefore, José Olaya is arranging collection from the cocoa and coffee farmers who do have a vehicle, and cannot leave their communities, as they cannot enter farms due to Covid-19. They make similar arrangements to deliver the baskets of produce.

“Co-operatives like José Olaya are used to working in difficult conditions, so are very resourceful. The General Manager has told us that they are adjusting other processes to meet coffee and cocoa shipping deadlines. Their next export is in June and they hope to get these orders to Europe on time.”

France Villeneuve, Regional Manager for Northern Hemisphere & Pacific Rim, shared stories from buyer customers in her region.

She said: “Amidst huge challenges, they have been finding new ways to help producers protect their communities and livelihoods. Unfortunately, many handcraft organisations were already suffering before the pandemic due to declining sales, which had negatively impacted some producers in Asia, most particularly India and Bangladesh, where the majority of

handcraft producers are located. Further help is now needed, following the cyclone that hit the region in May.

“Many producers in Asia continue to face challenges, due to Covid-19, as small retail stores remain closed and several trade shows have been cancelled. The entire supply chain is affected as delays in selling the goods also means that some buyers will not be in a position to negotiate new orders with producers.

“In addition, some countries have restricted the export of non-essential goods, meaning that buyers are not only unable to receive products from their suppliers, but are also struggling to send payments to them.

“It has been incredibly inspiring to see so many buyers starting their own fundraising campaigns to help artisans, or using some of their profits to support the communities they work with.

“One of our buyer customers in the USA is doing just this in response to the restrictions described earlier by Paul and Brigitte, as their company, Lucuma Designs, was founded to create opportunities for Peruvian artists.”

The organisation works with women from the Aymara community, an ethnic minority living on an Andean plateau near Lake Titicaca. Sadly, the global pandemic has affected all levels of their supply chain, and the strict lockdown restrictions mean that producers cannot even rely on their small amount of secondary income from farming, as many are unable to transport their crops to market due to the government permits required.

Lucuma Co-founder Don Blackowiak said: “The Peruvian government has made a special payment to the poorest families, but so far only a single family qualified for this, out of nearly 300 artists who work with us, so we are looking for ways to keep supporting our artists as much as we can.

“Our gourd carvers have isolated themselves in the village of Cochas and are limiting access to the community. As a result, workshops have been entirely or partially closed since mid-March. Many of the carvers also have fields to attend, and are working on them as they can.

“However, with the dry season approaching, we worry very much for our artists if they remain unable to work or to transport their goods.”

Lucuma is supporting gourd carvers in this isolated village, who are helping to feed the families of their producers through the local church.

Don said: “We are so proud of this project. We see it as an amazing example of what is possible when fair trade enables a community to help themselves.”

Gourd carver, Saturnino Velasquez, said: “Thank you very much for your help in favour of needy families in Cochas Chico, Peru. In our area, we are in good health, but our transit is restricted. We have supported many families in these past weeks, and so we have reached the neediest families, and we are planning to help 100 more.

“We cannot do it quickly or on a larger scale due to the difficulty we have in buying products such as rice, sugar, oil and other products, because we do not have the mobility to move from the centre to our area.”

"LUCUMA IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST GOURD BUYERS IN PERU THANKS TO SHARED INTEREST. THE STEADY WORK, THE LOANS, COMBINED WITH THE HARD WORK OF THE CARVERS THEMSELVES, HAS TRULY MADE A DIFFERENCE."

"WE ARE COMMITTED TO LEARNING OUR LESSONS AND BECOMING MORE RESILIENT TO GET THROUGH THESE DIFFICULT CIRCUMSTANCES, USING THIS TIME TO REACH OUT TO OUR ARTISTS SO WE CAN GATHER AND SHARE THEIR STORIES. WE FEEL THAT THIS CRISIS WILL OPEN PEOPLE'S HEARTS TO THE NEEDS OF OTHERS LESS FORTUNATE AROUND THE WORLD."

Don Blackowiak, Lucuma Co-founder



Berta Vivas of Artesania Rojas, right, in Cochas Chico, Peru, carves a gourd along with other carvers.

IMAGE TOP: Rocio Arana of Artesania Urpi in Cochas Chico, Peru, selects gourds from the company's warehouse
IMAGE BOTTOM: Anali Papuyco of Artesania Urpi in Cochas Chico, Peru, carving a gourd.

