



Hope for the world

Fairtrade Roses And Infinite Hope

Play audio 

Earlier this year I visited a farm, two dusty hours outside Nairobi in Kenya, where they grow beautiful spray roses. They had won the Fairtrade Prize for Best Workers' Committee in Africa and had immediately starting using their prize – an iPad – to tweet (@HarvestFairtrade), and to do some research.

Samuel Otieno, Chairman of the Workers Committee, explained how they decided about investing the extra Fairtrade premiums they earned. They talked to the workers and did a local needs assessment. And then they looked at the upcoming United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals, and at Kenya's 2030 ambitions – and decided to line up their efforts behind these national and global goals.

Samuel said, 'If I move as an African, as a Kenyan, as a worker, then I can have more impact. The Sustainable Development Goals are about us as workers'.

So they invested in tree-planting, in vaccinations, in school desks – even in giving sanitary towels to girls so they stay at school. Their work has succeeded in reducing drop-out rates due to school fees by 50 per cent at secondary school, while college enrolment is up by 20 per cent.

I was blown away by the workers' vision of profound hope, how they were seeking to join wider efforts, and bringing these vast global goals alive from the bottom up. They gave me hope that global discussions on big themes could indeed be translated into concrete positive change for people, while another flower worker told me how Fairtrade gave them hope.

'We are so proud,' he said, 'that people miles away on the other side of the world are thinking about me, about us as workers, when they buy flowers.'

Indeed, while Fairtrade brings concrete tangible benefits to farmers and workers, again and again, it is this sense of hope which seems to be almost as important, which gives people a vision that they can win a fairer deal in trade and tackle poverty in their communities themselves – and contribute their part to big difficult issues such as tackling climate change.

Sometimes it is easy to despair. Also this year, I visited farmers in Guatemala who explained the devastation wrought by changing weather patterns. The bees were not making honey – it was too cold – while the coffee harvest was down by a staggering 40 per cent.

The farmers have been knocked down, but are far from out. Rather their hope in change, their dignity, means that they have been calling loudly for a deal to be done on climate change – and for farmers to be helped to adapt now.

In the struggle for a more just world, we can hold to the words of Martin Luther King Jnr who said, 'We must accept infinite disappointment but never lose infinite hope'.



Harriet Lamb is CEO of peace-building organisation, International Alert. Former CEO of Fairtrade International, she has been involved in the Fairtrade movement for 16 years.

Please support our work: arocha.org/donate



advent.arocha.org.uk (Harriet Lamb – 10th December)

A Rocha UK 18–19 Avenue Road, Southall, UB1 3BL, UK
t: 020 8574 5935 e: uk@arocha.org w: arocha.org.uk
© Copyright 2015 A Rocha UK. All rights reserved.