In Asia, a Shared Interest customer has become a key player in the World Fair Trade Organization's (WFTO) 'People's Mask' initiative, to supply fairly traded protective masks. Based in the Philippines, Salay manufactures and exports handmade paper for a variety of household uses. This enables them to provide an opportunity for over 100 workers to earn an income, allowing them to sustain their basic needs.

Their business was hit hard by the pandemic; workers had been forced to stop production, consequently meaning there was no source of income.

Salay Founder Neil Rafusa said: "The situation here in the Philippines is comparably the same as other countries. We are advised to stay at home, observe social distancing, and everything in our life has to stop."

"Consequently, we halted all operations with the expectation that it is going to be hard for the next few months."

However, their inclusion in the WFTO Asia initiative arose from Neil's priority to support producers through the crisis.

Neil continued: "While at home I started thinking about innovations I could make, and I had the idea to start developing protective masks, using our own sustainable materials available locally. We manufacture the filters from abaca fibre, which we use to make our handmade paper."

Neil has since had it confirmed that the masks made by Salay meet the essential health and safety requirements and conform with necessary regulations to be provided as Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to essential workers.

"I BELIEVE THAT THE STRENGTH, FILTRATION AND DENSITY STRUCTURES OF OUR FILTER PAPER, WHICH IS MADE OF ABACA AND BANANA FIBRES, ARE BETTER THAN CLOTH AND TEXTILE. THEY HAVE ALREADY PROVEN DURABLE FROM THEIR USE IN OUR WALLET, BAGS, NOTEBOOKS, AND SACHELS."

"I WANT TO THANK EVERYONE INVOLVED IN THE CREATION OF THESE MASKS. THOUGH THE DEMAND IS LIMITED, WE HOPE THE LOCKDOWN WILL BE SUSPENDED SOON SO THAT WE CAN REACH A WIDER MARKET. WE ARE NOW DEVELOPING GOWNS AND APRONS FOR MEDICAL PERSONNEL. THIS IS SOMETHING PEOPLE REALLY NEED AT THE MOMENT, AND ALSO A WAY TO PROVIDE AN INCOME FOR OUR PRODUCERS AND KEEP OUR BUSINESS ALIVE."

Neil Rafusa, Salay Founder

Ana Santiago, right, speaks with Anali Papuyco at Artesania Urpi, in Cochabamba, Peru



WFTO ASIA - PEOPLE'S MASKS INITIATIVE

In response to the coronavirus pandemic, several members of WFTO Asia collaborated to shift production to make protective masks.

In April, we received the following information from WFTO Asia Director, Jerome Montemayor:

"The People's Mask Initiative is part of our 'Fair Trade Covid-19 Response'. This is our strategic programme towards ensuring the continuity and sustainability of fair trade in Asia. Driven by the compelling need to respond to the severe lack of PPE, WFTO Asia mobilised its members and partners to shift their production to making the People's Mask."

"WFTO Asia saw the need to demonstrate to the region (as well as to the rest of the world) what fair trade is all about. Fair trade is all about caring for people. This was the call to members and partners, to come together and produce these face coverings for essential workers, and those living in marginalised communities."

"With this, 'People's Mask' was born. It is a fusion of fair trade standards, hygiene, and health protocols, together with tested mask designs. It evolved into the 'People's Mask' to distinguish it from medical-grade respiratory masks. The People's Mask was designed to serve non-medical personnel who are called to serve us. This includes social workers, public servants, storekeepers, delivery workers – and many other people who work to improve the safety and health of the greater majority. The People's Mask is also for people who cannot exercise social distancing given their current living conditions – they need masks too."

HOW DID SALAY BECOME INVOLVED IN THE PROGRAMME?

"Salay was among the first to respond. Instead of just following the People's Mask design that WFTO Asia provided them, Neil and his team pushed the concept further by developing a respiratory mask and filter made from indigenous fibres. By doing so, Salay is helping build the self-sufficiency of the Philippines in an environmentally friendly way."

HAS THE PROGRAMME BEEN AS SUCCESSFUL AS YOU HAD HOPED?

"Within six weeks, we have more than 40 fair trade organisations in Asia committed to join the effort. We have already produced and distributed more than 75,000 masks from ten countries across Asia."

"We have started to serve the needs of Asian countries as well as some countries in Europe, Australia, Africa, and North America. However, there remains a long way to go, with more countries in Asia, and beyond that are requesting our support."

Workers at Association Ton (ATN), cashew and mango producers in Burkina Faso. ATN supply mangos and cashew nuts to buyer Tropical Wholefoods.

KEEP CALM AND DO GOOD

Tropical Wholefoods is one of Shared Interest's long-standing customers, and has been working with us since 1998. Based in Sunderland, their story began with the vision to help Ugandan farmers sell their fruits at fair prices in European Markets.

"I WAS RAISED TO THINK ABOUT THE GREATER GOOD IN GENERAL, SO WHEN I STARTED IN BUSINESS, PROFIT WAS NOT THE OVERRIDING ISSUE IN MY MIND. HAVING BEEN BORN IN AFRICA, I GREW UP IN ENGLAND AND RETURNED TO UGANDA IN THE LATE 1980S TO SEE LEVELS OF POVERTY, WHICH I FOUND HORRIFIC. I IMMEDIATELY WANTED TO DO SOMETHING POSITIVE TO RAISE INCOMES AND PROVIDE A ROUTE OUT OF POVERTY FOR THE PEOPLE I SAW."

Adam Brett, Tropical Wholefoods Founder

With this ethos it is no wonder that when Covid-19 struck, Tropical Wholefoods were quick off the mark to respond. As the impact of the virus was starting to be felt across the world, Tropical Wholefoods Director, Richard Friend was already thinking of ways they could diversify to support communities in need.

Richard said: "It was depressing to see the panic buying of food in the UK and we wanted to do something positive and help people. It is obvious that the economic effects of the pandemic are likely to lead to cases of extreme need in the UK and we wanted to be part of a response. We make 'a meal in a bar' products for several customers and thought that adapting one of these and making it available to buy would be a quick and straightforward thing to do."

So far, Tropical Wholefoods has donated nearly 6,000 bars locally to help food banks, soup kitchens and shelters for the homeless. Providing nutrition for their clients at a time when stocks of fresh or donated foods may be low.

Each bar provides 15% of an adult's recommended daily calorie, protein and carbohydrate intake and is created from a range of healthy ingredients. When they created the bars, Tropical Wholefoods said they would donate a box to an organisation supporting people in need for every box bought.

Richard continued: "The response has been great with hundreds of customers from across the UK getting in touch to buy a box. So, we have been able to donate thousands of bars, which is fantastic. The response has been so good, we are planning to make more and continue to offer them in the same way – for every box bought, we will donate a box.

"We would love to have provided all of the bars for free, but we're a relatively small organisation and we have to cover some of costs of production and distribution.

"If food banks purchase the bars directly, we will of course make sure they receive a second box free of charge."

Line Manager, Neil Calvert, added: "We are in food manufacture so some of us can still come into work which makes the current situation slightly more normal, but these are still worrying times for everyone."

"It's really good for morale that we are also able to do something to help people locally. Everyone knows that these organisations do a great job in supporting people in need."

As QR goes to print, we received news that the factory is temporarily closed as staff have been furloughed. However, the bars are available to buy directly from the Tropical Wholefoods website, tropicalwholefoods.com

COUNCIL COMMENT

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Many of us will have heard the analogy 'We may be in the same storm, but we are in very different boats' to describe our varying experiences of the coronavirus crisis. For me, the pandemic highlights familiar unease about issues of unfair global resource distribution, and the disproportionately devastating impact on poorer communities. I am sure I share with many, the need to respond again practically.

What can we do? Buying fair trade products is a practical step that I imagine most of us take when we can. Many 'normal' methods have been disrupted: visiting our local fair trade shop, buying from our regular church stalls etc., but we can still continue to seek out fair trade options. In fact, it is perhaps even more important to do so. The Fairtrade Foundation urges us to act to protect and support supply chains. As we know, cancelled orders have a direct impact on thousands of families whose livelihoods depend on them. As this issue of QR shows, Shared Interest producers and buyers, need support in helping their businesses and communities to survive.

The pandemic also has sparked creativity in our own communities. Here in Yorkshire, one currently closed fair trade shop has set up an email ordering service with delivery by volunteers. I am sure such initiatives are widespread across the country. Traidcraft has had an impressive response to its new 'Essentials Box', described as 'a selection of fair trade store cupboard essentials', and is seeking new orders. Positive stories on its website tell of the difference we can make by building fair trade options into our regular shopping habits.

Let's keep trying to find ways to act, however small such individual acts seem to be. It feels a good moment to recall Margaret Mead's quote:

"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."

I hope it will not be too long before we can meet again in person, to inspire each other and share positive stories. Until such time, I wish you health and hopefulness in these difficult times.

Katherine Wyatt, Member of Council

ATN producer shows freshly picked cashew nuts.



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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BECAUSE WE CARE:

